



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM**  
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

# ECOTOURISM FRAMEWORK & ROADMAP



In partnership with



**Ministry of Climate Change,  
Environment and Energy**  
Republic of Maldives

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The Ministry of tourism (MOT) in partnership with Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy and USAID Climate Adaptation project put together the Framework and Roadmap of ecotourism in the Maldives. A technical working group was created to complete the document:

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# ECOTOURISM FRAMEWORK OF THE MALDIVES

# INTRODUCTION

This framework document sets out the current context of Eco tourism in the Maldives. This document identifies the main context and objectives with guiding principles, outlines future goals, and provides a road map. The eco-tourism framework is designed to be adaptive and will be periodically revised based on evidence-based policies and changing ecosystem-based approaches.

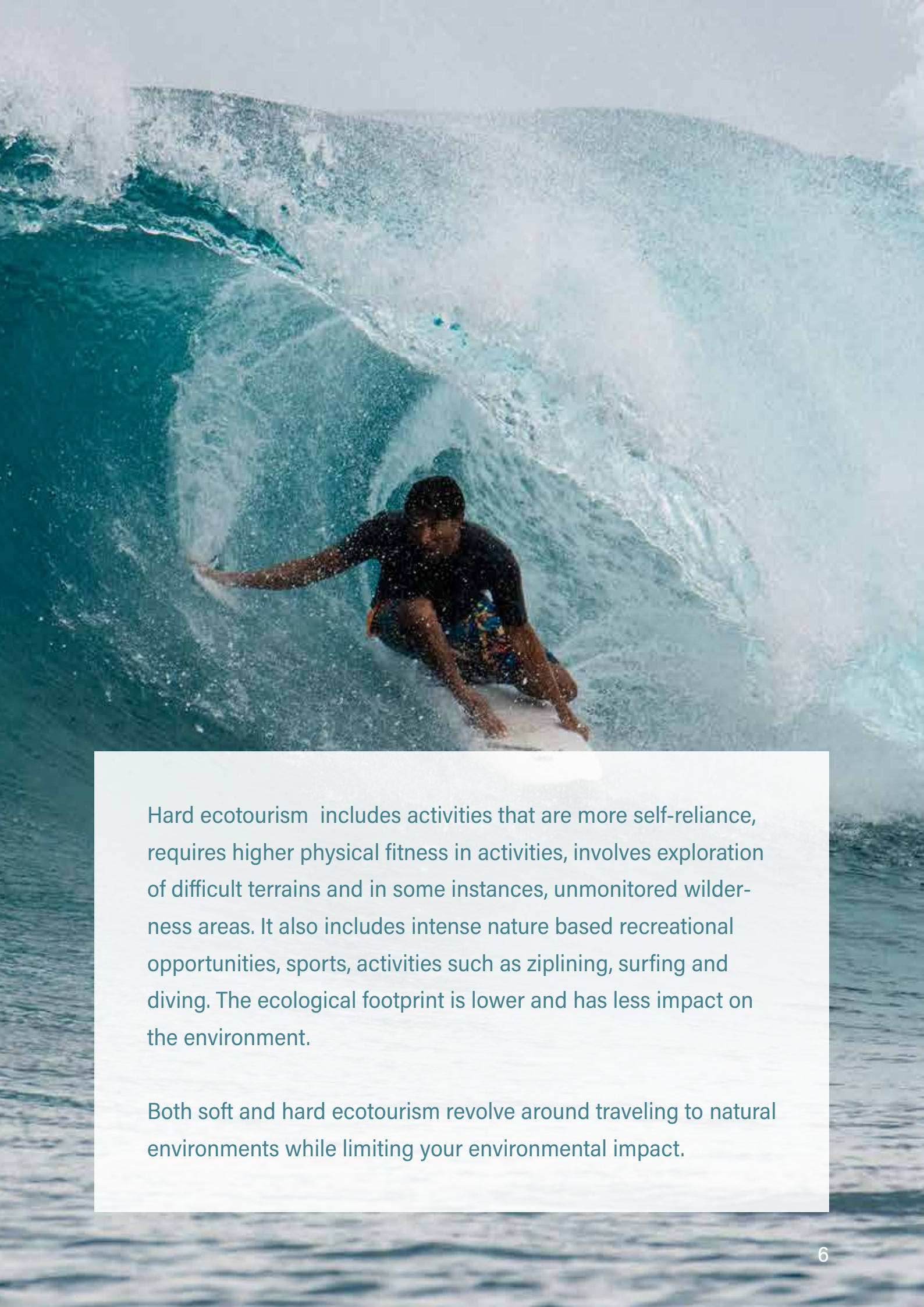
## Definition

International Ecotourism Society (2015) defines Ecotourism as:

“  
*Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the wellbeing of local people and involves interpretation and education*  
”

## **In general ecotourism can be categorized as:**

Soft ecotourism is the most accessible form of tourism which is suitable for all: it requires less physical exertion, and less disconnect from settlements. It can typically be accessed through an easily accessible nature based recreational activity, and provides a relatively hassle-free chance to experience nature. It includes activities like going for a stroll in your nearest nature park, bird watching, enjoying butterfly gardens/ plants and or snorkeling in a nearby shallow reef.



