



BAA ATOLL

BAA ATOLL
BIODIVERSITY
MALDIVES

Baa Atoll is an administrative division of the Maldives, namely southern Maalhosmadulu Atoll, which is 42 km long and 32 km wide and consists of 9 inhabited islands.

MAELSTROM OF MANTAS

鬼蝠魃漩渦

Baa Atoll plays host to an amazing marine phenomenon that is under threat simply because it is so predictably available all year round.

因为全年皆可预测，这让那巴阿环礁里有着令人惊叹的海洋现象的受欢迎。

Text & Photo: Beth and Shaun Tierney



I'm sitting on the sand at 10 meters with my head going in circles. Left, right, left, up, down, around. If it was to turn any more, I swear it would go a full 360 degrees. I feel like one of those mechanical clowns you see at the fun fair, with heads always rotating so you can't get anything in their mouths. My mouth is open too, any further and my regulator would detach.

I am sitting in the middle of a mass of manta rays. There must be more than 50, but I can't count them because my neck isn't built to turn that far. Anyway, one has just come up to me then belly-rolled inches from my face. What a show-off.

My husband, photographer and dive buddy, is grinning like a Cheshire cat. Never, in the 20 or so years that we have been divers, would we have thought such a thing was possible. There is no collective noun for manta rays, perhaps because they are rarely seen together in such numbers.

Baa Atoll lying northwest of North Malé Atoll is the latest hot destination for seeing these incredible marine animals. Until a few years ago, Baa was a quiet destination – just a little bit too far from the airport, and there were only a couple of resorts and an occasional liveaboard passing through.

Promises made – and kept

We stepped off the plane, straight onto our vessel and set sail northwards. From that moment on, we were reminded constantly that manta sightings is not a guaranteed event. Then again, we all know that nothing is guaranteed when it comes to nature and diving.

We spent a leisurely day diving some of the best sites in North Malé atoll. They were all fantastic but deep down; our group had come for one reason only. Ironically we were reminded that 'nothing is guaranteed' when a sudden change of weather meant we couldn't cross the open water channel to Baa. The rain poured, the wind whipped up the ocean; the night dragged and tension rose, but the sun shone the next morning and we were off to Hanifanū, arriving just before lunch.

And that was when everything changed. We sailed into the tiny mirror-smooth lagoon where the mantas are said to aggregate and there they were, just as if they had been waiting for us. There was a small one flapping idly over the sandy bottom there and a slightly bigger one drowsing over the darker water near the drop off.

Everywhere we looked, there was the promise of mantas. Suddenly, someone yelled "whale shark!" from the opposite side of the lagoon, and moments later our boat load of divers were masked, snorkeled and self-propelling towards the action. Passing a dozen manta rays along the way, we had a glimpse of an eight-meter-long whale shark.

We were excited beyond reason and in awe of what we had seen, but we had also encountered dozens of human animals



top: The tiny mirror-smooth lagoon is where the mantas are said to aggregate. 上图：尤西尔礁的小岛聚集区便是鬼蝠魟聚集的地方。

我正坐在十米深的沙上，着我的头不断绕着圈子转着。左、右、左、上、下、再掉头。如果再多转个几下，我的头就要转成完全的三百六十度了。我觉得自己好像是有趣的露天游乐场里那些机器小丑中的一员，有着永远转不停的头，因此你无法从他的嘴巴里听到任何东西。而我的嘴巴也是张开着的，只要再稍微张大一点，我的呼吸调节器就会离我而去。

此刻，我正坐在一大群的鬼蝠魟当中，它们想必超过了五十只之多，但我无法去细数它们，因为我的脖子构造没有办法让我转那么过去。无论如何，一只鬼蝠魟正好朝我而来，然后，在我的脸只有几英寸的地方做了一个表演。真是太震撼了！

我的丈夫，摄影师兼潜水伙伴，正笑得像一只露出牙齿的猪。在我们二十年左右的潜水生涯中，我们从未想过会有这样的事情发生。鬼蝠魟没有集合名词，也许就是因为它们稀少以这样的数量一起出现过。

