



# THERO

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EDITION

Evoking the spirit of thrill-seeking pioneer Tony Hussein Hinde, the 'father of surfing in the Maldives', **Duncan Madden** finds longboard perfection on the Indian Ocean's Yin Yang Break

# INDIAN OCEAN SURFER

**I**n his new documentary, *Serendipity* (no relation to the Kate Beckinsale cheese-fest), Australian surfer-director Simon Lamb focuses on one of the world's most obvious yet least visited surfing destinations, the Maldives.

Set in the 1970s it tells the tale of surf pioneer Tony Hussein Hinde, a 20-year-old Aussie who wanted to escape the already-crowded breaks of Indonesia and so set out on a journey of discovery. What he found was a scattering of 26 atolls and hundreds of mostly-uninhabited islands playing host to the pristine waves of the Laccadive Sea in the Indian Ocean. It was a secret he kept, and surfed, for more than a decade.

Although set in the golden era of surf discovery when the concept of world travel in search of waves was in its infancy, *Serendipity* is just as relevant today. Ask most people – surfers included – about the Maldives and you'll invariably hear about honeymoons and high prices. Granted, the waves are spread far and wide and reaching them can challenge commitment and cash flow, but that's always been a fundamental part of surf travel: to overcome obstacles in search of crowd-free perfection, and the Maldives has that in abundance.

Today's journey to the Maldives is of course entirely different to Hinde's. Three flights, a spectacular nighttime speedboat ride and 20 hours from London, my destination was the **Laamu Atoll**, and the Six Senses resort on Olhuveli Island. Not exactly pioneering exploration, but the Six Senses is home to something very special besides its luxury villas, fine dining and crunchy white sands. Hidden from view on the eastern side of the island, a short boat ride through luminous blue seas from the resort's watersports centre, breaks one of the Indian Ocean's lesser-known gems, the Yin Yang Break.

Back on dry land – of sorts – the Six Senses is unique to my Maldivian experiences. Its main complex of reception, restaurants, dive centre and wine 'vault' (a six-metre-tall tower, the island's highest point) stands atop stilts over the blue lagoon. It's an awesome welcome, even more so at night. And once my shoes are removed – island policy – I am soon peddling my two-wheeled transport, with individual number plate, towards my villa. ▲

*Laamu Atoll, which boasts a cluster of 82 islands, forms the southern limit of Central Maldives and is rimmed by barrier reefs. Confusingly, locals call it 'Haddhunmathi'.*





## GIVE ME A BREAK

So named after the Chinese philosophical concept symbolising the two conflicting but interrelated sides of nature, the Yin Yang break has two sides to its personality. A right-hander initially breaking over deep water, it first pitches gently but cleanly allowing for an easy paddle-in before trundling its big, open face on to the corner of the reef where it morphs into a spitting barrel that races over shallow coral to its eventual demise. Two waves in one then – and depending on the size and power of the swell, certainly not for the uninitiated.

Among a mix of beach and water villas available, I'd opted for the latter in the hopes of sneaking a view of the fabled Yin Yang wave. While that view didn't materialise from my watery palace, I couldn't complain. Huge canopy bed, indoor/outdoor bathroom, sprawling terrace with day bed, over-water hammocks,

submerged dining table, steps into the sea – and to top it off a crow's nest with views to the horizon. My mind pondered the hardships Tony Hinde endured when he first surfed these virgin waves – and I felt stoked that times have changed somewhat.

After a decent sleep, morning onshore winds put pay to an early surf but gave me time to cycle the island's sandy tracks and orientate myself. The Yin Yang breaks to the south, on the outer reef of neighbouring island **Hithadhoo**. Closer to shore, towards the northern side, are the imaginatively named Jetty C and Turtles breaks (they break off Jetty C and next to the turtle breeding grounds), suitable for novices and learners, though not entirely free from risk.

I had lunch in Six Senses' Leaf restaurant (huge prawn salad, if you're interested) for its outlook towards the Yin Yang, and was joined by Steve, the resident watersports commander-in-chief and surf guru. A life-long surfer and world traveller, he always seemed to end up in the cold waves of north Devon before he found his Maldivian calling. "It's great here," he enthuses, with one eye on the conversation, the other on the ocean. "I get to surf and I get to teach people how to surf, and on my days off work, I surf!"

There's a waft of stereotype about Steve as he waxes lyrical about life here and not having to cook his meals, wash his clothes or really even think that much: the ultimate surfer paradise. But you can't knock his sheer love of the ocean and dedication to

it – and it soon becomes clear his affections extend equally to the local islands and their residents. With a dearth of opportunity and shortage of work and resources, local life away from the resorts can be hard and problems with boredom and its associated evils are rife, especially for the young.

Steve organises surf lessons and competitions for the local kids, providing surfboards from the resort and those left by travelling surfers as gifts.

"Some of the boys are getting really good and we've even had a few girls out there too," he continues. "It's a way of showing

them there are other things to do, other opportunities to try new things."

As if to prove the point, when I show up for the quick boat ride out to the Yin

*Hithadhoo, a small island in the Laamu Atoll, is home to turtles and – in the surrounding waters – dolphins, stingrays and schools of fish, including reef sharks.*

# MY WATERY PALACE HAS OVER-SEA HAMMOCKS & A CROW'S NEST WITH VIEWS TO THE HORIZON



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Yang and my first surf that afternoon, it's local surfer Maude who acts as my guide. Ushering me into the RIB for the five-minute ride to the reef, we're spectacularly waylaid by a pod of spinner dolphins putting on a flipping great show all around us. When they eventually tire from their dizzying front flips, we motor to the main agenda and pull up alongside the Yin Yang, at last.

