



Andaman Islands

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Why Go?

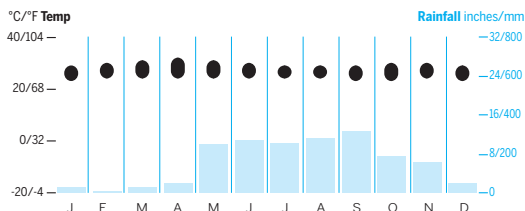
On old maps, the Andamans and Nicobars were the kind of islands whose inhabitants were depicted with dog's heads or faces in their chests, surrounded by sea serpents in a tempest-lashed sea known to Indians as Kalapani: the Black Waters. These were the islands that someone labelled, with a shaky hand, 'Here be Monsters' – probably an early traveller who didn't want to share this delightful place with the rest of us.

Lovely opaque emerald waters are surrounded by primeval jungle and mangrove forest; snow-white beaches melt under flame-and-purple sunsets; and the population is a friendly masala of South and Southeast Asian settlers, as well as Negrito ethnic groups whose arrival here still has anthropologists baffled. And geographically, the Andamans are more Southeast Asia – 150km from Indonesia and 190km from Myanmar – making them all the more intriguing.

The Nicobars are off-limits to tourists, but that still leaves hundreds of islands to explore.

When to Go

Port Blair



Dec–Apr High tourist season: perfect sunny days, optimal diving conditions.

Oct–Dec & Apr–mid-May Weather's a mixed bag, but fewer tourists and lower costs

Dec–Mar Best time to see turtles nesting

Andaman Islands Highlights

- 1 Regress to infantile laziness and happiness on **Neil Island** (p1074)
- 2 Dive, snorkel and socialise on **Havelock Island** (p1072)
- 3 Glimpse Port Blair's colonial history at **Ross Island** (p1071)
- 4 Travel through the jungle heart of the Andamans around **Mayabunder** (p1076) and **Kalipur** (p1076)
- 5 Find Butler Bay and paradise on **Little Andaman** (p1077)



FAST FACTS

- » Population: 380,000
- » Area: 8248 sq km
- » Telephone code: 03192
- » Main languages: Hindi, Bengali, Tamil
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹800, \$\$ ₹800 to ₹2500, \$\$\$ above ₹25,000

History

The date of initial human settlement in the Andamans and Nicobars is lost to history. Anthropologists say stone-tool crafters have lived here for 2000 years, and scholars of human migration believe local indigenous tribes have roots in Negrito and Malay ethnic groups in Southeast Asia. Otherwise, these specks in the sea have been a constant source of legend to outside visitors.

The name 'Andaman' is thought to derive from 'Hanuman'; the Hindu monkey god supposedly used the islands as a stepping stone between India and Sri Lanka. Anthropologists say stone-tool crafters were here 2000 years ago but the date of initial human settlement is not known.

The 10th-century Persian adventurer Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar described an island chain inhabited by cannibals, Marco Polo added that the natives had dogs' heads, and tablets in Thanjavur (Tanjore) in Tamil Nadu named the archipelago Timaitivu: the Impure Islands.

None of the above was exactly tourism-brochure stuff, but visitors kept coming: the Marathas in the late 17th century and 200 years later, the British, who used the Andamans as a penal colony for political dissidents. In WWII some islanders greeted the invading Japanese as liberators, but despite installing Indian politicians as (puppet) administrators, the Japanese military proved to be harsh occupiers.

Following Independence in 1947, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were incorporated into the Indian Union. With migration from the mainland (including Bengali refugees fleeing the chaos of partition), the population has grown from a few thousand to more than 350,000. During this influx, tribal land rights and environmental protection were often disregarded; some conditions are improving but indigenous tribes remain largely in decline.

The islands were devastated by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, offshore aftershocks and the resulting tsunami. The Nicobars were especially hard hit; some estimate a fifth of the population was killed; others were relocated to Port Blair and many have yet to return. But by and large normalcy has returned, along with tourists, although places like Little Andaman remain practically deserted by visitors (so visit).

Climate

Sea breezes keep temperatures within the 23°C to 31°C range and the humidity at around 80% all year. It's very wet during the southwest (wet) monsoon between roughly mid-May and early October, while the northeast (dry) monsoons between November and December also have their fair share of rainy days.

Geography & Environment

The islands form the peaks of the Arakan Yoma, a mountain range that begins in Western Myanmar (Burma) and extends into the ocean running all the way to Sumatra in Indonesia.

The isolation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has led to the evolution of many endemic plant and animal species. Of 62 identified mammals, 32 are unique to the islands, including the Andaman wild pig, crab-eating macaque, masked palm civet, and species of tree shrews and bats. Almost 50% of the islands' 250 bird species are endemic, including ground-dwelling megapodes, *havabills* (swiftlets) and the emerald Nicobar pigeon. The isolated beaches are breeding grounds for turtles; rivers are prowled by saltwater crocodiles; and dolphins are frequently sighted, but the once abundant dugongs have all but vanished.

Mangroves provide a protective barrier between land and sea. Inland forests contain important tree species, including the renowned padauk – a hardwood with light and dark timber occurring in the same tree.

Activities

The Andamans are one of the world's great **diving** locations, as much for their relative isolation as their crystal-clear waters, superb coral and kaleidoscopic marine life.

The main dive season is roughly November to April, but trips still occur during the summer wet season (June to August) – just closer to the shore. Diving conditions are generally fine in September and October; there's just rain to contend with.

Centres offer fully equipped boat dives, discover scuba diving courses (from ₹4000), PADI open water (₹18,000) and advanced courses (₹13,500), as well as Divemaster training. Prices vary depending on the location, number of participants and duration of the course, but diving in the Andamans costs around ₹2000/3500 for a one/two boat dive. In national parks an additional ₹500 per person per day is payable directly to the park.

Havelock Island is far and away the main diving centre in the islands, although outfits have expanded to Neil and South Andaman. See relevant sections for details.

Much easier and cheaper to arrange than diving, **snorkelling** can be highly rewarding. Havelock Island is one of the best, and certainly easiest, places for snorkelling as many accommodation places organise boat trips out to otherwise inaccessible coral reefs and islands. There's also excellent snorkelling offshore on Neil Island and Kalipur.

Some reefs have been damaged by coral bleaching in recent times, but diving still remains world-class, and new sites are still being discovered.

i Information

Even though they're 1000km east of the mainland, the Andamans still run on Indian time. This means that it can be dark by 5pm and light by 4am; people here tend to be very early risers. All telephone numbers must include the 03192 area code, even when dialling locally.

Andaman & Nicobar Tourism (IP&T; 0232747; www.tourism.andaman.nic.in; Kamaraj Rd, Port Blair; ☎8.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Pick up a copy of the useful tourist booklet the *Emerald Islands* (₹100) either here or from the small branch at the airport.

ACCOMMODATION Prices given in this chapter are for midseason (1 October to 30 April, excluding peak times). They shoot up in peak season (15 December to 15 January). May to September is low season. Camping is currently not permitted on public land or national parks in the islands.

PERMITS Most civil servants come to Port Blair on two-year postings from the mainland. With such a turnover of staff, be aware rules and

regulations regarding permits are subject to sudden changes.

All foreigners need a permit to visit the Andaman Islands; it's issued free on arrival. The 30-day permit allows foreigners to stay in Port Blair, South and Middle Andaman (excluding tribal areas), North Andaman (Diglipur), Long Island, North Passage, Little Andaman (excluding tribal areas), and Havelock and Neil Islands. It's possible to get a 15-day extension from either Port Blair at the **Immigration Office** (03192-239247; ☎8.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, until 1pm Sat) or the police station in Havelock.

The permit also allows day trips to Jolly Buoy, South Cinque, Red Skin, Ross, Narcondam, Interview and Rutland Islands, as well as the Brothers and the Sisters.