巴阿环礁地处马列北环礁（North Malé Atoll）的西北方，是观赏这些不可思议海洋动物的最新热门景点。直到几年前，巴阿环礁还是一个相当僻静的景点——可能离机场太远了些，而且当地只有几个度假胜地以及一艘不定期经过的游船。

许下并且恪守承诺

我们一下飞机就直接登上我们的船舶，启航北上。从那一刻起，我们便不断地被提醒，无法保证我们一定可以观赏到鬼蝠魟。不过，话又说回来，我们都知道当涉及大自然与潜水时，没有什么是可以保证的。

我们在马列北环礁一些最好的地点潜水，度过了悠闲的一天。虽然这一切都非常棒，但是事实上，我们的团员来到这里的理由只有一个。讽刺的是，当我们正被提醒着「不保证任何事」时，天气突然变化，这意味着我们无法跨越开放的水道前往巴阿环礁。接着大雨倾盆而下，狂风掀起海浪；夜色骤降降临，而紧张的气氛不断升高。然而，第二天早上阳光灿烂，我们摩拳擦掌前往哈尼法鲁岛（Hanifanū），就在午餐之前抵达目的地。

就是在那一刻，一切有了改变。我们邂逅了一束光滑如镜的小岛，据说这是鬼蝠魟聚集的地方，而没错，它们就在那里，仿佛它们正在等待著我们的到来。在那边的沙滩有一只小鬼蝠魟懒不

“Passing a dozen manta rays along the way, we had a glimpse of an eight-meter-long whale shark.”

一路上我们游过了十几只鬼蝠魟，然后就看到了一只八米长的鲸鲨。

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Words cannot do justice to this spectacle and without a doubt, being submerged, or snorkeling, among so many manta rays is going to be one of the top diving events of your life.

语言无法客观地描述这种情形，而毫无疑问地，被淹没或浮潜有这么多数量的蝠鲼之中将会是你生命中最重要的一个潜水活动。

and that seemed far less appropriate. Our divemaster pulled us out of the water and briefed the group thoroughly on etiquette in the lagoon and the pros and cons of diving versus snorkeling. Reassured by this knowledge, we climbed into full scuba kit and a little calmer, swam down to the feeding station. By the time we got there, around 30 mantas had arrived. By the time we left, there were more and our adrenaline levels were way back up.

Science in the lagoon

Although the why's and whereof's of this phenomena have not been investigated fully, Hanifaru's shallow lagoon captures substantial amounts of plankton. This natural occurrence relates to the tides, the moon phase and currents.

It's not possible to predict when all these things are just right for the mantas, but at certain times they are, and the water inside the lagoon turns dark with microscopic critters. The sequence appeared to last around three days.

On the first, a little plankton washes into the lagoon and a few mantas followed, sifting it as they swam lazily across the surface. On day two, the amount of plankton increased then started to sink in the water column. The mantas drop too, spinning through the water, twisting and turning as they hovered in the nutrition.

By day three, the visibility had dropped as there was just too much plankton. It sank towards the seabed with the mantas in pursuit, sifting the sand for what was there. The water turned milky white and your head started that mad spinning again as tantalizing glimpses of mantas in the gloom suddenly transformed into a manta right in your face.

Fifty? One or two hundred? Who knows how many - it's impossible to count. And just when you think you might have finished counting, your attention is diverted as the mantas swim away, only to be replaced by a pair of whalesharks who have arrived for exactly the same reasons.

A plan for conservation

Words cannot do justice to this spectacle and without a doubt, being submerged, or snorkeling, among so many manta rays is going to be one of the top diving events of your life. However, there is a more dubious side to this story...

Once the news of Hanifaru's occupants reached the international media, visitor numbers exploded. The Maldivian government tagged it as a marine protected zone, but the area is not policed. A code of conduct was drawn up, but it is a voluntary one.

