

Dive The Best

A **Review** onboard the **Maldives Carpe Diem**



Author's Note

My name is Greg Lemoine. I'm not affiliated with Carpe Diem at all. This review is a celebration of the most amazing dive experiences. If I don't share my joy and knowledge, it is wasted on me. I am an international educator, advanced PADI Instructor (retired), and regular diver aboard the Carpe Diem.

Trust me with what I share within this review. The writing is mine. The pictures were taken by me. This is my way of giving back to something I love!

I have been a global diver since 2001, when I moved to Honduras and took a refresher in Utila, in the Bay Islands. Certification in 1984 scared the hell out of me because it was in Lake Michigan. Cold, dark, no fish, 9mm wetsuits, quickly over for basic certification. Since then, I've always been cautious, needed warm water dives, and led a "safety-first" dive life.

Don't ask how many dives I've had. It's a lot. In many places. With many dive outfits and lots of rental equipment. Now, I've got my own kit. I focus on underwater photography with iPhone, an exciting new niche, and simply enjoying safe dives. At some point in my life, I graduated from shore diving to live-a-board diving. Such pampering scares me enough to think I won't ever go back to another kind of diving. Simply put: once you dive with Carpe, you are totally spoiled! Welcome to the Carpe Diem! Welcome to the pampering!

What You'll Learn



1

Where are the Maldives? Over there by Thailand, people! Follow the equator across Africa. You'll find the Maldives just south of India.

2

The Ship - the 30m (100ft) Carpe Diem is just one of the Carpe Maldives Fleet. Read more inside.





3

The Tender - called locally a *Dhoni*, is the following dive boat. Read more inside.

4

Dives - basically, you dive three times a day. This, of course, depends on the weather, the overall trip itinerary, and the safety of the designated dive spots. Read more inside.

5

Daily Routines -the article goes more in depth, but suffice it to say:

- Dive
- Eat
- Sleep
- Repeat

6

Pampering - It's all in the details. Fresh sheets daily. Individualized needs. Food allergies? Help with travel or local needs? Missing an o-ring? Forgot your dive computer? Let Carpe help.