To obtain the permit, air travellers simply present their passport and fill out a form on arrival at Port Blair airport. Permits are usually issued up to the 30-day maximum (be sure to check).

Boat passengers will probably be met by an immigration official on arrival; if not, seek out the immigration office at Haddo Jetty immediately. Keep your permit on you at all times – you won't be able to travel without it. Police frequently ask to see it, especially when you're disembarking on other islands, and hotels will need permit details. Check current regulations regarding boat travel with any of the following:

Andaman & Nicobar Tourism (03192-238473)

Foreigners' Registration Office Chennai (044-23454970, 044-28278210); Kolkata (033-22470549, 033-22473300)

Shipping Corporation of India (SCI; www.shipindia.com) Chennai (044-5231401; Jawahar Bldg, 6 Rajaji Salai); Kolkata (033-2482354; 1st fl, 13 Strand Rd)

NATIONAL PARKS & SANCTUARIES Additional permits are required to visit some national parks and sanctuaries. At the tourism office in Port Blair, there's a **Forestry Department Desk** (9am-3pm Mon-Fri, until 1pm Sat) where you can find out whether a permit is needed, how to go about getting it, how much it costs and whether it is in fact possible to get one.

If you plan to do something complicated, you'll be sent to the **Chief Wildlife Warden** (CWW; 233321; Haddo Rd, Pt Blair; ☎8.30am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) where your application should

CAREFUL WITH THE CORAL!

In general, you should only snorkel during high tide in the Andamans. At low tide it's easy to step on coral, irreparably damaging the delicate organisms. Even the sweep of a strong flipper kick can do harm. You also risk a painful sea-urchin spine if you set foot on the seabed. Divers should be extra cautious about descents near reefs; colliding with coral at a hard pace with full gear is environmentally disastrous.

consist of a letter stating your case, the name of the boat and the dates involved; all things being equal, the permit should be issued within the hour.

For most day permits it's not the hassle but the cost. For areas such as Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park, and Ross and Smith Islands near Diglipur, the permits cost ₹50/500 for Indians/foreigners. For Saddle Peak National Park, also near Diglipur, the cost is ₹25/250.

Students with valid ID pay minimal entry fees, so don't forget to bring your card.

The Nicobar Islands are off-limits to all except Indian nationals engaged in research, government business or trade.

i Getting There & Away

AIR There are daily flights to Port Blair from Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai, although flights from Delhi and Kolkata are often routed through Chennai. Round-trip fares are between US\$250 and US\$500 depending on how early you book; some airlines offer one-way flights for as low as US\$80, but these need to be booked months in advance. At the time of research, **Kingfisher Airlines** (☎1800 2093030; www.flykingfisher.com) had the cheapest last-minute flights to the islands. Other options include **Air India** (Chennai ☎044-28554747; Kolkata ☎033-22117879; Port Blair ☎03192-233108; www.airindia.com) and **JetLite** (Chennai ☎080-39893333; Kolkata ☎033-25110901; Port Blair ☎03192-242707; www.jetlite.com).

There are no direct flights from Port Blair to Southeast Asia, though at the time of research a chartered flight was scheduled to fly direct from Kuala Lumpur. But don't get your hopes up.

BOAT Depending on who you ask, the infamous boat to Port Blair is either 'the only real way to get to the Andamans' or a hassle and a half. The truth lies somewhere in between. There are usually four to six sailings a month between Port Blair and the Indian mainland – fortnightly to/ from Kolkata (56 hours), weekly (in high season) to/ from Chennai (60 hours) and monthly to/ from Vizag (56 hours). In Chennai you can book tickets through the **Assistant Director of Shipping Services** (☎044-25226873; Rajaji Salai, Chennai Port). **Shipping Corporation of India** (SCI; www.shipindia.com; ☎033-22482354 in Kolkata, 0891-2565597 in Vizag) operates boats from Kolkata and Vizag. The schedule is erratic, so call SCI in advance. All ferries from the mainland arrive at Haddo Jetty.

Take sailing times with a large grain of salt – travellers have reported sitting on the boat at Kolkata harbour for up to 12 hours, or waiting to dock near Port Blair for several hours. With hold-ups and variable weather and sea conditions, the trip can take three to four days. You can organise your return ticket at the **ferry ticket office** at

Phoenix Bay. Bring two passport photos and a photocopy of your permit. Updated schedules and fares can be found at www.and.nic.in/spsch/sailing.htm.

Classes vary slightly between boats, but the cheapest is bunk (₹1700 to ₹1960), followed by 2nd class B (₹3890), 2nd class A (₹5030), 1st class (₹6320) and deluxe cabins (₹7640). The **MV Akbar** also has AC dorm berths (₹3290). Higher-end tickets cost as much as, if not more than, a plane ticket. If you go bunk, prepare for waking up to a chorus of men 'hwwaaaaching' and spitting, little privacy and toilets that tend to get...unpleasant after three days at sea. That said, it's a good way to meet locals.

Food (tiffin for breakfast, thalis for lunch and dinner) costs around ₹150 per day and are pretty much glop on rice. Bring something (fruit in particular) to supplement your diet. Some bedding is supplied, but if you're travelling bunk class bring a sleeping sheet. Many travellers take a hammock to string up on deck.

There is no official ferry between Port Blair and Thailand, but if there are yachts around you could try to crew. You can't legally get from the Andamans to Myanmar (Burma) by sea, although we hear it's been done by those with their own boats. Be aware you risk imprisonment or worse from the Indian and Burmese navies if you give this a go.

Bad weather can seriously muck up your itinerary: ferry services are cancelled if the sea is too rough. Build in a few days' buffer to avoid being marooned and missing your flight (which perhaps isn't always a bad thing...).

i Getting Around

AIR A subsidised interisland helicopter service runs from Port Blair to Little Andaman (₹1488, 35 minutes, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday), Havelock Island (₹850, 20 minutes) and Diglipur via Mayabunder (₹2125 or ₹1915 from Mayabunder, one hour). Priority is given to government workers and the 5kg baggage limit precludes most tourists from using this service. You can chance your luck by applying at the **Secretariat** (☎230093) in Port Blair, returning at 4pm to see if you were successful.

BOAT Most islands can only be reached by water. While this sounds romantic, ferry ticket offices can be hell: expect hot waits, slow service, queue-jumping and a rugby scrum to the ticket window. To hold your spot and advance you need to be a little aggressive (but don't be a jerk) – or be a woman; ladies' queues are a godsend, but they really only apply in Port Blair. You can buy tickets the day you travel by arriving at the appropriate jetty an hour beforehand, but this is risky during high season and not a guarantee on Havelock any time of year. In towns like Rangat, ferry ticket office opening hours are erratic and

ISLAND INDIGENES

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands' indigenous peoples constitute just 12% of the population and, in most cases, their numbers are decreasing. The Onge, Sentinelese, Andamanese and Jarawa are all of Negrito ethnicity, who share a strong resemblance to people from Africa. Tragically, numerous groups have become extinct over the past century. In February 2010 the last survivor of the Bo tribe passed away, bringing an end to both the language and 65,000 years of ancestry.

Onge

Two-thirds of Little Andaman's Onge Island was taken over by the Forest Department and 'settled' in 1977. The 100 or so remaining members of the Onge tribe live in a 25-sq-km reserve covering Dugong Creek and South Bay. Anthropologists say the Onge population has declined due to demoralisation through loss of territory.

Sentinelese

The Sentinelese, unlike the other tribes in these islands, have consistently repelled outside contact. For years, contact parties arrived on the beaches of North Sentinel Island, the last redoubt of the Sentinelese, with gifts of coconuts, bananas, pigs and red plastic buckets, only to be showered with arrows, although some encounters have been a little less hostile. About 150 Sentinelese remain.