The lagoon has been submitted to UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, and recently, a new proposal was put to the government outlining plans to turn the entire country into a national park, where everyone pays US\$10, and that money

心地拍起游行，而一只稍大一点的鬼蝠鲼在靠近下水区的较深海域内昏昏欲睡。

放眼望去，到处都是我们会看到的鬼蝠鲼。突然，有人从泻湖的另一端大喊：“鲼鲼！”。片刻之后，我们满船的潜水客全都戴上了面罩与呼吸器，自我推进地往鲼鲼所在处前进。一路上我们遇到了十几只鬼蝠鲼，然后就瞥见了一只八米长的鲼鲼。

我们兴奋到失去理智，对于眼中所见的那般深感敬畏，但是，我们也遇到了几十个人类，而那就似乎不是很恰当。我们的潜水长把我们拉出水面，并对团员们细致的介绍了在泻湖应注意的规矩，以及潜水和浮潜的利弊。这些知识解除了我们的疑虑，我们穿上全副的潜水套装并且稍稍平静一点，往下游向喂食站。当我们抵达时，大约已经有三十只鬼蝠鲼在那里了，而我们要离开的时候，鬼蝠鲼的数量更多，我们的肾上腺素也已经飙升了不少。

泻湖中的科学

虽然，发生这现象的原理始终没有完整而彻底的调查，但是哈尼法鲁岛的浅泻湖的确吸引了大量的浮游生物，这种自然发生的现象涉及潮汐、月相和水流。

很难预测是在什么时候，这一切会正好适合鬼蝠鲼的到来，但在某些特定的时间点就会准备妥当，而这时泻湖里面的水会因为微生物而变成深色，这一连串的现象似乎维持大约三天左右。

在第一天，一些浮游生物会被冲刷到泻湖壁，而一些鬼蝠鲼随之而来，一边懒洋洋地游过水面一边详查这些浮游生物。第二天，浮游生物的数量增加，接著在水柱中开始下沉；鬼蝠鲼也跟着下降，在水中快速旋转著，不断地扭动和转动著它们的身躯，在这些营养物中大肆吸食。

到第三天，因为太多的浮游生物，使得能见度降低，这些浮游生物沉在海床上，鬼蝠鲼则不断追逐并细查沙子上的任何东西。水变成了乳白色，而当泻湖中鬼蝠鲼诱人的隐约身影在突然之间转变成你眼前活生生的鬼蝠鲼时，你的头又会再度开始那种疯狂的旋转。

五十只？一百只或二百只？谁知道究竟有多少只——根本是数不清。就在你认为你可能已经计算完毕时，随著一只鬼蝠鲼游走，你的注意力又被转移了，取代的是两只为了完全一样的原因来到这里的鲼鲼。

一项保育計畫

语言无法客观地描述这种情形，而毫无疑问地，被淹没或浮潜在这这么多鬼蝠鲼之中，将会是你生命中最重要的一次潜水活动，然而，这个故事还有一个更不确定的一面——

当哈尼法鲁岛内生物的消息引起国际媒体的注意时，游客的人数就随之爆增了。虽然马尔代夫政府将它标记为海洋保护区，但该地区并未加以管制，这里是有制定出一个行为准则，但也只是自发性的规范而已。

这个泻湖已经提交给联合国教科文组织（UNESCO）列为世界遗产。最近，一项新的提案被放入政府议程，计划将整个国家转变成一座国家公园，在那里每个人都需支付十美元，而这笔钱将建立一道系统，以确保在潜水地点设置停泊处、收集垃圾和成立教育中心。

我们猛然意识到这是一个理想的解决方案，因为有许多船只搭载前往地哈尼法鲁岛的潜水员，以及许多从当地度假村前来浮潜的「一日游游客」，目前所做的研究并不充份，无法真正知道长期的影



“No matter how hard we tried to keep our distance, the mantas didn't choose to keep their distance from us.”

不管我们多么努力地试图保持我们的距离，这些蝠鲸似乎没有选择和我们保持距离。

creates a system that will ensure moorings are put on dive sites, rubbish collected and education centres established.