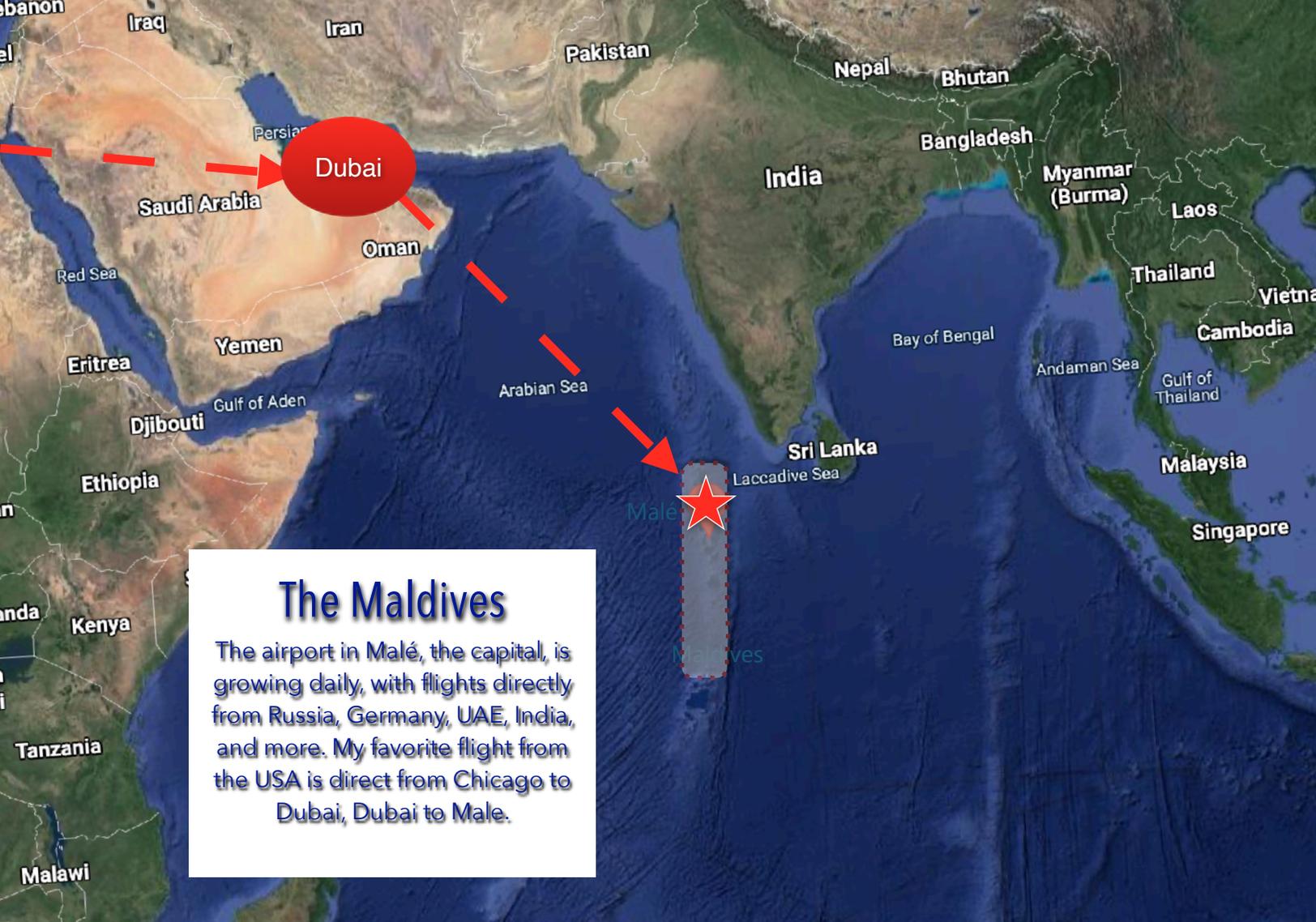
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The Dive Crew - When you are a guest diver on the Carpe Diem, you are in the hands of a professional, local Maldiven dive crew. These guys dive every day for years in those waters and those dive spots you will dive once. Trust them to find the most difficult to find macros and the largest of the pelagic. Underwater is their home. Let them introduce you, safely.



8

The Ship's Crew - consider this a Five Star cruise with some diving attached. Really. The crew is there for one reason: you.



The Maldives

The airport in Malé, the capital, is growing daily, with flights directly from Russia, Germany, UAE, India, and more. My favorite flight from the USA is direct from Chicago to Dubai, Dubai to Malé.

The Maldives [mal deevs] is a chain of small coral islands in the Indian Ocean. The 1200 islands stretch from north to south about 820km (510mi). A small southern part is south of the equator and the rest is just north of the imaginary line. Take sunscreen! It's hot.

There are just under half a million people and the majority live on Malé, the capital island. Roughly 200 of the 1200 islands are inhabited. That leaves over 1000 remote islands.

Trust me, I've done the following trip several times. It works wonders. To make it easy for you, I'll start the trip stateside, in Chicago. Don't forget to make sure your credit card gets you into the lounges! Take the direct flight via Emirates to Dubai. It takes about 13 hours.

This is a dive trip. See Dubai some other day. Check into the Marhaba Lounge and rest up. There

is a lounge by the International arrivals B11 or you can hang out in the HardRock right there. The flights for Malé usually leave out of B or C and I usually take the 4am flight direct with Emirates again. Don't bother getting a bottle of alcohol in the Duty Free, it's illegal in Maldives. **There is a full bar onboard though, don't worry.

When you arrive in the Malé airport, it's small. You'll meet everyone in the Information center and they dive guides will meet you in their Powder Blue Polo shirts. I always plan it to arrive the same day so there is no need for a hotel stay. Just sit there and have a coffee or bottle of water. *Life* is about to begin!



You can see all you want and more on their website:
<https://carpediembaldives.com>

Once the clock ticks around, it's time. The group is led out to the dive boat, loaded up, and taken out to the waiting Carpe Diem. Take your shoes off. You won't put them on again until you leave at the end of the trip.