Andamanese

As they now number only about 50, it seems impossible the Andamanese can escape extinction. There were around 7000 Andamanese in the mid-19th century, but friendliness to colonisers was their undoing, and by 1971 all but 19 of the population had been swept away by measles, syphilis and influenza epidemics. They've been resettled on tiny Strait Island.

Jarawa

The 350 remaining Jarawa occupy the 639-sq-km reserve on South and Middle Andaman Islands. In 1953 the chief commissioner requested that an armed sea plane bomb Jarawa settlements and their territory has been consistently disrupted by the Andaman Trunk Rd, forest clearance and settler and tourist encroachment. Most Jarawa remain hostile to contact.

Shompen

Only about 250 Shompen remain in the forests on Great Nicobar. Seminomadic hunter-gatherers who live along the riverbanks, they have resisted integration and avoid areas occupied by Indian immigrants.

Nicobarese

The 30,000 Nicobarese are the only indigenous people whose numbers are not decreasing. The majority have converted to Christianity and been partly assimilated into contemporary Indian society. Living in village units led by a head man, they farm pigs and cultivate coconuts, yams and bananas. The Nicobarese, who probably descended from people of Malaysia and Myanmar, inhabit a number of islands in the Nicobar group, centred on Car Nicobar, the region worst affected by the 2004 tsunami.

unreliable. At the time of research it was a requirement to bring a photocopy of your permit: organise this before you arrive.

There are regular boat services to Havelock and Neil Islands, as well as Rangat, Mayabunder, Diglipur and Little Andaman. If all else fails, fishermen may be willing to give you a ride for

around ₹2000 between, say, Port Blair and Havelock. A schedule of inter-island sailing times can be found at the website www.and.nic.in/spsch/iisailing.htm.

BUS All roads – and ferries – lead to Port Blair, and you'll inevitably spend a night or two here booking onward travel. The main island group –

South, Middle and North Andaman – is connected by road, with ferry crossings and bridges. Cheap state and more expensive private buses run south from Port Blair to Wandoor, and north to Bharatang, Rangat, Mayabunder and finally to Diglipur, 325km north of the capital. The Jarawa reserve closes to most traffic at around 3pm; thus, buses that pass through the reserve leave from around 4am up till 11am.

PRIVATE JEEPS & MINIVANS Hop-on, hop-off affairs connect many villages; you can hire a whole vehicle for an inflated price.

TRAIN Mainland train bookings can be made at the **Railway Bookings office** (☎233042; ☉8am-12.30pm & 1-2pm), located in the Secretariat's office south of Aberdeen Bazaar, Port Blair; your hotel owners should also be able to help with any onward rail enquires.

Port Blair

POP 100.186

Green, laid-back and occasionally attractive, Port Blair is the main town in the Andamans; a vibrant mix of Indian Ocean inhabitants – Bengalis, Tamils, Nicobarese, Burmese and Telugus. Most travellers don't hang around any longer than necessary (usually one or two days while waiting to book onward travel in the islands, or returning for departure), instead hell-bent on heading straight to the islands. And while 'PB' can't compete with the beaches of Havelock, its fascinating history makes for some outstanding sightseeing.

👁️ Sights

Cellular Jail National Memorial

HISTORICAL BUILDING

(GB Pant Rd; admission ₹10, camera/video ₹25/100; ☉8.45am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sun) A former British prison that is now a shrine to the political dissidents it once jailed, Cellular Jail National Memorial is worth visiting to understand the important space the Andamans occupy in India's national memory. Construction of the jail began in 1896 and it was completed in 1906 – the original seven wings (several of which were destroyed by the Japanese during WWII) contained 698 cells radiating from a central tower. Like many political prisons, Cellular Jail became something of a university for freedom fighters, who exchanged books, ideas and debates despite walls and wardens.

There's a **sound-and-light show** (adult/child ₹20/10) in English at 6.45pm on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

Anthropological Museum

MUSEUM

(☎03192-232291; MG Rd; admission ₹10; ☉9am-1pm & 1.30-4.30pm Fri-Wed) The best museum in Port Blair provides a thorough and sympathetic portrait of the islands' indigenous tribal communities. The glass display cases may be old school, but they don't feel anywhere near as ancient as the simple geometric patterns etched into a Jarawa chest guard, a skull left in a Sentinelese lean-to or the totemic spirits represented by Nicobarese shamanic sculptures. Pick up a pamphlet (₹20) on indigenous culture, written by local anthropologists, in the gift shop.

Samudrika Marine Museum

MUSEUM

(Haddo Rd; adult/child ₹20/10, camera/video ₹20/50; ☉9am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sun) Run by the Indian Navy, this museum has a diverse range of exhibits with informative coverage of the islands' ecosystem, tribal communities, plants, animals and marine life (including a small aquarium). Outside is a skeleton of a blue whale washed ashore on Kamorta Island in the Nicobars.

Chatham Saw Mill

HISTORICAL SITE

(admission ₹10; ☉8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat) Located on Chatham Island (reached by a road bridge), the saw mill was set up by the British in 1836 and was one of the largest wood processors in Asia. The mill is still operational and, while it may not be to everyone's taste – especially conservationists – it's an interesting insight to the island's history and economy. There's also a large crater from a bomb dropped by the Japanese in WWII, and a rather dismal forest museum.

Corbyn's Cove

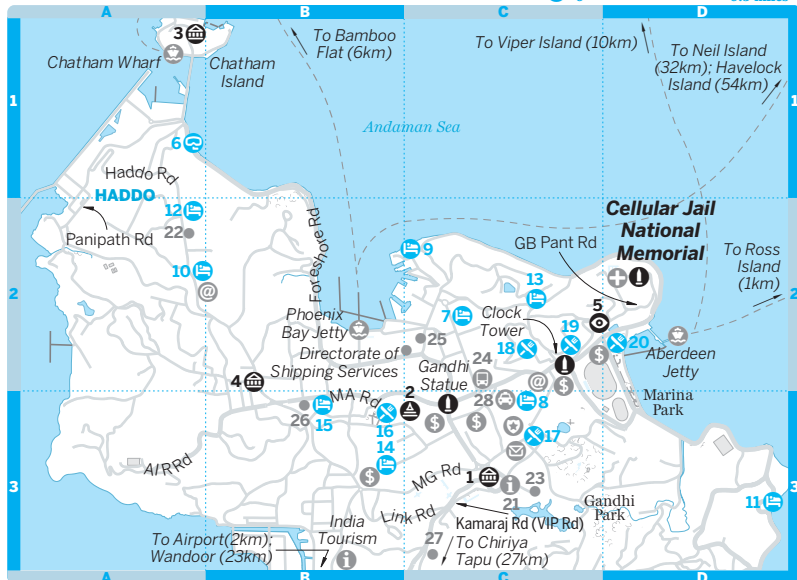
BEACH

No one comes to Port Blair for the beach but, if you need a sand fix, Corbyn's Cove, 7km south of town, is your best bet. It's a small curve of coast backed by palms that's popular with locals and Indian tourists, and it's a good spot for swimming and sunset. An autorickshaw ride from town costs about ₹200. Otherwise hiring a motorcycle is a good way to travel this coastal road, and you'll encounter numerous Japanese WWII bunkers along the way.

Burmese Buddhist Mission

SACRED SITE

This tiny bell-shaped stupa (shrine) is not particularly impressive, but it's an incongruous example of Burmese Buddhist architecture in India and a reminder that you're way closer to Southeast Asia than the subcontinent.



Activities

The following dive companies specialise in sites south of Port Blair. All are fairly new on the scene, but offer a great alternative to diving outside Ritchie's Archipelago. Suited for divers of all levels.