Hard ecotourism includes activities that are more self-reliance, requires higher physical fitness in activities, involves exploration of difficult terrains and in some instances, unmonitored wilderness areas. It also includes intense nature based recreational opportunities, sports, activities such as ziplining, surfing and diving. The ecological footprint is lower and has less impact on the environment.

Both soft and hard ecotourism revolve around traveling to natural environments while limiting your environmental impact.

# Objectives of Ecotourism

These objectives will aim in creating a sustainable and responsible ecotourism framework that benefits both the environment and local communities, while maximizing visitor experiences in the Maldives.

- To protect and conserve the natural ecosystem and heritage sites.
- Identification of potential sites of ecotourism, encouraging preservation of natural and cultural assets.
- Minimize disturbances to ecosystem and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity including but not limited to native species and endangered species.
- Ensure ecotourism activities are within minimal ecological footprints with lower carbon emissions, and support climate change action through sustainable resource management.
- Preservation and conservation of places / sites of significance importance and encourage to preserve new places and natural assets to become heritage sites.
- Enhance responsible involvement of local communities and businesses.
- Educate the visitor for responsible interaction with natural and cultural assets.
- Create awareness in the local communities.
- Identify and promote conservation funding and management of natural and cultural assets.
- Strengthen regulations and implement strong monitoring mechanisms.
- Equitable access and benefit sharing of resources.
- Preserve tangible and intangible assets and environment.
- Strengthen and upgrade destination ecosystem and environmental assets through collaborations with tourist facilities.



# VISION

A globally renowned  
ecotourism destination in  
harmony with nature and  
people



## MISSION

To enjoy the Maldives as a world renowned ecotourism destination, committed to preserving and protecting our natural and cultural heritage while creating diverse opportunities for local communities and realizing economic benefits



# THREE PILLARS OF ECOTOURISM IN MALDIVES



**NATURE**



**PEOPLE**



**ECONOMY**

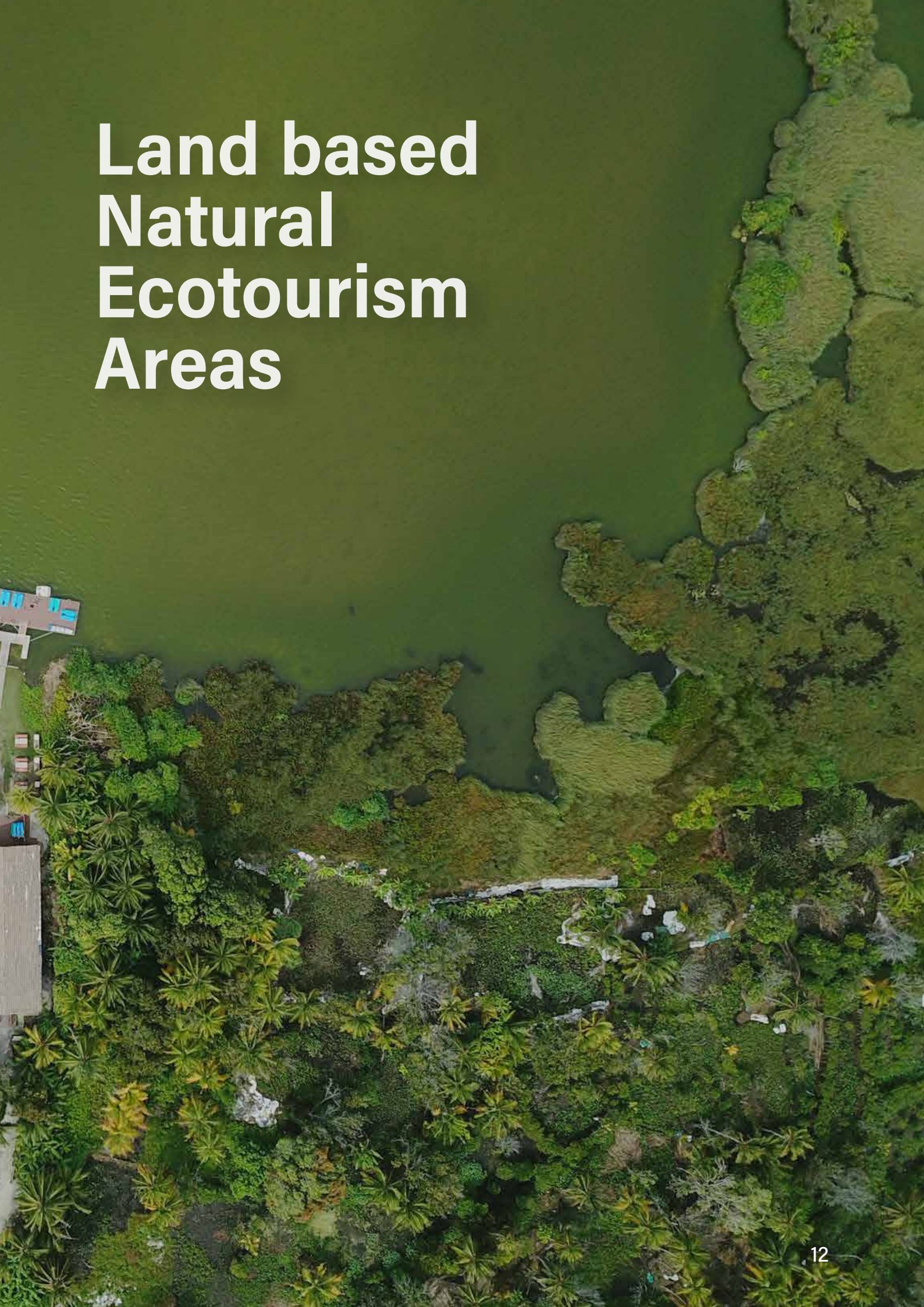
An aerial photograph of a tropical island. The island is covered in dense green vegetation, including many palm trees. A large, calm lagoon with a greenish-brown hue occupies the right side of the image. In the bottom right corner, there are some buildings and a paved area, suggesting a developed part of the island. The overall scene is lush and scenic.

