

The Maldives

Our global survey of the ubiquitous “overseas Indians” commences with a brief review of their presence in India’s neighbourhood. Among all the SAARC countries, we will refer only to the Maldives group of islands as the complex web of our relations with the other countries of the South Asian region is outside the scope of our study of the Indian Diaspora.

- 1.2. There are an estimated 9,000 NRIs in the Maldives, according to the census figures computed in the year 2000. This must be considered a relatively high figure, considering that the total population of this country consisting of many islands and atolls in the Arabian Sea is only 269,000 according to the same census. The Indian Diaspora in the Maldives is mainly composed of doctors, teachers, engineers, accountants, managers and other such highly qualified professionals. They have helped the country in the development of its human resources in many sectors. There are also, in the Maldives, a large number of Indian skilled and unskilled personnel, namely, technicians, masons, tailors, plumbers and labourers. They are making a handsome contribution to the development of the country’s permanent assets.
- 1.3. It is interesting to note that there is only one Maldivian citizen of Indian origin in this country. There is a good reason for this. Both historically and commercially, people from the southern coast of India, particularly from Kerala, had been in close and regular contact with the Maldives. But these contacts did not metamorphose into a composite socio-cultural group, perhaps owing to the exclusive Islamic identity of the Maldives and its people. The popularity here of Indian movies, music and various Indian products can be attributed to the fact that Indians from the west coast of India have been engaged in a thriving coastal trade with the Maldives for a very long time. The similarity of some words in the local *Dhivehi* language with Hindi words must indicate the historical process of interaction between the two neighbouring countries.

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