Planet Scuba India

DIVING

(☎242287; www.planetscubaIndia.com; Foreshore Rd, Haddo) The only dive company in Port Blair; Planet Scuba runs dives to Mahatma Gandhi NP and Cinque. Stocks diving equipment.

Lacadives

DIVING

(☎9679532104; www.lacadives.com) Based just outside Wandoor, specialising in more remote areas of Mahatma Gandhi National Park, avoiding the crowds of Red Skin and Jolly Buoy.

Infinity Scuba

DIVING

(☎281183; www.infinityscubandamans.com) Located in Chiriyia Tapu, Infinity's main destination is Cinque Island; also visiting Rutland Island and a wrecked ship.

Tours

Andaman & Nicobar Tourism

TOURS

(IP&T; ☎232694; www.tourism.andaman.nic.in; Kamaraj Rd; ☎8.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Runs Port Blair city tours

(₹52), as well tours to Ross Island (₹75), Mt Harriet (₹157), Wandoor via spice and rubber plantations (₹105), Corbyn's Cove (₹52), Chiriyia Tapu (₹105) snorkelling trips to Jolly Buoy and Redskin Islands (₹450), and a tour of Ross and Viper Islands and North Bay (₹360). Trip times vary throughout the week.

Sleeping

Most of the hotels are around the Aberdeen Bazaar area. The airport is about 4km south of town. Midrange accommodation is often booked out solidly from September to December by Indian package tours.



Aashiaanaa Rest Home

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎09474217008; shads_maria@hotmail; Marine Hill; r ₹300-900; ☎) Run by the incredibly friendly Shadab and his lovely family, the Aashiaanaa has a lot of 'As' in the name and love in its heart. Rooms are spotless and spacious, and the more expensive ones have nice views over town. It's conveniently just up the hill from Phoenix Bay Jetty.

Hotel Sinclairs Bayview

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎03192-227824; www.sinclairshotels.com; South Point; r from ₹5300; ☎☎) Located 2km outside town, on the road to Corbyn's Cove, Sinclairs' big comfy rooms have the best views in town, opening right out to the water. It has nice

Port Blair

📍 Top Sights

Cellular Jail National Memorial..... D2

🏛️ Sights

- 1 Anthropological Museum C3
- 2 Burmese Buddhist Mission..... C3
- 3 Chatham Saw Mill..... A1
- 4 Samudrika Marine Museum B2
- 5 WWII Bunker C2

🌊 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 6 Planet Scuba India..... A1

🛏️ Sleeping

- 7 Aashiaanaa Rest Home..... C2
Amina Lodge..... (see 8)
- 8 Azad Lodge C3
- 9 Fortune Resort - Bay Island C2
- 10 Hotel Driftwood A2
- 11 Hotel Sinclairs Bayview..... D3
- 12 Hotel Tejas A2
- 13 Lalaji Bay View C2
- 14 Sai Residency B3
- 15 TSG Emerald..... B3

🍴 Eating

- 16 Adi Bengali Hotel..... B3
- 17 Annapurna C3
Bayview (see 11)
- 18 Gagan Restaurant C2
- 19 Lighthouse Residency C2
Mandalay Restaurant (see 9)
- 20 New Lighthouse Residency..... D2

Information

- 21 Andaman & Nicobar Tourism
(IP&T)..... C3
- 22 Chief Wildlife Warden A2
Forestry Department Desk..... (see 21)
- 23 Immigration Office..... C3

Transport

- 24 Bus Stand C2
- 25 Ferry Booking Office..... C2
- 26 Govindamma & Co..... B3
Railway Booking Office..... (see 27)
- 27 Secretariat..... C3
- 28 Taxi & Autorickshaw Stand..... C3

seaside gardens with hammocks to lounge in, and several Japanese WWII bunkers on-site.

Fortune Resort – Bay Island HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎03192-234101; www.fortunehotels.in, reservations.frb@fortunehotels.in; Marine Hill; s/d from ₹5500/6200; 🍷🍷🍷) Perched above the ocean with fine sea views from its terraced garden and balcony restaurant, Fortune boasts a fine location. The rooms, while comfortable with polished floors, balconies and island bric-a-brac, are small; make sure to ask for a sea-facing room.

Hotel Tejas HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎03192-221698; www.hoteltejas.mobi; Haddo Rd; r from ₹750; 🍷) Sparkling rooms of the linoleum-floor-and-comfy-enough-bed sort perch over a hill, a tangled clump of jungle and a sweeping view of Haddo Jetty.

Azad Lodge GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎03192-242646; MA Rd, Aberdeen Bazaar; s/d from ₹250/450, without bathroom ₹150/250) One of the best budget options in town, Azad's rooms are clean and cheap, though singles without bathroom are like prison cells.

Hotel Driftwood HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎03192-244044; hoteldriftwood@rediffmail.com; JN Rd, Haddo; r from ₹1600; 🍷🍷) The mid-

range Driftwood makes a fine choice for those wanting comfort at reasonable prices. Rooms are sunny and a decent size; the pricier ones have lovely views of lush jungle. It has smiley staff, a good restaurant with an attached outdoor bar (karaoke night Saturdays), and wi-fi access in the lobby.

TSG Emerald HOTEL \$\$

(☎03192-246488; www.andamantsgshotels.com; MA Rd, Haddo; r from ₹2000; 🍷🍷) While a business-chic hotel may not necessarily suit the Andamans, this place is pretty plush with sleek, sparkling, modern rooms. Also has a nautical themed bar upstairs.

Other good cheapies:

Amina Lodge GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎9933258703; aminalodge@gmail.com; Aberdeen Bazaar; s/d ₹300/400) Run by a friendly couple, Amina has good-value rooms in the thick of the action. It can get noisy, so ask for a room away from the main road. Bicycle hire is possible.

Lalaji Bay View GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎9933222010; lalajibayviewbookings@gmail.com; RP Rd, Dugnabad; r from ₹250) Set among ramshackle colonial buildings, Lalaji Bay is a good budget option with clean rooms and attractive bedspreads.

Sai Residency

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎9434262965; r from ₹400; ☎) This small, family-run affair has some spic-and-span rooms in a central location tucked down a small street.

**Eating****Bayview**

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(Southpoint; mains from ₹110-500; ☎11am-11pm) Right on the water with a lovely cool sea breeze, the Bayview is a great spot for lunch. While the grilled fish is delicious and the beer cold, this place is still more about the location than the food. Ask the friendly staff to show you the Japanese WWII bunkers on the premises. An autorickshaw will cost ₹40.

Lighthouse Residency

INDIAN \$\$

(MA Rd, Aberdeen Bazaar; mains ₹60-280; ☎11am-11pm) The Lighthouse is lit like a fluorescent nightmare, but the air-conditioning is cranked, the beer's cold and seafood fresh. Choose from the display of red snapper, crab or tiger prawns. The BBQ fish is sensational. Its sister restaurant, **New Lighthouse Residency**, further up the road, is open air, but there's no alcohol.

Annapurna

INDIAN \$

(MG Rd; mains from ₹40) Annapurna is an extremely popular veg option that looks like a high-school cafeteria and serves consistently good karma-friendly fare, ranging from crisp southern dosas to rich North Indian-style curries.

Mandalay Restaurant

INDIAN, WESTERN \$\$\$

(Marine Hill; buffet breakfast/lunch or dinner ₹200/350) If you need to splurge, you can do a lot worse than the Mandalay's excellent buffet meals, heavy with Indian and Western faves served on either an attractive deck or in a not-quite-as-appealing Burmese-themed interior.

Gagan Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(Clock tower, Aberdeen Bazaar; mains from ₹40; ☎7am-9pm) Popular with locals, this hole-in-the-wall place serves up great food at good prices, including seafood curries, coconut chicken, and dosas for breakfast.