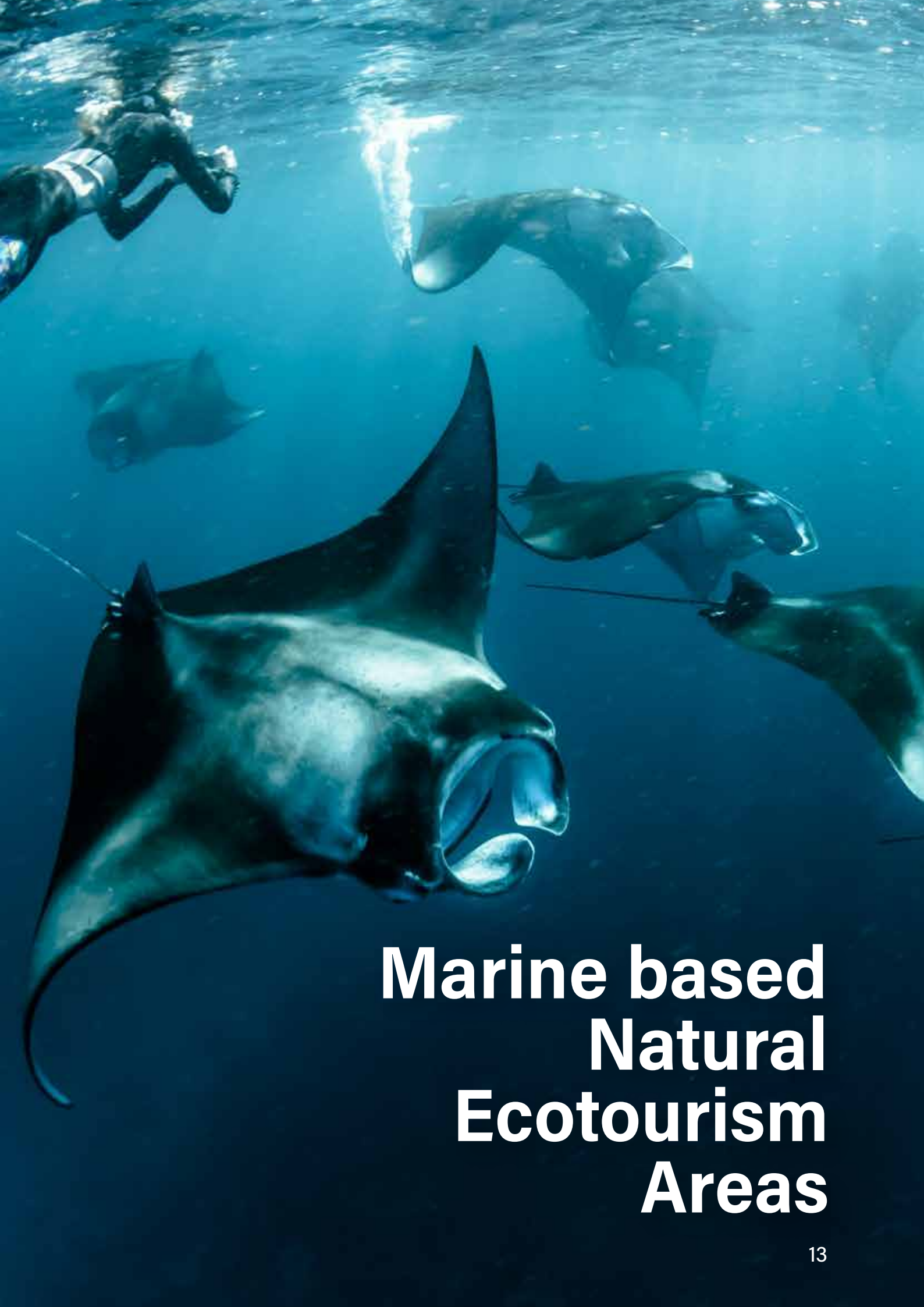
# POTENTIAL ACTIVITY AREAS IN ECOTOURISM

**There are 3 main potential activity  
areas in the Maldives**

- 1) Land based Natural Ecotourism Areas
- 2) Marine based Natural Ecotourism Areas
- 3) Cultural and Heritage Ecotourism Areas