What looked rather small and perhaps a little mediocre from the beach was altogether bigger and better up close. A clean, four-foot swell was unloading with a rhythmic, urgent rumble that beckoned us into the water – me with such haste I forgot to take off my new sunglasses and lost them to the watery depths.

Even more of a surprise is the new addition to the Yin Yang. At its far right end, a dhoni (local fishing boat) has snagged on the reef and stuck fast. Maude explains it happened a few weeks before and all efforts from local boats and even a tug dispatched from **Malé** to retrieve it have failed. "So there it will stay until it eventually sinks," she says, before adding with a twinkle in his eye: "and becomes a part of the reef itself, perhaps making the wave stretch a little farther." Maude's a surfer, no mistake.

For the next two hours it's me, Maude, the odd turtle and clean empty surf peeling endlessly before us.

I take my time to get my bearings and work out where and how the waves break, watching Maude stroke into waves with practised ease after two years of surfing here and only here. After a few reasonable but short rides, I paddle into the largest I've yet seen and connect all the way through to the fast and ferocious inside section, not quite getting barrelled but close enough to feel my adrenaline pulse and smile grow ever wider.

The Yin Yang had other ideas though and my smile was soon extinguished by a gruelling paddle back out to the safety of deep water. Having foolishly ridden the first wave of the previous set (a classic no-no), I turn to face six more waves and another set beyond unloading on the reef in front of me.

Duck diving my board, then just diving

under, I felt my lungs burn and the months of city living coming back to haunt me. I'm woefully unfit and, rather embarrassingly, after the tenth or eleventh dive down am in need of a break. I surface to find Maude next to me, smiling away as he beckons the boat over. Nice timing.

Salted and sated, I drift back to my villa and then wander to meet my companions

**RIDING TO  
THE REEF WE  
ARE WAYLAID  
BY DOLPHINS  
WHO PUT ON  
A FLIPPING  
GREAT SHOW  
ALL AROUND  
THE BOAT**

BELOW: When the surf is not playing ball there are plenty of other activities to indulge in, including turtle spotting under the waves





## WHERE TO STAY IN THE MALDIVES

### BEST FOR: ROMANCE

Taj Exotica Resort and Spa, an exclusive and private island resort, is found 15 minutes away by luxury speedboat from Malé. Here you can stay in one of 64 villas, each of which has been furnished in natural tones and textures. All of them offer ocean views. Enjoy total relaxation at this high-end resort, make the most of the spa and lap up cocktails and wines.

[tajhotels.com](http://tajhotels.com)

### BEST FOR: WILDLIFE

Four Seasons at Landaa Graavaru allows guests to join sealife experts to learn about manta rays, which are found in temperate and tropical waters. Conceived in conjunction with The Manta Trust – the world's leading manta ray charity – and escorted by its founder and world-renowned manta honcho Guy Stevens, all-inclusive seven-day expeditions will immerse those who take part in every aspect of the Trust's research and conservation efforts.

[fourseasons.com/maldiveslg](http://fourseasons.com/maldiveslg)

### BEST FOR: RELAXATION

Atmosphere Kanifushi, which opened last year, brings together a fusion of modern design and Maldivian architecture. Located among tropical vegetation in Lhaviyani Atoll, lapped by the Indian Ocean, it spreads along a two-kilometre-long lagoon, offering maximum privacy.

[atmosphere-kanifushi.com](http://atmosphere-kanifushi.com)

for cocktails and dinner. Gorging on lobster, scallops, unspecified local-caught reef fish and bottomless whisky sours we dip our toes (and in my friend Natalia's case, half her possessions) in the still-blue waters below and reflect on this earthly paradise. It was a proper post-surf wind down, and gratefully received, I can tell you.

As is the way with island life, the rest of the week unfolds in much the same fashion. When there are waves, I surf, and always with only Maude except only once when a group of Aussies descends on us from a touring boat trip. But on this particular

*Inshore reefs tend to attract a wide variety of sea life and – with the right guidance – in the Maldives you will be able to see an impressive number of fish and turtles.*

dazzling white beaches.

For instance, we dive **inshore reefs** with the resident marine biologist and hear her plans to sustain the water life in the area. We also take sunset boat trips in search of more dolphins and – my personal highlight – are abandoned for a day on a tiny desert island with only hermit crabs for company.

And like that, my week in the Maldives is over. Island time rules state that everything feels like slow motion, but it disappears in the blink of an eye.

As we take to our 5am speedboat I can still hear the roar of the Yin Yang Break detonating tantalisingly on the reef behind me, sounding more powerful than ever before through the inky night.

occasion I actually welcome the crowd, such is the multitude of waves on offer.

And when the surf isn't cooperating, there is plenty to keep us occupied beyond resting prostrate on the

# GORGING ON LOBSTER AND SCALLOPS, AND SUPPING WHISKY SOURS, OUR TOES DIP INTO THE WATERS

I find myself yearning for one more wave, and as we fly back overhead I crane my neck to get a view of other surf spots tucked away among the atolls. Honky's, Sultans, Jailbreaks and most of all, Pasta Point, the wave that claimed the life of Tony Hussein Hinde 33 years after he first discovered it. So much history here in the Maldives, and so many reasons to come back.



## GETTING THERE

Trips to Six Senses are available from Turquoise Holidays starting from £2,279 per person half board for one week including flights from London Heathrow with Sri Lankan airlines. See [sixsenses.com](http://sixsenses.com) and [turquoiseholidays.co.uk](http://turquoiseholidays.co.uk)