Adi Bengali Hotel

BENGALI \$

(MA Rd; mains from ₹30; ☎7am-3pm & 6-10pm) This energetic canteen does a brisk stock-in-trade in spicy fish curries and other West Bengal staples. Everything's prepared pretty well, if the usual clientele of silent, satisfied Bengali labourers is any proof.

i Information

Port Blair is the only place in the Andamans where you can change cash or travellers cheques. There are ATMs all over town, and a Western Union office by the post office. There are a few internet places in Aberdeen Bazaar.

Aberdeen Police Station (☎03192-232400; MG Rd)

Andaman & Nicobar Tourism (IP&T;

☎232694; www.tourism.andaman.nic.in; Kamaraj Rd; ☎8.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) The main island tourist office, and place to book government accommodation and get wildlife permits. Staff are helpful, if laid-back.

e-Cafe (internet per hr ₹30; ☎8am-midnight) In Aberdeen Bazaar, just before the Clock Tower.

GB Pant Hospital (☎03192-233473, 232102; GB Pant Rd)

Main post office (MG Rd; ☎9am-7pm Mon-Sat)

State Bank of India (MA Rd; ☎9am-noon & 1-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) Travellers cheques and foreign currency can be changed here.

i Getting There & Away

See p1070 for details on transport to and from the Andaman Islands. The airport is about 4km south of town.

Boat

All interisland ferries depart from Phoenix Bay Jetty. Tickets can be purchased from the **ferry booking office** (☎9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat). On some boats tickets can be purchased on board, but in high season you risk missing out. Most people head straight to Havelock (₹195, 2½ hours), with two or more ferries departing daily; those not wanting to hang around Port Blair should make the jetty their first port of call to book tickets. Don't forget to bring a photocopy of your permit. Another option is the privately owned **Makruzz ferry** (www.makruzz.com) operating on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday in high season (from ₹650, two hours). Tickets are available from the airport or travel agents in Aberdeen Bazaar.

From Chatham Wharf there are hourly passenger ferries to Bamboo Flat (₹3, 15 minutes).

Bus

There are buses all day from the bus stand at Aberdeen Bazaar to Wandoor (₹12, 1½ hours) and Chiriya Tapu (₹10, 1½ hours). Two buses run at 4am and 4.30am to Diglipur (₹170, 12 hours) and at 5am and 9.30am to Mayabunder (₹130, nine hours) via Rangat (₹95, seven hours) and Baratang (₹55, three hours). More comfortable

private buses are also available; their 'offices' (a guy with a ticket book) are located across from the main bus stand.

i Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT A taxi or autorickshaw from the airport to Aberdeen Bazaar costs around ₹50. There are also hourly buses (₹5) to/from airport, located 100m outside the complex, to the main bus stand.

BUS The central area is easy enough to walk around, but to get out to Corbyn's Cove, Haddo or Chatham Island you'll need some form of transport.

MOTORBIKE Unfortunately you can no longer hire bicycles in Port Blair, but you can hire a motorbike or scooter from **Govindamma & Co** (☎9732486858; MA Rd; per 24hr ₹400), which is a perfect way to explore south of Port Blair.

AUTORICKSHAW From Aberdeen Bazaar to Phoenix Bay Jetty is about ₹20 and to Haddo Jetty it's around ₹40.

Around Port Blair & South Andaman

ROSS ISLAND

Visiting Ross Island (not to be confused with its namesake island in North Andaman) feels like discovering a jungle-clad Lost City, à la Angkor Wat, where the ruins happen to be Victorian English rather than ancient Khmer. The former administrative headquarters for the British in the Andamans, **Ross Island** (admission ₹20) is an essential half-day trip from Port Blair. In its day, little Ross was fondly called the 'Paris of the East' (along with Pondicherry, Saigon etc...). But the cute title, vibrant social scene and tropical gardens were all wiped out by the double whammy of a 1941 earthquake and the invasion of the Japanese (who left behind some machine-gun nests that are great fun to poke around in).

Today the old English architecture is still standing, even as it is swallowed by a green wave of fast-growing jungle. Landscaped paths cross the island and most of the buildings are labelled. There's a small **museum** with historical displays and photos of Ross Island in its heyday, and a small park where resident deer nibble on bushes.

Ferries to Ross Island (₹75, 20 minutes) depart from the jetty behind the aquarium in Port Blair at 8.30am, 10.30am, 12.30pm and 2pm every day other than Wednesday; check when you buy your ticket, as times can be affected by tides.

You can also catch a 9.30am ferry to **Viper Island** (₹75), where you'll find the ruins of gallows built by the British in 1867, but it's a fairly forgettable excursion.

WANDOOR & MAHATMA GANDHI MARINE NATIONAL PARK

Wandoor, a tiny speck of a village 29km south-west of Port Blair, has a nice beach (though at the time of research, swimming was prohibited due to crocodiles being sighted in the area), but is better known as a jumping-off point for **Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/500). Covering 280 sq km it comprises 15 islands of mangrove creeks, tropical rainforest and reefs supporting 50 types of coral. The marine park's snorkelling sites alternate between **Jolly Buoy** (☉1 Nov-15 May) and **Red Skin** (☉16 May-30 Oct), a popular day trip from Wandoor Jetty (₹450; Tuesday to Sunday). That said, if Havelock or Neil Islands are on your Andamans itinerary, it's probably easier and cheaper to wait until you reach them for your underwater experience; unless you're willing to pay through the nose, boats simply don't linger long enough for you to get a good snorkelling experience. **Lacadives** (☎9679532104; www.lacadives.com) is worth getting in touch with if you want to explore the area properly. There are several places to stay in Wandoor. Permits can be arranged at Wandoor jetty or the tourist office in Port Blair.

Buses run from Port Blair to Wandoor (₹12, 1½ hours).

CHIRIYA TAPU

Chiriya Tapu, 30km south of Port Blair, is a tiny village of beaches, mangroves and, about 2km south, some of the best **snorkelling** outside Havelock and Neil Islands. It's a great spot place to watch the sunset. There are seven buses a day to the village from Port Blair (₹10, 1½ hours) and it's possible to arrange boats from here to Cinque Island. The new **biological park** (Indian/foreigner ₹20/50; ☉9am-4pm Tue-Sun) is still a work in progress (scheduled for completion in 2015), but has a pleasant forested setting with spacious, natural enclosures for crocodiles, deer and wart hog.

CINQUE ISLAND

The uninhabited islands of North and South Cinque, connected by a sandbar, are part of the wildlife sanctuary south of Wandoor. The islands are surrounded by coral reefs, and are among the most beautiful in the Andamans.

Only day visits are allowed but, unless you're on one of the day trips occasionally organised by travel agencies, you need to get permission in advance from the Chief Wildlife Warden (p1070). The islands are two hours by boat from Chiriyā Tapu or 3½ hours from Wandoor, and are covered by the **Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park permit** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/500). See p1068 for info on diving opportunities in Cinque Island.

Havelock Island

With snow-white beaches, teal shallows, dark jungle hills, a coast crammed with beach huts and backpackers from around the world, Havelock's one of those budget-travel tropical gems that, in a few years, will have the same cachet as Thailand's Ko Pha-Ngan if not the nightlife. There are quietly buzzing social scenes concentrated around the common area of the beach hut resorts, but nothing approaching full-moon party madness. Besides for doing nothing, Havelock is a popular spot for snorkelling and diving, and many are content to stay here for the entire duration of their visit to the Andamans.

👁️ Sights & Activities

Havelock is the premier spot for **scuba diving** on the Andamans, and the main reason why most tourists jump straight on the ferry here. There's no shortage of dive operator options, with places set up along the main tourist strip; it's just a matter of checking out a few and going with the one you feel most comfortable with.