# Land based Natural Ecotourism Areas





# Marine based Natural Ecotourism Areas

# Cultural and Heritage Ecotourism Areas





# POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES IN AREAS



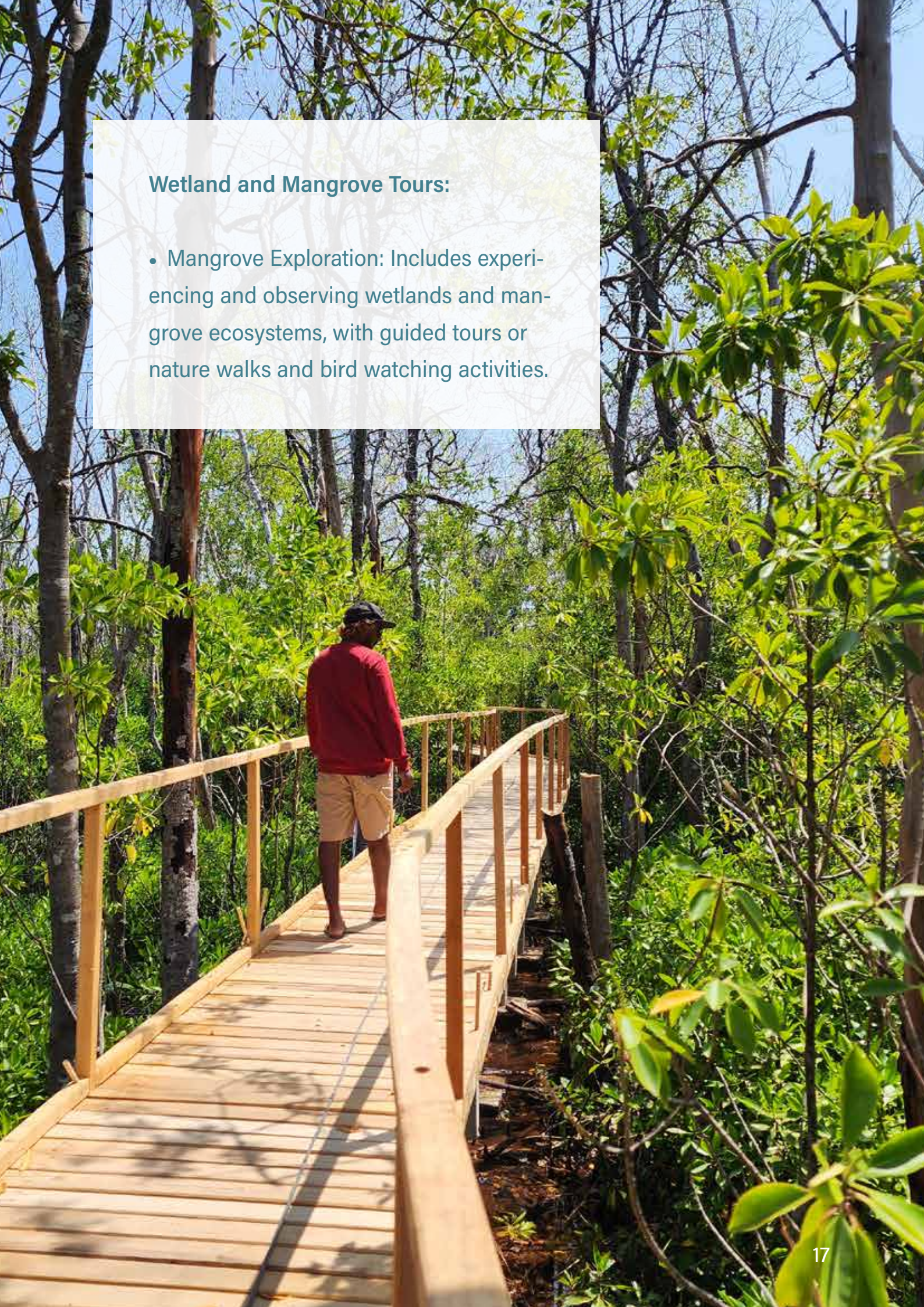
## 1. Land based Natural Ecotourism Areas