While the ship's crew transfers all of your luggage, head into the main galley for your first briefing. Enjoy a cold umbrella drink while you learn all about the ship's rules, find out where your cabin is, and meet the rest of the divers.

After your first briefing, there is time to load your dive gear into bins, get into your cabin to unpack your clothes, and come back into the main galley to fill out dive paperwork.

The oldest of the three vessels in the Carpe Fleet, the Carpe Diem set off on its maiden voyage in 2008. She is a locally crafted wooden hulled motor yacht measuring in at 35m (115ft).

My favorite detail is the trip bananas. The small, sweet bananas are loaded on Day 1. You can watch them ripen and eat them when you fancy one. It's all in the details.

The ten cabins are comfortable and air conditioned, each with a private bathroom and hot water. If you are single, like me, you share a cabin, but most of us are busy diving and use the room to simply change or pass out between dives.

Your cabin is cleaned every day and the cabin boy even folds your blanket into different forms each day, if you are into that.

The seas can and do get rough once in a while, but the Carpe Diem is a huge vessel. You will enjoy being on this floating hotel. She only cruises during the daytime.





Dive Boat - the Dhoni

The Dhoni follows the Carpe Diem. The captain, the gasser, and the equipment boy are all professionals that live on the Dhoni, take care of your gear, and keep you diving. Imagine. Your gear is always ready. It doesn't move. The air and nitro compressors are on the Dhoni. Tanks are filled while you are on the Ship.

The boat is generous enough for 20 divers to prep comfortably. Wetsuits are hung up to dry. There are two water wells for cameras and freshwater rinses. Everything is conducive to efficient entry and coming aboard again. Small groups enter the water off the swim platform so 4-6 divers can do positive entry or negative together in currents.

The crew does this every day! They know how to keep you safe. If the boat is rockin', and it usually is, a crew member is always there to keep you steady. Can't get that chicken wing into your BCD? Arm stuck? Need more weight? No problem. If you are more self sufficient and don't trust anyone with your kit, fine, just let them know up front. They only want to offer their help.

These Maldivians are a one stop shop. Their focus is on making your dive experience the best it can be. You just don't know what you are missing until you've been here.



Lists and Signatures

Every diver signs off on their gas EVERY dive. Everyone is accounted for as the dive crew records and asks each diver their time and depth.

Fins Off

Entry is simple. Fins off. Climb the ladder. If you require a different method, the crew will abide.

NITROX

If you dive Enriched Air, Carpe mixes a straight 32 for each dive rather than other mixed levels. If you don't know Nitrox, sign up and learn on the trip!

Oh Captain, my Captain

As an instructor and a strict safety diver, I keep my eye on everything during a dive. The dive captain is the one to watch. If the captain runs a tight ship, the rest of the safety measures usually follow.

The Carpe Diem Dhoni is a top rate dive boat. There is constant communication between the captain, the main ship, and the diver leaders. The dive leaders, in turn, keep the divers in the safety loop.

The Dhoni captain gets the divers right on the dive spot. One of the guides jumps in and gauges the current on the spot. Each small group enters once the captain's engines are neutralized and the boat is in motion away from the entering

divers. He doesn't miss and all of the groups enter within minutes of each other.

During the dives, the captain and crew are following bubbles and watching the surface for divers. The captain runs the boat right up next to the surfaced divers, keeping currents and winds in mind, never taking his eyes off the individual divers.

The communication between the three Dhoni crew and the dive guides is constant, intentional, and reliable for diver safety. Safety first!

Carpe Diem



Underwater Life

The Carpe Diem is all about scuba diving. I'd be remiss if I didn't tease you with a few pictures and information about the creatures you might see on safari with Carpe Diem. The crew does it's best to offer every opportunity, but whether your timing is right is up to mother nature.



Sharks

Reef, white tip, black tip, hammer, tiger? The last two are rare, but after a Carpe Diem trip you will likely be accustomed to diving with smaller reef sharks.