The **snorkelling** here is equally impressive. The best way to get out is to organise a *dunghi* (motorised wooden boat) through your hotel. Trips cost from ₹1000 to ₹2000, depending on the number of people going, distance involved etc – if you go with a good-sized group you may pay as low as ₹250 per head. Snorkelling gear is widely available on Havelock from resorts and small restaurants, but is generally very low quality.

Fishing is another popular activity, likewise best organised through your hotel. There are also several sports-fishing operators in town.

Some resorts can organise guided **jungle treks** for keen walkers or birdwatchers, but be warned the forest floor turns to glug after rain. The inside rainforest is a spectacular, emerald cavern, and the **birdwatching** – especially on the forest fringes – is rewarding; look out for the blue-black racket-tailed drongo trailing his fabulous tail feathers and, by way of contrast, the brilliant golden oriole.

About 5km beyond No 5 Village, you'll find Kalapathar, where there's an **elephant training camp**; at the time of research there were plans to give demonstrations of working elephants in action. Beyond Kalapathar the road passes another pristine beach and then peters out into forest.

Radha Nagar Beach

BEACH

The prettiest and most popular stretch of stretch of sand is the critically acclaimed Radha Nagar Beach, also known as **beach No 7**. It's a beautiful curve of sugar fronted by perfectly spiralled waves, all backed by native forest that might have grown out of a postcard. And the sunsets? Pretty damn nice. The drive out to the beach, located on

CROCODILES

The tragic death of an American tourist attacked by a saltwater crocodile while snorkelling in Havelock on April 2010 sent shockwaves through the community. While crocodiles are a way of life in many parts of the Andamans, they've never been sighted where the incident took place at Neil's Cove, near Radha Nagar. Furthermore, an attack occurring in the open ocean on a coral reef was considered extremely unusual. There are numerous theories about how the crocodile got there; most likely it was ousted from its mangrove habitat on the western side of the island, in a territorial dispute. The crocodile was eventually captured (now residing in Port Blair's zoo) and there have been no sightings since – a high level of vigilance remains in place. General consensus is that it was an isolated incident, and it should not deter people from swimming, though it's important you keep informed, heed any warnings by authorities and, on the western side of the island, don't swim alone and avoid being in the water at dawn or dusk.

Other tourist spots for which warnings have been issued include Corbyn's Cove, Wandoor Beach, Baratang and all over Little Andaman.

the northwestern side of the island about 12km from the jetty, runs through the green dream that is inland Havelock (autorickshaws will take you for about ₹150), or otherwise the bus runs here from No 1 Village when it pleases. Ten minutes' walk along the beach to the northwest is the gorgeous 'lagoon' at Neils Cove, another gem of sheltered sand and crystalline water. There was a crocodile attack here in 2010, so it might be worth checking if it's safe for swimming (see boxed text, p1072). In high season you can take an **elephant ride** (adult/child ₹25/15; ☎11am-2pm Mon-Sat) along the beach, posing for that quintessential cheesy snap.

Elephant Beach

BEACH

Elephant Beach, where there's good **snorkelling**, is further north and reached by a 40-minute walk through a muddy elephant logging trail; it's well marked (off the cross-island road), but hard going after rain. The beach itself virtually disappeared after the 2004 tsunami and at high tide it's impossible to reach – ask locally. Lots of snorkelling charters come out this way, and there are lifeguards who will reprimand anyone who litters – God bless them.

Beach 5

BEACH

On the other side of the island from Radha Nagar, Beach No 5 is paradise. Its palm-ringed beaches give it that added relaxed feel, and it has shady patches and less sandflies than Radar Nagar. However, swimming is very difficult in low tide when water becomes shallow for miles. Most of the island's accommodation is out this way.

Dive India

DIVING

(☎091-9932082204; www.diveindia.com; btwn No 3 & 5 Village)

Andaman Bubbles

DIVING

(☎282140; www.andamanbubbles.com; No 5 Village)

Barefoot Scuba

DIVING

(☎282181; www.barefootindia.com; No 3 Village)

Sleeping & Eating

Most hotels in Havelock are of the cluster-of-beach-hut genre. They all claim to be 'eco' huts ('eco' apparently meaning 'cheap building material'), but they are great value for money, especially in low season.

All listed accommodation has passable menus of backpacker-oriented Western and Indian food. If you desire something more

authentically Indian, head to the cheap food stalls in town (No 1 Village) or the main bazaar (No 3 Village). There's a 'wine shop' in No 1 Village.

Most of the accommodation is strung along the east coast between villages No 2 and No 5.

Eco Villa

BUNGALOWS \$\$

(☎2822212; www.havelock.co.in/ecovilla; Beach 2; huts ₹300-3000) The original, and still the best, Eco Villa is the only place with huts right on the beachfront. It caters to all budgets, from the two-storey bamboo duplex huts, tastefully decorated with pot plants, to simple bamboo bungalows, all of which open up to the water. The restaurant gets pretty damn romantic at night, when the moon rises over deep-blue ocean evenings. Accepts credit cards.

Orient Legend Resort

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎282389; Beach 5; huts ₹300-1000, without bathroom ₹100-250) A very popular choice, this sprawling place covers most budgets, and is one of the few guesthouses where you can actually see the water from your room.

Wild Orchid

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎282472; www.wildorchidandaman.com; d cottages from ₹3000; ☎@) Set back from a secluded beach, this is a mellow, friendly place with tastefully furnished cottages designed in traditional Andamanese style. The restaurant, **Red Snapper** (mains ₹100-350), is the best in town, with a great islander ambience. The fresh tuna pasta is magnifico, and tiger prawns out of this world.

Emerald Gecko

BUNGALOWS \$\$

(☎282170; www.emerald-gecko.com; huts ₹750-2250) This is a step up in quality from other hut resorts. There are four comfortable double-storey huts with open-roofed bathrooms, lovingly constructed from bamboo rafts that drifted ashore from Myanmar. There are some budget huts too, and the **Blackbeard** restaurant has a quality menu designed by the same folk as Wild Orchid.

Barefoot at Havelock

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎reservation 044-24341001; www.barefootindia.com; cottages ₹7100-9700; ☎) For the location alone – ensconced in bird-filled forest grounds just back from Radha Nagar Beach – this is Havelock's most luxurious resort, boasting beautifully designed timber and bamboo-thatched cottages. The **restaurant** (mains ₹180-450) with Italian chef serves up

everything from Indian to Thai, making for a nice romantic splurge.

Dreamland Resort

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎9474224164; Beach 5; huts ₹300) In a prime location, only 50m from Radha Nagar 7, Dreamland has simple thatched bungalows and very friendly owners.

Green Land Resort

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎9933220620; huts ₹200-250, without bathroom ₹150-200) This is the spot for those wanting peace and quiet, with simple huts arranged in a jungle of fruit trees. It's only a 15-minute walk to Radha Nagar.

Coconut Lodge

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎282056; huts ₹200-500) Popular with Israeli travellers, Coconut Lodge is the place to head to if you want to party. Huts are arranged in a weird circular outlay that directs everyone to a raised, concrete platform where the entire lodge usually ends up carousing.

Anju-coco Resto

INDIAN, CONTINENTAL \$
(mains ₹120-250) Charming little restaurant run by a friendly owner, features a varied menu with tasty BBQ fish in the high season. The big breakfast (₹60) is indeed big, and a good choice.

B3 – Barefoot Bar & Restaurant

PIZZA \$\$
(Village No 1; mains ₹150-500; ☎11am-4pm & 6-9.30pm) Modern decor with classic movie posters on the walls; there's a Western-heavy menu, with the best pizzas in Havelock. Outdoor seating is pleasant, but overlooks the unattractive jetty.

These places also have great Western food and a relaxed ambience:

Full Moon Cafe

WESTERN \$
(mains ₹90-180) At Dive India.

