

MALDIVES –ULIGAN –Gateway to Paradise?

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www.yachtmrjohn.blogspot.com

In February of 2014 we made a decision to cruise the Maldives from North to South and were surprised by the lack of available information on the subject, where there was information, it was often contradictory and at times quite off-putting.

Here is the score according to MR JOHN, I have tried to cover it as accurately as I could but if there are any errors then they are most surely all mine and my diminished memory!

I started by sending a basic e-mail to all the agents that were on the Noonsite List and a few more besides....then we waited for the replies. It may pay to shop around a bit when it comes to an agent but having surveyed all our replies the charges were basically the same, except for one or two, who clearly had better things to do than mess with yachts.

Most of the charges are laid down by the government and it's only the agency fees that tend to vary. They have a new government which is just getting settled in and the charges for visiting yachts are under review.....There is considerable on-going pressure to have these charges reduced and stimulate the tourist industry with regards to people entering by private yacht.

The most immediate of these changes, which was applied to us, was the granting of a THREE MONTH VISA on arrival....not only did this mean a saving of almost US\$50 per head but more importantly, the time constraint was removed to rush down to Male, which was the only place to do extensions. It was also a good business move as other governments should note.... "When you have lured the tourist in and they are spending money, why do anything to make them go away?"

For us it came down to short list of three agencies but seeing as we wanted to enter in Uligan in the north and depart from Addu in the south, we were inclined to the agency that seemed to cover those bases and not just Male. The Other thing was that we plumbed for the agent that seemed most wanting of our business..... always a good start!

Asadhulla Mohamed, based in Uligan, quickly became our agent... he was very responsive to all our enquiries and seemed to understand cruising yachts and their requirements. He is a part of the SEA HAWKS agency group which has a central base in Male and affiliates in both Uligan and Addu.

Most of the other agencies use Asad as their representative in Uligan

The fees that were applied to us were as follows:

ALL IN US\$			
Customs Clearance	Inward	64.85	Note 1
	Outward	64.85	
Official Transport for inward clearance		70.00	Note 2
Port State Permit		12.95	
Sanitation Cert. /Port health		3.24	
Entry Charge		3.24	
Cruising Permit, tourism Ministry		324.00	
26 days anchoring fee @ 3.3/day		85.80	Note 3
Agency fees for doing Check In		75.00	Note 4
Agency fees for doing Check Out		75.00	
ALL PLUS 6% GST (government tax)		46.73	
Making a Grand Estimate Total of		825.68	

NOW... this is a BIG NUMBER and may be off-putting to many cruisers BUT....the question is:
IS IT VALUE FOR MONEY???? If the answer is yes, then whatever that number is, it's worth it!

FIRST, I'll lay out the bits not said above which may concern yachts headed this way...

NOTE 1: The customs fee of \$130 is fixed, you pay this no matter how long you stay or where you go.

NOTE 2: The Official Transport fee..... this was what we paid for the officials to be brought out to our boat in Uligan. It is one hell of a price and our Agent apologised profusely for having to charge it but that was what he had to pay for the only transport available.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PAY THIS.... Before arrival (as early on as possible) you should inform the Agent that your vessel has a launch and that you will collect the Officials and bring them to your boat; there are usually six of them and the agent. Now.. you can't mess about here, you either have a good Rib and it all works, or you don't. You could probably get away with two trips so long as you are fairly quick about it...and it would be easier to work this one at Uligan and Addu than in Male (where you'd have to know where to go make the collection AND be able to tackle either deep water anchoring or maintaining station under power all at the same time).

We paid the \$70, we have a canoe for a tender!!

BUT... if I'd known the score, I could have said I was going to pick the Officials up ourselves and steamed right into the harbour with our boat, got them off the dock and returned to anchor to do the paperwork before putting them ashore again. At 10mtrs length and only 1.3mtrs draft we could easily have done that.... The harbour was certainly big enough and deep enough.

OK.... So you may have to bat that one back and forth with your agent but \$70 is a lot of money!

NOTE 3: The first 15 Days are free..... after that you pay \$3.30/day (the 26 days was the figure the agent used as this corresponded to OUR given arrival / departure dates)..... it will probably work out a little longer and a little more). The \$3.30/day DOES increase after you have been here a while (after the first 15 days and the first month of 3.30/day?)....

This, I have to clarify, but we were quoted for two months at 3.30/day.

NOTE 4: You can do 3 days (which may be squeezed to 4 if done correctly) WITHOUT AN AGENT.

After that YOU ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE AN AGENT.

If you are headed to Uligan, Asad (our agent) will arrange the customs clearance for you without applying any Agents fee if you let him know in advance and let him know that you only intend this short stay.

ALTERNATIVELY: he will only charge you a \$20 Agents Fee and secure you an extra 6 days above your first three (which you were permitted without agent)

SO ..you could be there for 8-9 days for a total of \$150..... (ie \$17/day). This could make a stop over here well worth while, it is quite a good anchorage in the NE trade wind period; you can top up on water and some basic supplies, the reefs around the island are superb and the water is wonderfully clear. Communications are first rate and Phone/data cards are available (best organised with the agent before arrival).

It is also possible to take a ferry and visit other Islands in the group thus getting a full taste of the Maldives experience.

You should be prepared to pay for everything in Cash US Dollars.... The official rate was 15 local to US\$1 but you can often better that by 10% on the black market.....or where ever you can change money as I didn't see any Banks ashore!

NOTE: there is a great big, clear, sandy patch close north of the outer channel marker (with red light), it has 12 to 16 ft of water over it at LW and eight foot draft could be taken into it without difficulty. There is plenty enough room for 3 to 4 yachts to lie here safely and comfortably.