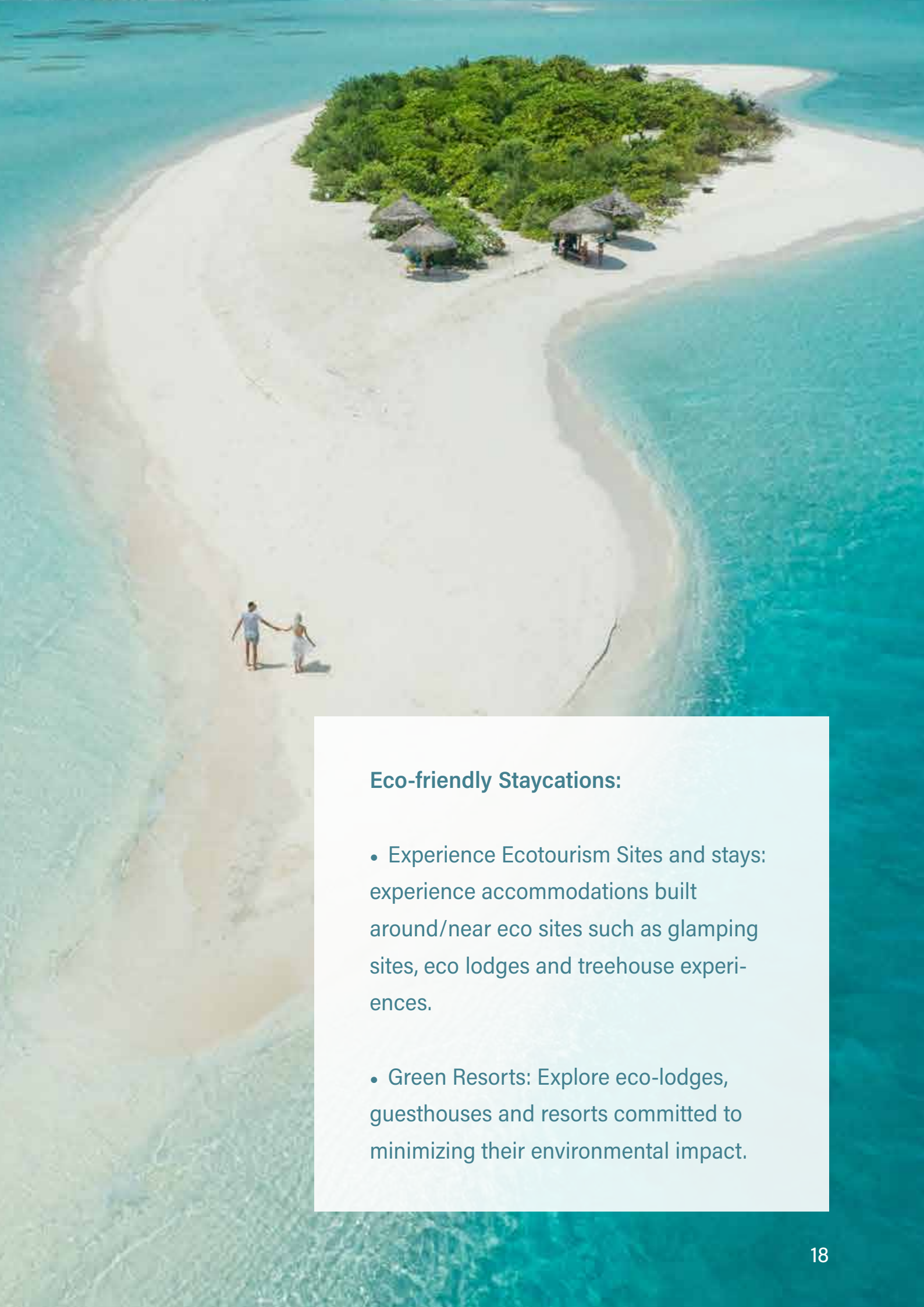
### Island and Atoll Exploration:

- Uninhabited Island Tours: Visit pristine islands to appreciate untouched landscapes and ecosystems.
- Atoll Discovery: Explore the atolls and their unique features, emphasizing their ecological importance.

