

Diving Trip Report

Angaga Island

Ari Atoll, Maldives

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Gateway to Angaga

Agent.

Regal Diving. I booked quite late but Regal were able to work some magic and made sure we were able to get to the Maldives during the school holidays at Easter 2006. I also booked the 6 days unlimited diving pack.

Getting there.

The travel time (door to door) was 22 hours. Getting to the Maldives never seems easy. I flew from Heathrow on Emirates to Dubai with a three hour stop over and plane change to another Emirates flight that flew down to Male. Once I had collected my baggage and cleared the airport, I transferred to the seaplane terminal. I had about an hour's wait and then made the final leg of the journey. This was 99 KM or half an hour by seaplane down to Angaga.



A few notes on the outward journey

- Emirates baggage allowance is 30kg per diver so long as they are advised at the time of booking.
- Contrary to what I had been told, you are served alcoholic drinks on Emirates.
- Dubai is good value for some duty free goods. I spent some time looking in the various shops during the outward-bound stop over and decided what I would buy on the return journey stop over.
- When I transferred to the sea plane every bit of baggage (including hand luggage) Was weighed and I was charged USD 22 for excess baggage. Trans Maldivian airways did not make the same charge on the return flight.

So What's the location like?

Angaga is a small island that can be circumnavigated on foot in about 20 minutes. I stayed in one of the water villas, which are rooms on stilts and about 100metres off the island via a causeway.

The accommodation was excellent. I opted for the half board eating arrangements. I found that a light breakfast and evening meal were all I needed each day.

The central complex that contained the restaurant and bars was also well run, clean and served good food via an international style buffet.

The island is very popular with German visitors/ divers.

All drinking water and alcohol are charged. You pay one bill for your extras on departure.



typical beach



to the water villas

The Weather

I visited Angaga in early April. The average air temperature was about 30-32 degrees, dropping to 25-27 degrees at night. The weather stayed dry 95% of the time and a light breeze made the temperature bearable. The sea conditions were very settled with no more than force 2 conditions most days.

What do non-divers do on Angaga Island ?

Not a lot. Unless you are on honeymoon, a diver or a bookworm you would probably get bored very quickly. There are a few activities such as table tennis and boat excursions to other islands. There is also a wind surfing centre which provides tuition as well as the hire of equipment.

Angaga Island Dive Centre

The dive centre is Sub Aqua Dive Centre Angaga. This German-run dive centre is well organised. We found that once we understood the rules, the dive centre was efficient but possibly because of a slight language barrier, the staff were not outgoing in a chatty, friendly sort of way.

We arrived at midday and decided to check in to the dive centre early in the afternoon to see if we could get an afternoon dive and actually get to dive for the 6 days I had paid to go diving.



dive boat tornado

I was advised to report at 6pm and bring my qualifications/ logbook. So no afternoon dive. I duly returned that evening and presented my paperwork. The staff were not too sure about BS-AC qualifications. However, I had a qualification card and the reference to CMAS stars seemed to help.

I was told that our insurance we had taken out in the UK via Divemaster insurance (MEDEX) was not acceptable and that the centre only recognised DAN insurance which they conveniently had to hand and told us we could only dive if we paid USD10 each to be added to the dive centre's own insurance policy.

Once I had got through the acceptance of qualifications and some scrutiny of my logbook, I was shown around the dive centre and advised how the system worked for booking on the day boats, gas fills, house reef diving etc.

If you have a nitrox qualification you will be entitled to dive on EAN32 at no additional cost.