Manta Rays

Carpe Diem offers the best opportunities to see Manta rays. There are dive sites and ship anchor sites planned in order for you to see these Maldivian wonders.



Nudie Branchs

Basically, underwater slugs, these little creatures make my Maldives Christmas more decorative. Nudies come in a plethora of colors but they tend to be just a few millimeters in size.



Whale Sharks

You might see them diving, snorkeling, or right off the stern while anchored in a lagoon.



Peacock Mantis Shrimp

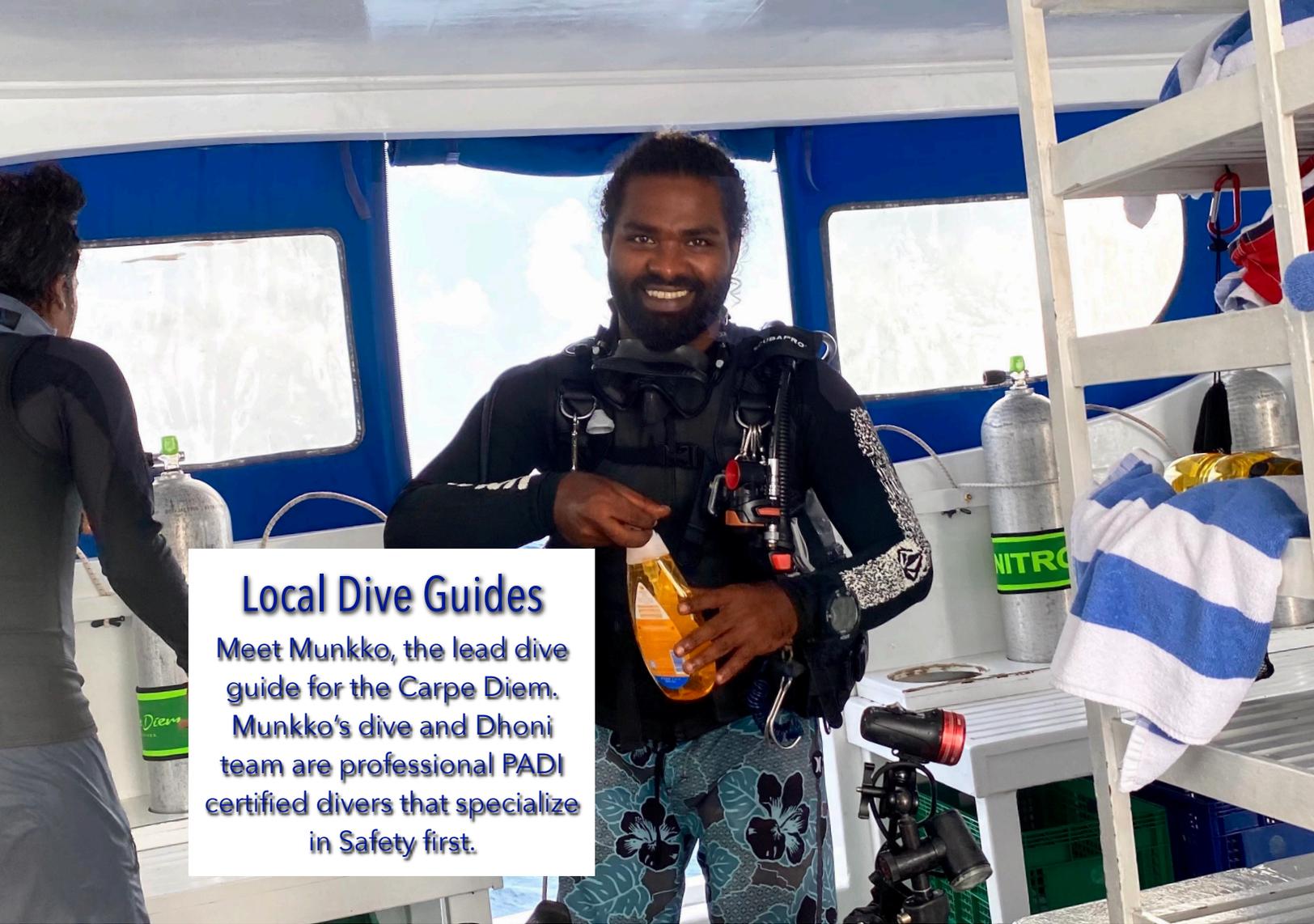
If you don't know about this super creature, it is now time to google it. Let your Carpe dive guide know you love these, and they will make sure to point them out. *I dare you to stop reading and look them up now!*