Café Del Mar

WESTERN \$
(mains ₹70-200) At Barefoot Scuba.

i Information

There are two ATMs side by side in No 3 Village, where you can also find painfully slow **internet** (per hour ₹80).

i Getting There & Away

Ferry times are changeable, but there are always direct sailings to and from Havelock from Port Blair at least once daily, and often twice or more (tourist ferry ₹195, 2½ hours). You'd best book tickets at least a day in advance. The ticket office is open between 9am and 11am. Otherwise you could try the more comfortable Makruzz (from ₹650, two hours).

Several government ferries a week link Havelock with Neil Island (₹195). It's also the most convenient launching point to get to Long Island (₹195), en route to Rangat where buses continue to North Andaman.

i Getting Around

A local bus (₹7) connects the jetty and villages on a roughly hourly circuit, but having your own transport is useful here. You can hire mopeds or motorbikes (per day from ₹250) and bicycles (per day ₹40 to ₹50) from your hotel or otherwise in No 3 Village.

An autorickshaw from the jetty to No 3 Village is ₹30, to No 5 ₹50 and to No 7 ₹150 to ₹200.

Neil Island

Happy to laze in the shadows of its more famous island neighbour, Neil is still the place for that added bit of relaxation. Its beaches may not be quite as luxurious as Havelock's, but they have ample character and are a perfect distance apart to explore by bicycle. There's a lovely unhurried pace of life here; cycling through picturesque villages you'll get many friendly hellos from kids and adults alike. In Neil Island you're about 40km from Port Blair, a short ferry ride from Havelock and several universes away from life at home.

At the time of research there were no internet or moneychanging facilities. There's a post office in the bazaar.

👁 Sights & Activities

Neil Island's five **beaches** (numbered one to five) all have their unique charms. **No 1** is the prettiest and most accessible, a 40-minute walk west of the jetty and village. The island's best **snorkelling** is around the coral reef at the far (western) end of this beach at high tide. There's a good sunset viewpoint out this way accessed via Pearl Park Resort, which becomes a communal spot in the sand for tourists and locals come early evening.

No 2, on the north side of the island, has the **Natural Bridge** rock formation, accessible only at low tide by walking around the rocky cove. To get here by bicycle take the side road that runs through the bazaar, then take a left where the road forks. The best swimming is at **No 4**, though its proximity to the jetty is a slight turn off. **No 3** is a secluded powdery sand cove, which is best accessed via Blue Sea Restaurant. Further ahead the more wild and rugged **No 5**

(5km from the village), reached via the village road to the eastern side of the island, is a nice place to walk along the beach, with small limestone caves accessible at low tide.

You can dive with **India Scuba Explorers** (☎9474238646; www.indiascubaexplorers.com), while snorkelling gear can be hired (per day ₹150) at your hotel or around town. If you're extremely lucky you may spot a **dugong** at No 1 Beach feeding in the shallows at high tide. Hiring a fishing boat to go to offshore snorkelling or fishing will cost between ₹1000 and ₹2000 depending on how far out you want to travel, how long you choose to snorkel etc; several people can usually fit on board.

The main bazaar has a mellow vibe, and is a popular gathering spot in the early evening. **Cooking classes** (from ₹200) can be arranged at Gyan Garden Restaurant. Behind the restaurant is a track up the small hill that leads to a **viewpoint** across the island and out to sea.

Sleeping & Eating

In the low season there are great deals on simple beach huts. The most popular places to stay are **Tango Beach Resort** (☎03192-282583; huts ₹50-350, cottages ₹600-1000) and **Pearl Park Resort** (☎03192-282510; huts ₹100-250, cottages & r ₹400-1600) both at No 1 Beach. Their proximity and same-sameness makes them feel like identical sides of a double-headed coin; both offer nice thatched huts and less interesting, if more comfortable, concrete rooms. The main difference is that Tango has ocean views and a sea breeze, while Pearl Park has the sunset point and lush garden surrounds. **A-N-D Beach Resort** (☎214722; huts ₹300-700) is another good option on No 4 Beach.

Eating is surprisingly good on Neil Island. You'll find cheap and delicious Bengali food in the market.

Moonshine (mains ₹40-150) on the road to No 1 Beach is a backpacker favourite, cooking up excellent home-made pasta dishes (the prawn pasta is amazing), with cold beer. In the market, **Chand Restaurant** (mains ₹50-200) is also popular, with strong filter coffee and delicious BBQ fish. **Gyan Garden Restaurant** (mains ₹50-200) has a good seafood selection.

Getting There & Around

A ferry makes a round trip each morning from Phoenix Bay Jetty in Port Blair (₹195, two

hours). There's also a daily ferry to Havelock in either the morning or early afternoon.

Hiring a bicycle (per day from ₹50) is the best way to get about; roads are flat and distances short. An autorickshaw will take you to No 1 Beach from the jetty for ₹50.

Middle & North Andaman

The Andamans aren't just sun and sand. They're also jungle that feels as primeval as the Jurassic and as thick as the Amazon, a green tangle of ancient forest that could have been birthed in Mother Nature's subconscious. This shaggy, wild side of the islands can be seen on a long, loping bus ride up the Andaman Trunk Rd (ATR). Going to Diglipur by road thrusts you onto bumpy roads framed by antediluvian trees and roll-on, roll-off ferries that cross red-tannin rivers prowled by saltwater crocodiles.

But there's a negative side to riding the ATR: the road cuts through the homeland of the Jarawa and has brought the tribe into incessant contact with the outside world. Modern India and tribal life do not seem able to coexist – every time Jarawa and settlers interact, misunderstandings have led to friction, confusion and, at worst, violent attacks and death. Indian anthropologists and indigenous rights groups like Survival International have called for the ATR to be closed; its status is under review at time of writing (see p1066). At present, vehicles are permitted to travel only in convoys at set times from 6am to 3pm. Photography is strictly prohibited, as is stopping or any other interaction with the Jarawa people – who are becoming increasingly reliant on handouts from passing traffic.

The first place of interest north of Port Blair is the impressive **limestone caves** (☹closed Mon) at Baratang. It's a 45-minute boat trip (₹200) from the jetty, a scenic trip through mangrove forest. A **permit** is required, organised at the jetty.

Rangat is the next main town, a transport hub with not much else going for it. If you do get stuck here, try **Hotel PLS Bhawan** (s/d from ₹150/250; ☹), the best of a bad bunch. There's an ATM nearby. Ferries depart to/from Port Blair and Havelock Island (₹50/195, nine hours), as well as Long Island (₹7) from Yeratta Jetty, 8km from Rangat. A daily bus goes to Port Blair (₹95, seven hours).

Between December and March, Hawksbill turtles nest on the beaches at **Cuthbert Bay**, a 45-minute drive from Rangat. Any

northbound bus will drop you here. **Hawksbill Nest** (☎03192-279022; 4-bed dm ₹600, d ₹400, with AC ₹800; ☹) is the only place to stay; bookings must be made at A&N Tourism in Port Blair. A permit (₹250) can be organised at the ranger office in Betapur

LONG ISLAND

With its friendly island community and lovely slow pace of life, Long Island is perfect for those wanting to take the pace down even a few more notches. There are no motorised vehicles on the island, and at times you're likely to be the only tourist here.

A 1½-hour trek in the jungle (not advisable after heavy rain) will lead you to the secluded **Lalaji Bay**, a beautiful white-sand beach with good swimming. Hiring a *dunghi* (₹1500 return) makes it much easier – especially if you don't like leeches. You can also get a *dunghi* to North Passage island for snorkelling at the stunning **Merik Bay** with its blinding white sand and translucent waters. Trips to South Button are also possible from here.



Blue Planet (☎9474212180; www.blueplanetandamans.com; r with/without bathroom from ₹300/700; @) is not only a great place to stay, it also sets an excellent example by incorporating bottles washed ashore into its architecture. Its simple rooms are set around a lovely Padauk tree, with hammocks strung about. Food is available, as well as very slow internet. Follow the blue arrows from the jetty to get here. It also has private cottages (₹2000 to ₹3000) at a nearby location. No alcohol is sold on Long Island, so you'll have to stock up beforehand.