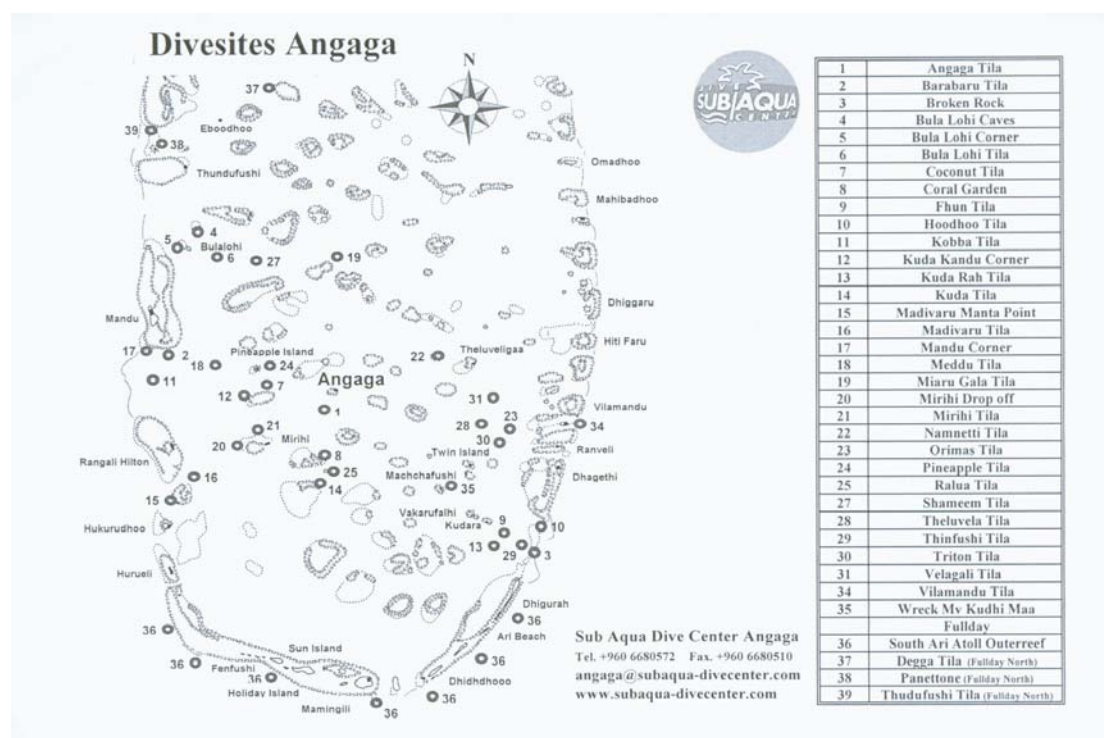
In order to get started I had to complete a check out dive on the house reef with one of the centre instructors. This took place the following morning. This was actually quite an enjoyable dive with sightings of stingrays, turtles and sharks along with the usual reef fish.

At the end of the check out dive I was told I was considered to be an experienced diver and could dive without a guide and as half of a buddy pair on the house reef (day/night) or off the dive centre boats.

It's worth pointing out that the brochure advises that the dive centre considers divers with more than 30 logged dives in the last 18 months and qualified to PADI Advanced or equivalent are OK (subject to check out dive) to dive without a guide. If you do need a guide you will be charged an extra USD5 per dive.

General Notes on Diving in the Maldives.

- Maximum depth is 30 metres
- No decompression Diving
- All divers must have a computer and AAS
- DSMB's are also a pre-requisite in some locations



So what's the diving Like ?

That depends on what you are expecting from your dives. If you are relatively new to diving or this is your first trip to the Maldives then you should be impressed.

Having visited the Maldives before and dived most places around the world, and as a more experienced diver, I was not that impressed with the overall quality of the dive sites.

I had hoped to see a few manta rays but to no avail. However, I did see large sting rays and a few spotted eagle rays. I did not get the chance to do any electrifying drift dives which are frequent subject matter of the advertising blurb associated with the Maldives. I noticed my mention of the 'drift' word seemed to strike terror into the dive centre staff.

Water temperature was a consistent 29 degrees C.

Angaga is within the confines of the Ari Atoll so relatively sheltered from oceanic currents. If you want the chance to carry out some racy drift dives you would be better off booking in to an island on the outer fringes of an atoll.