Frog Fish

One of the most difficult creatures to find is the frog fish. They are masters of disguise, melting right into the surrounding corals. The dive guides are always on the lookout for a prize like this. Keep your eyes open. Go slowly.

Never touch the sea life. Take only pictures. Leave only bubbles. Maybe we'll continue to see these creatures in the future.



Local Dive Guides

Meet Munkko, the lead dive guide for the Carpe Diem. Munkko's dive and Dhoni team are professional PADI certified divers that specialize in Safety first.

When it comes down to it, you are onboard the Carpe Diem to dive the Maldives. Of course, your group might charter the ship for fishing or snorkeling, but chances are, it's for diving.

Diving is what Munkko and his team do every single day. They are locals and they've been with the company many years. It's hard to imagine how many times they've been to the spectacular sites you will go on.

Safety permeates the decisions made for every dive. The procedures the team follows start with briefings. Before each dive, there is an in-depth briefing. Detailed maps are drawn and explained so divers own the dive plan. There are a lot of strong currents in the Maldives and divers are expected to stay with the group. While most dives are between 20 and 30 meters (70-100ft), 20 meters is the absolute depth limit set by the government for recreation diving.

Reef hooks, computers, and dive sausages are basic requirements. Divers are expected to stay

with their dive buddies. If there is minor current, diver pairs are allowed to go off on their own away from their guide. I don't recommend it because these guides know where all the creatures are hiding.

After the briefing, divers board the Dhoni by handing over whatever is in their hands to the crew. This leaves the divers' hands free to safely board from the ship to the Dhoni. You prepare your gear only after you see the gas tender test and verify your tank's O₂ level and you sign off.

The Dhoni has enough tanks for EAn (nitrox) or air diving. The tanks take Yoke or DIN valves and come in a small variety of sizes. For a nominal fee, you can opt for a 15L steel tank instead of the basic 12L aluminum tank. There are a few stubbies too.

Your spot on the Dhoni doesn't change. Between four and six divers are assigned a dive guide and switch off which group enters first. Sometimes, the first group to enter gets first dibs

on seeing pelagic before they flee the area. Rotating the groups makes the opportunities fair.



Have you ever felt rushed into preparation and getting into the water? This team doesn't rush you. Usually there is a lot of laughter and prep help from the team, but divers in a group enter together from the swim platform in an efficient manner.

Your dive leader gets the safe signal from the captain and everyone enters. Your guide is last in and last out, an important safety detail many dive teams don't follow.

When there are strong currents and the dive is on a pinnacle or the goal is hooking off on a reef edge to see schools of sharks, it takes a lot of skill to drop your divers in the right spot. Entry too close might sweep you right past the target. Too far away would require too much finning and risk diver exhaustion. This team knows how to read the currents and drop you right on the spots. Rarely do they miss.



Depending on the currents and absolute depths, day dives are planned for either 60 minutes or 50 BAR. Like mentioned before, in strong currents, it can be dangerous, so the group stays with their dive guide. One diver gets to low air and the guide signals the entire group to ascend to safety stop level.



Every dive ends with an important 5 meter/3minute safety stop. The Dhoni follows the divers so all dives are drift dives. The Dhoni does not anchor. Therefore safety stops are not on anchor lines. Once you surface, the Dhoni runs along side the group. Keep your fins on while you hang onto the drift lines along the Dhoni starboard side. Fins off one by one

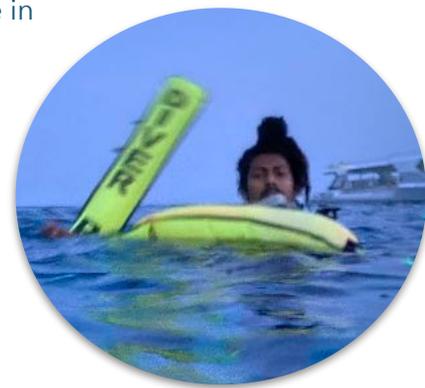
up a well formed ladder. Your dive guide is last out. Of course, if the weight of your gear or the ladder is a problem, the crew will get you aboard first and then your gear. This isn't SEAL training so there is no pressure to perform or rush. Enjoy the dive. Get back aboard safely.



