

## The Andamans' best kept secret

# Baratang Island

The pristine Andaman and Nicobar Islands set a dreamy picture for travellers looking to get away from the city's hubbub and the beaches here can give South Europe a run for its money.

words // **Edwina D'souza**



Map not to scale

Andaman  
and Nicobar  
Islands

**T**he capital city of Port Blair is the gateway to the Andamans and its many beautiful islands like Havelock, Ross and Neil Islands. And one would be wrong to say that the Andamans is only about the sun, sea and sands. Venture inland and the Andamans surprises you with its dense rainforests, mangroves, creeks and some of the rarest natural wonders unique to this place. A fitting preview to that is the Baratang Island in the Middle Andamans, which is a haven for nature lovers, birders and those who seek all things wild. Photography enthusiasts will have a field day soaking in sceneries that look straight out of a documentary.

**LAND OF THE JARAWAS**  
One can enter the Baratang Island via the Grand Trunk Road, Andamans' only highway connecting the south to the north. It's a three hour journey until you reach Jirkatang, which is the check post to cross the Jarawa tribal reserve. The Jarawas are one of the oldest existing human races in the world, who have shunned interaction with the outside world. According to estimates, only about 250 to 300 Jarawas remain and they still practice hunting and gathering as means of survival.

The Jarawa tribal reserve is a protected area by the Government; hence tourists are only allowed to enter this region thrice in a day and always in a convoy at a speed limit less than 40kmph. Throughout the 50km stretch, tourists are not allowed to stop the vehicle or take

any photographs and videos. It's an experience one captures with the eyes and not the lens, as you see the tribes coexist alongside modern civilisation in present day world.

**A BOAT RIDE THROUGH CAVES**

The limestone caves in the Andamans are one of the most prominent attractions in the Baratang Island. Formed by the compression of over millions of years of gradual deposits of marine life, corals and skeletons; these limestone caves date back to the pre-historic age.

A torch would come in handy as you find your way inside the dark and eerie caves with a temperature at least 2 degrees cooler than usual.

**MANGROVES TUNNEL**

Over 13 per cent of India's



**HOW TO GET THERE**

Vistara flies twice daily between Delhi and Port Blair via Kolkata and Chennai respectively.

A full day tour to the Baratang Island from Port Blair is an ideal way to explore this untouched region.

Right: Mangrove trees growing wild in the shallow waters near Port Blair; Below: Statue of a member of the Jarawa tribe hunting with a spear, on display at the Samudrika Marine Museum run by the Indian Navy.





### Insider's view



**Vishesh Khanna,**  
Vice President –  
Sales

“Among the most beautiful beaches in the country, Radhanagar in Havelock Island is a sight to behold. This beach is comparatively less inhabited and is the perfect place to unplug. Azure water meets a thick carpet of pearly white sand and a sense of calm pervades the air that you breathe in. It is the perfect place for rejuvenation while enjoying a mesmerising sunset. As for adventure enthusiasts, the beach also offers many snorkelling and scuba diving opportunities.”



As dusk approaches, the parrots head back to the island for the night, creating a green canvas that hovers in the air

mangrove forests are in the Andamans and a sizeable number belongs to the Baratang Island. On way to the limestone caves, one rides on a boat along a creek through a dense mangrove tunnel that looks like a scene straight out of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. The occasional chirping of the birds and crickets provides the appropriate background score to complete the mental picture. The journey by boat is great for birding and one can even spot salt water crocodiles, idling away along the water's edge in the mangroves. These reptiles are known to thrive in the marshlands and the inlets near the middle strait jetty at Baratang, are conducive to them.

#### MUD VOLCANOES

Not only is the Andamans home to the only active volcano in India at Barren Island, but it also has the unique mud volcanoes. In the Andamans, 11 mud volcanoes have been reported and eight of them are in the Baratang Island,

while three are in Diglipur in Northern Andamans. These mud volcanoes are remnants of the 2004 tsunami that rocked most of Asia. The effects of that natural disaster can be seen till date, where the earth is letting out trapped hydrocarbon gases in the form of cold mud bubbles in periodic pops. The mud volcanoes at Baratang are 6km from the jetty, followed by a short hike to get there.

#### PARROT ISLAND

A small unpeopled island in Baratang is home to one of the world's largest parrot habitats. Thousands of parakeets roost here in the evenings and leave the next morning only to return again in the evening, trimming and perfectly pruning the forest during this cycle. The Parrot Island is an experience in itself, where these birds fill the sky every evening making for one of the best sunsets you'll ever see. Birding enthusiasts from across the world often come here to catch a glimpse of this spectacular marvel. ✨



#### VISTARA QUIZ

Question 2: Who has written the largest number of books on ornithology, in India?

Answers in the next issue of Vistara magazine.

Share your answers at [inflightmag@airvistara.com](mailto:inflightmag@airvistara.com). Two winners per question will be notified over e-mail.

## EXPLORE THE CITY

The bustling cultural hub has many facets for travellers to explore



Visit Ross Island, a 10min ferry ride from Port Blair. This relatively unexplored island used to be an important hub for the British. Today, the mangroves of the island look gloriously untamed and wild with hanging vines, huge roots and trunks of century old trees hugging the cathedrals, graveyards and administrative remnants of that era.

### VISIT

The Andamans' Bird Island or *Chidiya-tapu* is a mangrove forest eco-park that plays host to numerous species of birds. Apart from being a bird watching paradise, this place is also famous for its picnic spots, trekking trails and glorious sunset views.

The Anthropological Museum in Port Blair displays ethnographic exhibits that explain the lifestyle and history of the various tribes of the Andamans (like the Jarawas, Sentinelese, Great Andamanese and Onges) as well as the Mongloid Tribes of Nicobar (the Nicobarese and Shompens).

Havelock Island, a ferry ride away from Port Blair, has some of the widest range of restaurants in the archipelago, frequented for their exotic menu and island vibe. Sit under the thatched roof, feel the refreshing sea breeze envelop you as you dig into some delectable finger licking goodies.

### EAT

Port Blair is the land of fresh seafood so head to any restaurant and opt for their 'Catch of the Day' specialities. For the accompanying sauce, experiment with the subtle and diverse flavours unique to this region. The seafood dishes here, especially the curried prawns, are commonly served with rice. There are many evening barbecue parties hosted by the beachside restaurants where freshly caught lobsters are grilled and served along with a fresh drink.



### SHOP

Aberdeen Bazaar is located in the heart of Port Blair and is its main cultural hub. All entry and exit points from Port Blair are best accessed from this *bazaar*. From colourful sea treasures to handcrafted wooden artefacts, this is the place for best ethnic souvenirs.

Pearls, especially those that come from Nicobar, are a much coveted ornament. You can either buy them loose and get them embedded in any jewellery back home or you can choose one from the really pretty pearl-sea shell combination neckpieces and bracelets that are available here.