Most of the dive sites visited by the day boats were tilas (underwater pinnacles/ reefs) which you could swim round in about 20-30 minutes. These sites are all very similar. Some have better and more diverse resident marine life than others. Quite a few of the sites are also home to white tip reef sharks so if you are looking to meet your first shark, you should not be disappointed.

Each dive trip you make on the dive centre's boat will cost you an additional USD11 Or USD 21 if you make two dive trips a day. The boats leave at 0900hr and 1500hr to local dive sites each day.

I opted for the day excursion to the outer fringe of the Ari Atoll @USD25 to make 2 dives as advertised with wale sharks and/or large pelagic. The largest fish we saw was a lone napoleon wrasse in about half a knot of current (OK, so we were on neap tides) and no, we did not get a partial refund.....

To be honest, the house reef was one of the most entertaining dive sites. During the day, there are little or no other divers on the house reef and a typical dive should provide sightings of many varieties of reef fish, moray eels, white tip reef sharks, tuna, barracuda, octopus and as I noted on my first dive, two large stingrays. I never went deeper than 20 metres on the house reef although if you make your way to the extremity of the 20metre ledge this would have been possible.

I was also getting used to a new camera on it's first blue water trip so the house reef was an ideal place to play with the new toy.

The Dive Sites

House Reef, Angaga Island

This is a very good dive site. Most divers opt for the day boats and the dive centre trains students on the house reef. Most of the time there was no more than 1-2 other buddy pairs on the reef so we found we were never 'crowded' by other divers when taking photographs.

I tried a night dive on the house reef but found this disappointing. The next day I went back at about 5.15pm and repeated the dive at dusk and exited the water about 15 minutes after it was truly dark. A twilight dive made a BIG difference. I effectively witnessed the reef's 'rush hour' where all the fish (eagerly watched by the sharks) were getting their last feed before bedding down.

The house reef is littered with dead stag horn coral but there are encouraging signs of new coral growth in the shallows.



coral grouper



night diving



hunting at dusk



snappers

Ralua Tila

A fair selection of reef fish as well as sharks and an eagle ray. Corals were not so good, other than some table corals on top of the reef in 5-6 metres of water.



moray eel

Bula Loi Corner

I saw the usual reef fish, but nothing out of the ordinary on this dive.



oriental sweet lips

Pineapple Tila

A small tila (here we go round the tila again, the tila again....) but I did see some nudibranch and a pink frog fish.



pretty in pink

Angaga Tila

Basic tila dive but I did see white tip reef sharks, reef octopus, nudibranch and a black frog fish



phyllidia varicosa

Outer Ari Atoll (west side)

This was billed as a 2 dive all day trip to see wale sharks and maybe other big pelagics. The biggest fish we saw was a solitary napoleon wrasse.

MV Kudhi Maa

I asked the dive centre if they could arrange a day boat trip to dive the only wreck in the area and they duly obliged. I think most other nationalities don't understand the average UK diver's interest in wrecks, but even so, I was on my way for a well needed fix of sunken steel.

This is a purposely sunk wreck. Kudhi Maa was a Japanese freighter some 52 metres long and with a beam of 9 metres. This 1,200 ton freighter was purposely sunk in 1999. I found this to be quite an interesting dive. Starting at about 28 metres, there was a nurse shark under the port side midships, and a few metres further along, some stingrays. I made my way up on to the deck level and descended in to the main hull. A big space with a water tank at one end. Back on deck there is a large crane and a largely intact bridge area. After spending time on the wreck, I decided to swim over and follow the line of the reef to finish off the dive.



Conclusions

The diving was a bit tame by my standards, but as a destination, Angaga island is relaxed, laid back & friendly. I certainly enjoyed the accommodation and the hospitality.

Next time I visit the Maldives I will make a point of staying on an island on the outer fringe of an atoll, so I can get drifting with the big fish.

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