

## **Maldives – A part of Paradise**

**By *Toofan Majumder***

" If there is paradise on Earth, it is here, it is here, it is here."

This was what coming to my mind many times during my 5 days stay in the land of atolls in the middle of the Indian Ocean, Maldives.

December was a slow period at my workplace and hence I could take a couple of days' vacations that I merged with a weekend to make this Maldives trip fruitful. I like to be a solo traveller and like to plan out my trips, that gives me flexibility on things that I want to focus and things that I am OK to skip. And so I planned out my trip for Maldives – half of the duration I will spend in the Capital of Maldives, Male' and the remaining half I will be spending in a very small island called Maalhos in the Baa atoll. I chose Baa atoll (though logistic wise it was bit difficult) because the Baa atoll is recognized by UNESCO as World Biosphere Reserve due to significant biodiversity in its waters.

First, let us talk about the journey. I have planned this trip months back and hence was able to manage cheap flights to Maldives from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. After reaching Male' at night on a Saturday and staying in Male' overnight, next day I boarded the flight to the Dharavandhoo island of Baa Atoll. Dharavandhoo airport is perhaps the smallest airport I have seen in my life. When we landed our flight was the only aircraft at the airport. From Dharavandhoo I had booked a boat (yes, I had to book a complete boat!) to take me to Maalhos island.



Photo : Maalhos island

Maalhos island is a very small island, at its length it is just 7.5 kms from one end to another. At its width it is only 0.5 km. On my first day I have literally circumnavigated the island on foot. It was a great experience as sea waters were pristine turquoise colour and sand was simply as whitest as a beach could be. While circumnavigating I realized the rising sea level certainly encroached many of the woods area of the island, leaving almost no path to walk and I was often walking in knee deep waters in my endeavour to circle the island. Global warming is not an abstract concept here in Maldives, it is a harsh reality! It is perhaps no wonder that Maldives was the first country to sign the Kyoto protocol!

At night on the same day, after dinner, I decided to take a stroll at the beach again. It was very dark as there was no streetlight at those areas. However, there were some lights caught my eye. Those are not from any artificial sources, neither from the sky, those are of living organism – bioluminescence planktons. I heard about them earlier but never thought those are so glorious.

It was as if blue tears moving up and down at the shore as sea waves are hitting the beach. And then there are some abrupt movements of lights , I realized those are due to the crabs that got in contact of those planktons and running inside the land at the beach and of those fish also, certainly contacted those planktons, which are drifting into the sea. After some time, I realized, I am also wearing a light shoe and as I was moving and agitating the planktons, my feet are glowing with natural blue colours! While I was amazed with this, but I could not help to think on the fate of those planktons – though I could hardly do anything at that point of time.



Photo : Bioluminescence Planktons

Next day morning, I decided to explore the waters. There were no guides, however, the hotel provides snorkelling equipment. I hit the water wearing those gears and for a long time was searching for a good spot of reef where I could see many fishes. And then finally found such place, oh, that is a wonderful land with so many colourful fishes. I have also seen a shark, few

dolphins and parrotfish. I was feeling grateful to God for creating such paradise on earth. I was also feeling grateful to my parents for bringing me in this world! I was particularly feeling grateful to my father, as unless he did teach me how to swim, I would have not dared to go into such depth of waters. And at last I was grateful to all who contributed to me in some way or other, for them, I was shaped as the person that I was at that point of time as I was contemplating.



Photo : A hermit crab at Maalhos island

The next day it is time to go back to Male'. Male' is the namesake of Maldives, Maldives means islands of Male' (though some people also claim Maldives came from Sanskrit word, Mala – garland and Dwipa – island). Many tourists skip Male' but the capital city has some interesting places to check. And most of them are in walking distance from one another. I visited the Old Friday mosque in Male' which is at least 350 years old. I visited president's residence which used to be palace during the sultanate era. Next, I explored Islamic Centre and National Museum of Maldives.



Photo : Old Friday Mosque

Memory of the 2004 tsunami is still vivid in the minds of the people of Maldives, I visited the Tsunami monument at the southwestern corner of the Male' island paid respect to people lost their lives during the event.

I know the memory of my recently concluded trip to Maldives will linger in my mind for a long time. I wish I can also share this experience with people whatever way I can. Not only the narration of beautiful island but also the more important narration of impact of climate change that is happening on those fragile ecosystems – that is the part I want to focus and communicate to the people.

Some people wait for afterlife to visit paradise, who knows God has already given us paradise to live and we have not understood it yet! Can we not do our part, whatever way we can, to protect the environment – so that these paradises are intact, and our future generation find them as beautiful as they are on today's date? We still have time, but if we delay even further – maybe it

will not take long time for these paradises to be extinct from the face of earth!  
The Choice is in our hand!