This strikes us as being an ideal solution as there are a lot of boats with divers heading up to Hanifaru and a lot of 'day-trippers' that arrive from local resorts to snorkel. There has been insufficient research done to truly know what the long term effects might be, but without a doubt, numbers should be controlled.

Added to this is a huge debate about whether it's better to snorkel or dive. Resorts with snorkelers want divers gone, and divers feel that the snorkelers are not well versed in marine life and are often unsure how to react in this situation. It's a heated debate, and education is vital for everyone. If you go, learn what you can and must not do. Respect the animals and try to stay out of their way as they swim through the lagoon.

We genuinely did not witness any intentional misbehavior, and it does have to be said that no matter how hard we tried to keep our distance, the mantas didn't choose to keep their distance from us, if anything, they seemed to want to be close to the divers those exhaust bubbles push the plankton right up in the water column and into their mouths! Sitting stationary on the bottom seems to be the best plan, while snorkeling can be difficult, as you can't maneuver away as easily.

There is no doubt that Hanifaru needs protection so, fingers crossed, this will happen. In the meantime, learn what you can, be prepared for the reality, then go. It will be crowded, it will not be peaceful and idyllic, but this is a marine phenomenon not to be missed.

✈️ Getting There

Liveaboards leave from Hulule island, the airport for Malé. There are many flights to Malé from around the world.

📅 When To Go

Diving is year round but the manta season is short, July to October, which is also the season when the weather is at its most unpredictable.

🇲🇻 Visa

Most nationalities are given a free 30-day tourist pass on arrival.

🗣️ Language

The local language is Dhivehi, but everyone speaks English.

💰 Currency

US dollars are accepted. Credit cards incur a substantial surcharge.

🤿 Dive Operator

Maldives Scuba Tours: www.scubascuba.com
 Four Seasons Resort: www.fourseasons.com
 Reethi Beach Resort: www.reethibeach.com
 Royal Island Resort & Spa: www.royal-island.com
 Worldwide Dive and Sail: worldwidedivesandsail.com
 Maldives Scuba Tours: www.scubascuba.com

响会是什么，但毫无疑问地，人数应该被控制住。

还有一个新增的巨大争论是，究竟浮潜好，还是潜水比较好。有浮潜的度假胜地希望潜水员消失，而潜水员觉得浮潜者并不熟知海洋生物，往往不知道该如何应对这种情况。这是一个激烈的辩论，而且对每一个人都是很重要的教育。如果你前往旅游，要知道什么是可以做以及什么是一定不能做的行为。请尊重动物，并且在它们游过你时，尽量不要挡住它们的路。

我们确实没有当场目击到任何故意的不当行为，但也必须说，不管我们多么努力地试图保持我们的距离，这些蝠鲸却没有选择和我们保持距离。如果有任何区别的话，似乎是它们想要靠近潜水员。那些排气水泡把浮游生物在水柱中往上推，靠近了它们的嘴巴里！固定不动地坐在水底似乎是最好的计画，因此在此浮潜会是很困难的，因为你无法轻易地巧妙移动。

毫无疑问地，地范法鲁岛需要受到保护，因此，让我们祈求好运，希望真的可以做到。同时，尽你所能的学习，准备好接受现实，然后踏上旅途。这将会非常拥挤，也不会是宁静和完美无瑕的旅程，但却是不容错过的一个海洋奇观。

✈️ 交通

有许多航班从世界各地飞往马列，航班从马列机场的福禄莱(Hulule)岛离开。

📅 最佳旅游时间

潜水是全年性的活动，但是蝠鲸的季节短暂，从七月至十月，而这时也是气候最难以捉摸的季节。

🇲🇻 签证

给予大多数国家的民众三十天免费的旅游落地签证。

🗣️ 语言

当地语言是迪维希文(Dhivehi)，但每一个人都说英文。

💰 货币

可以接受美元，信用卡需承担相当高的使用费率。

🤿 潜水业者

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