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## Maldives: Where to Stay: On the Water: Dhoni Mighili

### Dhoni Mighili

*Mushimas Mighili, North Ari Atoll*

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[www.dhonimighili.com](http://www.dhonimighili.com)

Of the five resorts I recently visited in the Maldives, including the sumptuous [Naladhu](#), Dhoni Mighili was my favorite experience, as it best embodied the Maldivian spirit of spending your days at sea. This small resort, which opened in 2003, was built on just two-and-a-half acres in the North Ari Atoll, a thirty-minute flight from Malé. It takes about ten minutes to walk around the island on foot, but the idea here is to spend little time on land, as the ocean beckons.

Each of the resort's six bungalows is paired with its own luxuriously appointed dhoni, a traditional Maldivian fishing boat shaped like a maharaja's slipper. The decks of the *dhonis* are fitted with enormous pillows and a day bed, while the air-conditioned interior holds a king-size bed, Philippe Starck-fitted bathrooms and a retro Smeg refrigerator stocked with a seemingly unlimited supply of Champagne. Your personal *thakuru* (house master) and a crew of three, who are available 24-hours a day, make sure the boat is ready to set sail anywhere you want. A chef anticipates your every dietary whim, making printed menus obsolete; during my visit, I enjoyed everything from tender steak from Australia to spicy Maldivian curry and fresh sushi.

For our first *dhoni* excursion, my husband and I chose Fish Head, one of the best scuba sites in the world. Minutes into our dive, we were engulfed by thousands of black and white bannerfish and had encountered a hawksbill turtle intently picking the algae off brain coral. As we descended along the reef, lionfish moved studiously, as if tangled in long silk kaftans. Before resurfacing, we even bonded with the Napoleon wrasse who has been guarding the reef for the last fifteen years. He was a tame bête, over five feet in length, who didn't mind being touched.

The following two days were spent rocking on the deck of our *dhoni*, sailing between anonymous beaches and sandbars and dreaming of fish that resembled Missoni knits. *From \$950 per person.*

**Who should stay:** Couples who love sailing and scuba diving and who don't get seasick.

**Who should not stay:** Families (children under sixteen are not allowed unless the island is booked exclusively) and couples who expect large, ultra-modern rooms. Although the *dhonis* are beautifully appointed, the bungalows on the island are a bit outdated. The resort is planning a renovation in the near future. Villas to book:\* All six villas are slightly different in square footage and distribution. Four of them have fresh-water plunge pools set in large courtyards.

**What to do:** Activities include snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing, and fishing. The resort has an extensive DVD and book collection. There's a 24-hour open bar, shaped like a *dhoni*, where guests can prepare their own drinks. The spa caters to one couple at a time.

Insider tip: Request your *dhoni* to pick you up at the airport in Malé, so your vacation can start the moment you land.

— Paula de la Cruz 02/07/2008

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