

Maldives

Maldives to ban Israeli visitors over war in Gaza

Government announces rally 'in solidarity with Palestine' following street protests in Muslim-majority archipelago



A pro-Palestine rally in Male, the capital of the Maldives, in October 2023 © Mohamed Afrah/Getty Images

John Reed in New Delhi and **James Shotter** in Jerusalem 8 HOURS AGO

The Maldives has announced a ban on Israeli visitors in response to public opposition in the country to Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

The government of President Mohamed Muizzu unveiled the decision on Sunday at a news conference in Male, the capital of the south Asian archipelago nation, along with other measures to support Palestinians.

The move followed street protests in Male in recent months and demands from opposition politicians for a ban on Israelis visiting the country. Muizzu's office gave no further details of when and how the ban might take effect.

Israel responded to the announcement by warning its citizens against travelling to the [Maldives](#) and advising those in the country to leave.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed more than 36,000 people, according to Palestinian officials, after Hamas and other militants launched an incursion into southern Israel on October 7, killing about 1,200 and taking about 250 people hostage.

In addition to banning Israeli passport holders, Muizzu's cabinet also "decided to appoint a special envoy to assess Palestinian needs", according to a statement by his office, and to launch a fundraising campaign "to assist our brothers and sisters in Palestine" with the help of UNRWA, the UN's Palestinian relief agency.

The Maldives' government also said it would hold a nationwide rally under the slogan "Maldivians in solidarity with Palestine" and pursue talks with other Muslim nations "to expedite a solution" to the [Israel-Palestine conflict](#).

Israel has not had diplomatic ties with the Maldives since they were suspended 50 years ago, but Israelis have been able to visit the archipelago nation since the early 1990s, when it removed a previous ban on Israeli tourism.

Visits by Israelis to the Maldives, whose economy is heavily dependent on tourism, had climbed to more than 15,000 in 2022, after the slump during the Covid-19 pandemic, but fell again after the start of the war.

According to the Maldives Ministry of Tourism, 528 Israelis visited the country in the first quarter of this year, down 89 per cent from 4,644 in the first quarter of 2023. The Maldives, with a population of just over 500,000, receives more than 1mn tourists per year.

In response to the Maldives' decision to ban Israeli passport holders, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended that its citizens avoid any travel to the country.

"The recommendation is also valid for Israeli citizens holding a foreign passport, in addition to the Israeli passport," the foreign ministry said. "For Israeli citizens staying in the country, it is recommended to consider leaving, since if they fall into distress for any reason, it will be difficult for us to help."

Muizzu took office in November after campaigning on a promise to reduce the influence of the Maldives' giant neighbour, India. His People's National Congress also [won a large majority](#) in parliamentary elections in April.

Since taking office, Muizzu has rattled New Delhi by [demanding the withdrawal](#) from the country of a small contingent of Indian troops, who are being replaced with technical personnel.

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