Once back on board, all you have to do is disengage your first stage, hang up your wetsuit on a drying hanger, and record your dive time/max depth. Drop your camera back into one of the fresh water bins. Sit back and share stories about the dive with the other divers.

All of the crew are trained in first aid and emergency oxygen is on board. In case of emergency, the crew is trained to get all divers back to the boat via signals and remains in constant contact with the Carpe Diem.

Clearly, diver safety is the key reason I dive with this outfit. Munkko plans dives with one other element in mind: bang for your buck. He will cancel dives if the currents are too dangerous but he and his team do everything to make up for the lost dive in another exciting site. In addition to pinnacles of schooling fish, channels with schools of sharks, and macro specific coral sites, the team plans Maldivian specialty experiences with mantas and whale sharks. Mantas and whale sharks are often seen on dives but the ship also overnights in specific lagoons for night experiences with these gently giants.



I'll say it again. Safety first. With safety in place, providing a memorable and rewarding dive itinerary is what Munkko's team is all about. Prepare yourself to be wow'ed and pampered.

Food on Board

Nilanka - Chef

Manjoo - Bar

The crews of the three ships do not change very often. So chances are, you will be dining under the care of Nilanka (head chef), Manjoo (bartender and food specialist), and Saif (assistant chef). These are the guys working around the clock to feed the divers as well as the crew. Their galley kitchen is magical!

The last time we were on board, a few of us nicknamed Nilanka, McGyver, because when someone caught a wahoo, it was served in about ten different delicious ways. First, fresh and fully cooked on a plate for dinner. Over the next few meals, the rest of the fish was used in different savory soups and delicious dishes. There isn't much that this culinary crew cannot or will not make.

The big breakfast is a buffet spread. Overlooking turquoise waters while having a buffet breakfast is amazing. Enjoy fresh fruits, omelettes, coffees, juices, breads, and more. Lunches usually consist of a pasta dish, rices, fruits, and more. Dinners start off with a daily soup, international dishes of all kinds, and desert with coffee or drinks. Every meal has some form of vegetarian choice and fresh fruits.

They will cater to specific allergies and nutritional needs as long as you fill out their information sheets well ahead of time (so they can fill their food orders and plan for you). No one goes hungry on a Carpe trip.

Unfortunately, the Maldives is a Muslim country and pork - specifically bacon - isn't on the menu. Getting a BLT or crispy bacon with my breakfast are two things I'll have to find elsewhere. Oh Well, at least there is a full wet bar. Manjoo keeps a tally of your al la carte drinks and you pay at the end of the trip.

A special note should be made about holidays. During the Christian holidays of Christmas and New Years, I know this culinary crew goes all out to make the ship festive. They put up lights, pull out the decorations, blow up balloons, and focus on extra special and bountiful holiday meals. I watched Saif pull aside all of the freshly caught fish and yank a turkey out of the deep freezer for Christmas dinner. Considering all of the crew are either Muslim or Buddhist, that says a lot for how far they go to make this floating five star resort a home away from home.



Saif
asst. Chef



This review was written after my fourth trip with the Carpe Diem. Every time I go to dive sites I've already been on, I see something different. The trips keep getting better and better. Even though the Maldives are getting busier and more popular, the waters are still clear of garbage and full of what I like to see most: schools. I don't care what kind of fish are schooling. Whether banner fish, reef sharks, or black durgans, I just like to see healthy schools. So far, so good. Schools are still here.

See you onboard.
Greg 2021

Greg Lemoine, international educator, writer, and diver since 2001.