

Connectivity in Gan, Maldives

Cell Phones – Cell phones coverage is very good in the Maldives. The local cellular network uses GSM phones only (no CDMA, i.e. *Verizon* network). If you have an **unlocked GSM phone**, most likely it will work in the Maldives. You will need to purchase a local SIM card. The cellular phone carrier in the Maldives is *Dhiraagu Telecommunications*. Dhiraagu stores are found throughout Addu Atoll as well as in the Male International Airport.

If you don't own a GSM phone, you can purchase one at the Dhiraagu store for around 400 Rf and up (\$1USD ≈ Rf15). Available phone stock varies in each store. In addition you will need to purchase a SIM card for the phone as well as 'prepaid minutes' card. Your passport is required to purchase a SIM card. Make sure to bring it to the Dhiraagu store.

Wireless 3G modems – You can purchase a wireless 3G modem for your laptop for personal internet use. These modems are available from the Dhiraagu store in the Male Airport and from the main Dhiraagu store in Hithadhoo (about 1 mile North of the S-Pol radar site, 6 miles North of the Equator Village Resort). It is recommended that you purchase the modems in the Male Airport if possible.

If you arrive later in the deployment, you may well be able to arrange a transfer of a cellular phone and/or modem from someone leaving the atoll (the modems are locked and do not work outside the Maldives). The USB modem is easy to use with Windows OS. Macs are less straightforward, older modems of which there are few seem to work well; the newer modems currently sold are not as compatible with Macs. If you have a newer Mac running *Lion* OS or updated *Snow Leopard*, it may be necessary to boot in 32-bit mode in order to use the modem
<<http://macstuff.beachdogs.org/blog/?p=134>> We have not been successful in connecting the 3G modems on Linux OS laptops. You will need administrator privileges on your laptop in order to install the software so make sure you have that before you travel.

The modems will work anywhere on the island, including your hotel room at Equator Village.

They are fairly functional: video *Skype* during low-volume times is possible, and PDFs can be downloaded, if slowly. Nighttime hours seem to be peak usage time and there is a drop in available bandwidth between about 5:00 PM to around 11:00 PM Local. *Skype* and (Google) voice chat is possible at night but the quality is degraded and can sometimes cut out.

The modems cost 800 Rf. In addition to the modem you also need a starter kit for 199 Rf. The starter kit includes the SIM card for the modem along with a free 400 MB of data transfer. Additional prepaid data cards can be bought to recharge the amount of data on the SIM. I suggest that you also purchase a 5 GB prepaid card at the same time of purchasing your modem. This will run around 500 Rf. Total for the modem, starter kit and 5 GB recharge card will cost approximately 1300 Rf, or around \$86 USD. Again, your passport is required to purchase the SIM card/starter kit so make sure you have that when you go to the store.

In order to charge your SIM card, they use scratch off cards much like a lotto ticket. The easiest way is to take the SIM card out of your 3G modem and insert it into a GSM phone. You can then boot up the phone and from there send a txt message with the code from the recharge card in order to recharge the SIM. Once you get verification that it has been recharged, you remove the SIM from the phone and reinsert it into the modem and it should be good to go. If you have any problems, the staff at the Dhiraagu stores are very helpful.

iPhone functionality – Many Maldivians use iPhones. In order to use your iPhone in the Maldives, it must meet certain requirements:

1. It must be a GSM smartphone (AT&T, T-Mobile, etc).
2. **It must be unlocked.** This is very rare in the U.S. and if you aren't sure whether your iPhone is unlocked or not, most likely it is locked.
3. You must purchase a micro-SIM vs a regular SIM. Some Dhiraagu stores sell micro-SIM.

I'd suggest bringing your iPhone into the Dhiraagu office and get their assistance in setting up the phone to make sure that it is unlocked and you purchase the correct SIM.

Other Smartphones – Various *Android* smartphones are in use in the Maldives. Again, certain requirements must be met:

1. It must be a GSM smartphone (AT&T, T-Mobile, etc).
2. **It must be unlocked.** This is very rare in the U.S. and if you aren't sure whether your iPhone is unlocked or not, most likely it is locked.
3. Check to make sure whether your phone uses micro-SIMs vs regular SIMs before you go to purchase one.
4. 4G functionality is not available in the Maldives at this time.

Wireless Access at the Equator Village Resort – There is a pay-as-you-go wireless Internet network at the Equator Village. Report from various people that have tried is that it is very expensive and slow. The speed is less than the wireless 3G modems from Dhiraagu. You pay in blocks for a certain amount of time in a single 24-hour period. It is suggested to use the Dhiraagu cellular modems instead of the Equator Village network.

Dhiraagu Stores – Dhiraagu stores are very easy to spot. They have very good branding and are all red/white.



Map to Main Dhiraagu Store on Hithadhoo