## Wetland and Mangrove Tours:

- Mangrove Exploration: Includes experiencing and observing wetlands and mangrove ecosystems, with guided tours or nature walks and bird watching activities.





### **Eco-friendly Staycations:**

- Experience Ecotourism Sites and stays: experience accommodations built around/near eco sites such as glamping sites, eco lodges and treehouse experiences.
- Green Resorts: Explore eco-lodges, guesthouses and resorts committed to minimizing their environmental impact.

The background of the slide is a vibrant underwater scene featuring a dense coral reef. The coral has a complex, branching structure with a mix of dark brown and light tan colors. The water is a clear, bright blue, and the lighting is bright, creating a high-contrast, detailed view of the marine life. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing text.

## Educational Ecotourism and volunteering:

- Eco Tours and environmental workshops:  
Guided tours providing insights into the natural and manmade history and ecological significance of the Maldives and taking part in educational programs increasing awareness of the ecosystem of Maldives and the importance of conservation.
- Participate in Conservation Projects:  
Engage in volunteer activities focused on environmental conservation, such as coral reef restoration, citizen science, and wildlife rehabilitation.

## 2. Marine based Natural Ecotourism Areas

### Marine-based Ecotourism:

- Diving Tours: exploring the vibrant coral reefs, experiencing the marine life and diving sites such as submerged reefs, channels, night diving and wreck site diving.
- Snorkeling Tours: Explore vibrant coral reefs, observe marine life, and contribute to biodiversity conservation efforts.
- Megafauna watching: responsible excursions to experience and respectfully interact with sea turtles, manta rays, dolphins, sharks and the occasional whales in their natural habitats.
- Experience sunset cruises and dolphin-watching tours on eco-friendly vessels that prioritize environmental sustainability.

### 3. Ecosystem Restoration Activities:

- Participate in coral reef restoration activities: experiencing coral restoration projects, in maintenance and out planting for the regeneration of damaged coral reefs.
- Educational Programs: Study and or awareness tour of biodiversity and heritage conservation and the ongoing efforts to protect these ecosystems and historical sites



#### 4. Culture and Heritage Ecotourism Areas

##### Cultural and heritage tours:

- Cultural Ecotourism: Visit inhabited local islands to learn about traditional Maldivian culture, support local communities in promoting sustainable practices.
- Historical Tours: Visit sites of historical significance in the Maldives.
- Maldivian Handcraft: Tourists can engage in workshops to learn about and participate in traditional Maldivian handicrafts, such as weaving, mat-making, and lacquer work.

# CURRENT SCENE OF ECO TOURISM IN THE MALDIVES

Maldives has implemented and promoted sustainable tourism for the past 50 years. Tourism sector in the Maldives is highly dependent on the biodiversity of Maldivian ecosystems. The Visitor Survey Report published in September 2022, shows beaches of the Maldives as the number one motivating factor for visitors. As per the survey report, motivating aspects such as underwater beauty, uniqueness, small islands, and manta rays, whale sharks and tiger sharks were at 59%, 44%, 38% and 22% respectively. This data provides evidence for the connection between tourism, environment and the rich biodiversity of the Maldives.

Ecotourism integrates tourism with nature, reflecting on responsible traveling and the importance of education and conservation of nature, and the empowerment of local communities. Below are some of the current activities carried out in the Maldives at present, that embody ecotourism.



# 1. Tours:

Tours catered for like-minded nature lovers who wish to contribute to conservation efforts across the globe and promote responsible tourism.

## 1.1. Secret Paradise Tours;

These are tours led by local guides, with small tour groups (a maximum of six people per group). Activities carried out by Secret Paradise Tours actively contribute to protection and conservation of the Maldives and the local economy, by focusing on local businesses. These tours provide education and volunteer opportunities.





**1.2. Biosphere Expeditions;** Biosphere Expeditions are catered for citizen scientists and nature lovers who wish to contribute to global conservation efforts, where programs such as volunteering in wildlife conservation are offered. Maldives Marine biology Volunteering Project is offered in the Maldives through the Biosphere Expedition. It is a volunteer project where citizen scientists take part in coral reef and whale shark volunteering programs. The project covers 26 atolls on a liveaboard, on which participants share rooms. Participants are trained as Reef Check EcoDivers and help marine biologists study and protect coral reefs and the resident whale shark population. Including the marine biologists and local guides, the project caters for 15 members per expedition, and all participants are required to be qualified divers.

