



Maldives

The islands that make up the Maldives look like spots of color on a dark blue canvas. The radiant white of the sandy beaches forms an intense contrast to the turquoise of the surrounding sea. The island chain of the Maldives comprises around 2000 islands; about 200 or so are inhabited. The overall area of all of the islands is less than 300 km² (116 square miles), a fact that makes the island group the smallest country in Asia. The climate of the country located close to the equator is tropically warm the whole year round, but the monsoons, some of which are very violent, bring large amounts of rain. The official language, Maldivian, is an Indo-Germanic language; the natives have Indian, African, and Arabic ancestors. Their cultural roots are correspondingly varied. However, unity exists where religion is concerned—almost every Maldivian professes a faith in Islam. The economic backbone of the country is the fishing industry.