There are three ferries a week to Havelock and Port Blair (₹195), and daily service to Rangat (₹8).

MAYABUNDER & AROUND

In 'upper' Middle Andaman, there are several villages inhabited by Karen, members of a Burmese hill tribe who were relocated here during the British colonial period. In Mayabunder, stop at **Sea'n'Sand** (☎03192-273454; thanzin_the_great@yahoo.co.in; r from ₹200; ☹), a simple lodge, restaurant and bar overlooking the water 1km south of the town centre. Run by Titus and Elizabeth and their extended Karen family, it's low-key and will appeal to travellers looking for an experience away from the crowds. You can go on a range of **boat-based day tours** (per tour from ₹500-2500) that, depending on the season, may include visits to **Forty One Caves** where

hawabills make their highly prized edible nests; snorkelling off **Avis Island**; or jungle trekking at creepy **Interview Island**, where there's a small population of wild elephants, released after a logging company closed for business in the 1950s. You'll feel very off the beaten trek here. A permit (₹500) is required, best organised through Sea'n'Sand.

Mayabunder, 71km north of Rangat, is linked by daily buses from Port Blair (₹130, 10 hours) and by thrice-weekly ferries (Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). There's an unreliable ATM here.

DIGLIPUR & AROUND

Those who make it this far north are well rewarded with some impressive attractions in the area. Though don't expect anything of **Diglipur**, the northernmost major town in the Andamans, which is a sprawling, gritty bazaar town with an ATM and slow **internet connection** (per hr ₹40). You should instead head straight for **Kalipur**, where you'll find lodging and vistas of the ocean and outlying islands.

Ferries arrive at Aerial Bay Jetty from where it's 11km southwest to Diglipur, the bus stand and Administration Block, where boat tickets can be booked. Kalipur is on the coast 8km southeast of the jetty.

👁 Sights & Activities

Leatherback, hawksbill, olive ridley and green **turtles** all nest along the Diglipur coastline between December and April. Tourists can assist with collecting eggs for hatching; contact **Pristine Beach Resort** for more information. The area also has a number of caves.

Islands

BEACH, SNORKELLING

Like lovely tropical counterweights, the twin islands of **Smith** and **Ross** are connected by a narrow sandbar. Since this is designated as a marine sanctuary, to visit you must get a permit from the **Forest Office** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/500; ☀6am-2pm Mon-Sat) opposite Aerial Bay Jetty. These islands are up there with the best in the Andamans, and the snorkelling is amazing. You can charter a boat to take you for the day from the village for ₹1000.

Craggy Island, a small island off Kalipur, also has good snorkelling. Strong swimmers can reach here, otherwise a *dunghi* is available (₹200 return).

Saddle Peak

TREKKING

At 732m, Saddle Peak is the highest point in the Andamans. You can trek through subtropical forest to the top and back from Ka-

lipur in about six hours; the views from the peaks onto the archipelago are incredible. Again, a permit (Indian ₹25, foreigner ₹250) is required from the Forest Office and a local guide will make sure you don't get lost – ask at Pristine Beach Resort. Otherwise follow the red arrows marked on the trees.

Sleeping & Eating

TOP CHOICE **Pristine Beach Resort** GUESTHOUSE
(☎9474286787; www.andamanpristineresorts.com; tents ₹150, huts ₹250-1000, r ₹2500; 🍷🍴) This pretty spot huddled among the palms between paddy fields and the beach has several simple bamboo huts on stilts, as well as more romantic bamboo 'tree houses' and upmarket rooms, and a restaurant-bar. Alex, the super-friendly owner, is a great source of information. The resort also rents bicycles/motorcycles (per day ₹60/250).

i Getting There & Around

Diglipur, located about 80km north of Mayabunder, is served by daily buses to/from Port Blair (₹170, 12 hours), as well as buses to Mayabunder (₹50, 2½ hours) and Rangat (₹70, 4½ hours). There are also daily ferries from Port Blair to Diglipur, returning overnight from Diglipur (seat/bunk ₹100/295, 10 hours).

Buses run from Diglipur to Kalipur (₹10) every 30 minutes; an autorickshaw costs about ₹100.

Little Andaman

Named Gaubolambe by the indigenous Onge, Little Andaman is as far south as you can go in the islands. There's an end-of-the-world (in tropical paradise) feeling here: barely any tourists visit, the locals are so friendly they feel like family, and the island itself is a gorgeous fist of mangroves, jungle and teal plucked from a twinkle in nature's eye.

Badly hit by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, Little Andaman has slowly rebuilt itself, and while there's still zero tourist infrastructure, new guesthouses are starting to open up. Located about 120km south of Port Blair, the main settlement here is **Hut Bay**, a pleasant small town that primarily produces smiling Bengalis and Tamils. North of here you'll find isolated beaches as fresh as bread out of the oven.

o Sight & Activities

Netaji Nagar Beach, 11km north of Hut Bay, and **Butler Bay**, a further 3km north,

are gorgeous, deserted (apart from the odd cow) and great for surfing.

Inland, the **White Surf** and **Whisper Wave waterfalls** offer a forest experience (the latter involves a 4km jungle trek and a guide is highly recommended); they're pleasant falls and you may be tempted to swim in the rock pools, but beware local crocodiles.

Little Andaman lighthouse, 14km from Hut Bay, is another worthwhile excursion. Standing 41m high, exactly 200 steps lead you up to magnificent views over the coastline and forest. The easiest way to get here is by motorcycle, or otherwise a sweaty bicycle journey. You could also take an autorickshaw until the road becomes unpassable, and walk for an hour along the blissful stretch of deserted beach.

Harbinder Bay and **Dugong Creek** are designated tribal areas for the Nicobarese and Onge, respectively, and are off-limits.

Intrepid surfing travellers have been whispering about Little Andaman since it first opened up to foreigners several years ago. The reef breaks are legendary, but best suited for more experienced surfers; and then there's the sharks and crocodiles to contend with. Get in touch with surfing nut, **Muthu** (☎9775276182), based in Havelock, who can provide info on waves for Little Andaman and around. Several surfing live-aboard yachts make the trip out here, taking you to more remote, inaccessible sites. Try **Surf Andamans** (www.surfandamans.com).

Sleeping & Eating

There's no great reason to stay in Hut Bay, an inconvenient 10km away from the nicer beaches, but if you do, **Nandhini Tourist Home** (☎9933259090; s/d ₹150/250) has rooms looking onto the tsunami-scarred beach. There are plenty of cheap thali and tiffin places (we recommend the unnamed Bengali eatery across from the police station).

TOP CHOICE **Blue View** (☎9531802037; Km11.5; s/d ₹150/250) has prime real estate across the road from Netaji Nagar Beach. Rooms are simple, adjoined shacks, and it has a friendly owner, Azad. You can rent bicycles/motorbikes (per day ₹50/250). The food here is very good. Otherwise you could try the less appealing concrete **Ananta Lodge** (☎744207; Km16; s/d ₹200/300) in the bazaar just beyond Butler's Bay.

i Getting There & Around

Ferries land at Hut Bay Jetty on the east coast; from there the beaches lay to the north. Buses (₹10) leave when they want for Butler Bay, or you can hire a local jeep (₹100).

Boats sail to Little Andaman from Port Blair daily, alternating between the overnight eight-

hour slow boat, and the afternoon six-hour 'speedboat' (seat/bunk ₹25/70).

If you're planning on getting a helicopter, this is the place to chance your luck. Not only will it save you from a 7½-hour boat trip, but the aerial views are incredible – though the 5kg baggage limit makes it tricky.