## 2. Recreational activities are offered in protected areas.

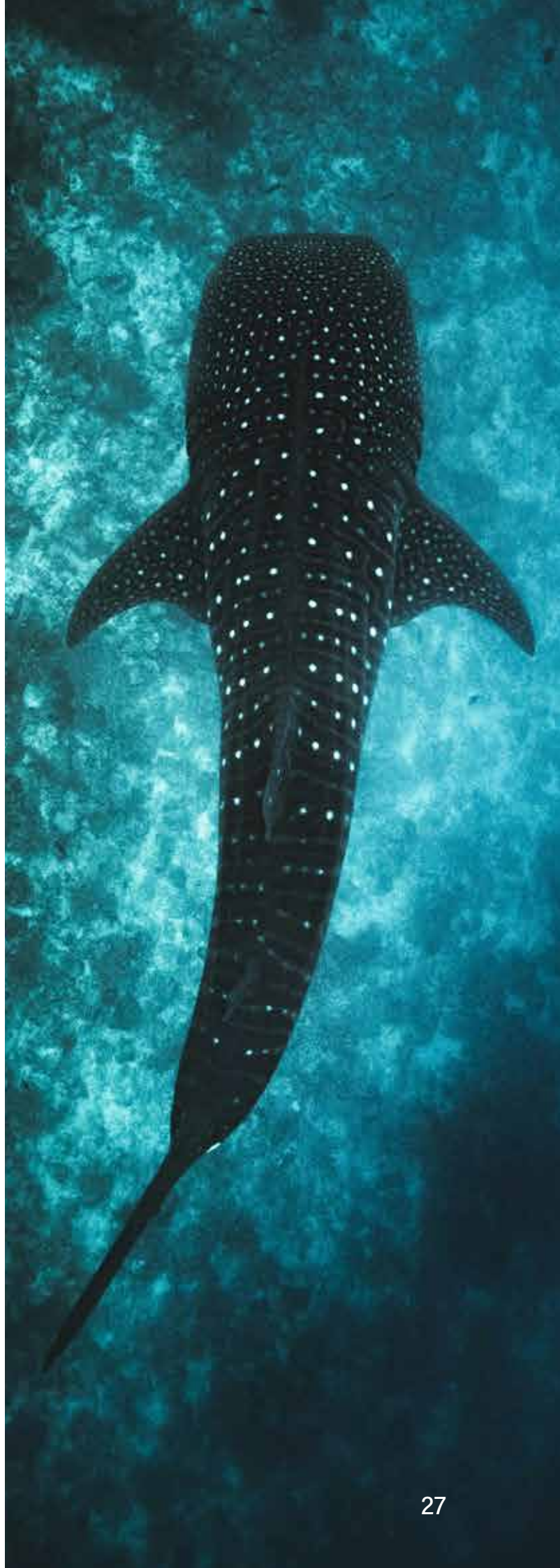
### 2.1. Hanifaru;

Hanifaru is a small, enclosed reef system with one main entrance channel. It is a feeding site for mantas and whale sharks, as well as a mating site for mantas. It is a popular manta aggregation site within the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve. Activities such as snorkeling are offered to visitors at Hanifaru, accompanied by guides. Hanifaru has a well-developed code of conduct to ensure the conservation of the ecosystem at Hanifaru.



## Code of conduct at Hanifaru;

- Boats entering and leaving the Hanifaru Area must reduce their speed and have a staff member at the front of the boat looking out for animals and swimmers on the surface.
- Should mantas or whale sharks be spotted, the boat must keep a safe distance of 20 meters away from the mantas, whale sharks, and people.
- Once in the Hanifaru area, boats must anchor in the shallow sandy lagoon.
- A maximum of five boats can be anchored in the designated area.
- Guides, boat crews, and dive instructors must brief the visitors about the boat being anchored and the visitors having to swim back to the boat to be picked up.
- The ratio of visitors to guides should be a maximum of 8 visitors per guide.
- Boat captains, dive masters, and guides must have sufficient training in boat guidelines and appropriate in-water behavior.
- Visitors must be informed of the dos and don'ts in the area.
- Visitors are not allowed to touch, ride, or swim after any animal.
- A distance of 3 to 4 meters should be kept from the animals.
- Jet skis, catamarans, and other such vessels are not allowed within the Hanifaru area.



## 2.2. Moodhu Madharusaa

Moodhu Madharusaa is a Marine education program carried out as part of the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme (MMCP) by Manta Trust. With a focus on educating students about the environmental issues faced by their communities and engaging them with conservation solutions. The goal of this program is to ensure that communities have a personal connection with their (marine) environment, understand the importance, and grow a passion for conservation. Moodhu Madharusa is based on five modules; marine ecology, coral reef ecosystems, marine megafauna, seagrass and mangroves, and ecosystem conservation. The modules are carried out through theory-based lessons, field trips, and swimming and snorkeling lessons. To date, MMCP has reached 3207 people through their education and awareness efforts, reaching out to 912 students, teachers, and women in communities. This includes 7 schools and 261 students. MMCP launched the Baa Atoll Manta Festival in 2018, an annual event focused on bringing communities together to celebrate and learn about the marine biodiversity of Maldives.



### 2.3. Addu Nature Park;

Addu Nature Park encompasses the Koat-tey and Eydhigali Kilhi Protected Areas. Eydhigali Kilhi is one of the largest wetland areas in the Maldives. It is home to birds such as the eastern grey heron, Maldivian pond heron, little egret, and white terns. The Nature Park offers guided nature tours to observe the unique fauna and flora of the park, canoeing in the bay area, and guided snorkeling. Educational field trips and information sessions for schools within the Addu City area and across the Maldives are also held here.



## 2.4. Fuvahmulah Nature Park ;

The Nature Park located in Dhadimagi Kilhi, is home to moorhens, waterhens, and various species of heron. Plants found in the area include taro, thatch screw pine and several types of plants utilized for medicinal purposes. Visitors at the Nature Park can enjoy swimming, canoeing, and pedal boating. Bicycles can also be rented at the park. The Nature Park hosts schools across the Maldives, as well as people from different sectors in the Maldives for educational field trips. During such sessions, students learn about the Nature Park, wetlands – their importance and uses, and historical and cultural aspects about Fuvahmulah.



# THE ROADMAP FOR IMPLEMENTING ECOTOURISM

## 1. Assessment and Mapping

As part of the roadmap to create ecotourism in the Maldives, the first step involves conducting an assessment and mapping process. This includes identifying and researching new ecosites to map, pinpointing culturally and historically significant areas, and assessing the existing infrastructure and accessibility. Additionally, a comprehensive need assessment on the required financial, human, technical, technology and training needs shall be conducted.

### Example categories that will be mapped:

- Surfing zones
- Dive sites
- Wreck sites
- Cultural and heritage zones
- Protected area in local islands
- Protected areas and OECMs in uninhabited islands and resorts





## **2. Guidelines, Regulations and Standards**

In an effort to foster ecotourism, the Maldives is committed to establishing comprehensive guidelines and regulations. This initiative will involve a thorough familiarization with existing regulations, the development of new policies, guidelines and standards tailored to ecotourism objectives. Through this holistic approach, the Maldives aims to create a sustainable and responsible framework that prioritizes the conservation of its natural and cultural treasures.

## **3. Ecotourism services**

To foster ecotourism, the aim is to establish a foundation for sustainable tourism by developing eco-friendly structures, implementing efficient waste management systems, adopting renewable energy solutions, and establishing accommodations that adhere to sustainable and eco-friendly principles.

## **4. Ecotourism Certification**

The introduction of ecotourism certification involves a systematic approach, beginning with the establishment of clear criteria for certification. This initiative aims to encourage businesses to align with these certification standards, to encourage environmentally



responsible practices. The certified businesses will be actively promoted to visitors, creating awareness and encouraging sustainable choices among tourists seeking eco-conscious options.

## **5. Education, Awareness and Empowerment**

A pivotal milestone in establishing ecotourism involves implementing a comprehensive strategy to create awareness. This includes enhancing the skills and knowledge of local communities, empowering locals to initiate eco-friendly businesses, promoting active participation in ecotourism initiatives and conducting awareness on sustainable tourism practices. Furthermore, educating tourists about responsible and sustainable practices ensures a well-informed and engaged visitor base committed to supporting eco-conscious initiatives throughout their stay. Together, these efforts contribute to the foundational awareness necessary for the success of ecotourism in the targeted destination.



## 6. Marketing and Promotion

In the realm of marketing and promotion for ecotourism, the strategy involves developing compelling marketing materials that showcase the destination's eco-friendly initiatives. This will be complemented by the strategic utilization of digital platforms to amplify the reach and impact of promotional efforts. Collaborative ventures with travel agencies and influencers will further enhance the visibility and endorsement of the destination's commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism practices. Together, these initiatives form a cohesive approach to effectively market and promote ecotourism, attracting a conscious and environmentally-aware audience. For instance, the introduction of Ecotourism Festivals and Nature Park Festivals.



## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

A systematic approach will be implemented to ensure the success of ecotourism initiatives. This includes the establishment of monitoring systems to assess and mitigate environmental impacts, the collection of feedback from both local communities and visitors, and the subsequent adjustment of strategies based on comprehensive evaluations. This iterative process aims to continuously refine and improve ecotourism practices, fostering a dynamic and adaptive framework that prioritizes sustainability and positive outcomes for both the destination and its stakeholders.

