The Andaman Islands

Floating in splendid isolation in the middle of the Bay of Bengal are the Andaman Islands. Administered by India, these 300 or so islands are the highest peaks of a submerged mountain range that stretches from Sumatra in the south to the Irawaddy delta in the north.

The Andaman Islands have everything you could desire from an adventurous yachting destination. There are literally hundreds of deserted islands to explore, each one seemingly more spectacular than the last. The beaches are magnificently pristine. The snorkelling and scuba diving is amongst the best in the world with an almost untouched marine ecosystem. There is a live volcano, thousands of square miles of untouched jungle, exotic and thriving wildlife and primitive hunter-gatherer tribes. The fishing is amongst the best in the world.

The Andamans is also starting to develop a superb reputation as a frontier surfing destination where the reef breaks have never been surfed before.

The Andaman Islands were declared a World Heritage Site in 2002. The Nicobar Islands are closed to all except Indian Nationals.

You will require Indian visas to visit the Andaman Islands. Indian visas can be arranged in Phuket by Emotion Travel (+66 76 222 320) or directly from Indian embassies worldwide.

The administration in the Andamans is very bureaucratic but consistent in the application of its rules. If you want to go to the Andamans you need to comply with the local rules and regulations, even if they seem onerous. If you break the rules, expect to be fined and deported.

For a full description of the entry procedures please see www.andamanseapilot.com/Andamans-reg.htm

On arrival in Port Blair you will need to provide a written itinerary for your cruise around the islands detailing each overnight anchorage – so some advance research is a good idea. A list of the islands you are permitted to visit can be found at www.andamanseapilot.com/Andamans-visit.htm or simply use the anchorages listed in this book.

During your cruise around the islands you are required to report your position twice daily to Port Blair Port Radio on either 6224kHz or 8294kHz. If you only have VHF you will have to restrict your visit to only Port Blair and Havelock Island.

It is essential to be aware of the weather and the forecast in the Andamans – this is especially the case if you are coming from benign Phuket. Weather forecasts are given daily by Port Blair Port Radio on 6224kHz and 8294kHz at 04:00 GMT and 10:30GMT.

If you have Internet access, there are excellent regional forecasts at http://intranet.mssinet.gov.sg/marine/.

Plan to visit the Andamans between December and May. Mid December to the end of February is the best time with warm, sunny conditions and a reliable 20 knots of wind every day.

March and April have little wind and are the best months for diving and snorkelling – this is also the time of year when the migratory whales visit the Andamans.

April is the best month for surfing with large swell from the southwest that gives spectacular breaks along the west coast. From May to December the Andamans is effectively closed with strong winds, very rough sea conditions and near continuous torrential rain. There are hurricanes from May to July and again from September to December.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands were very hard hit by the earthquake that caused the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004. As a result of the earthquake, South and Middle Andaman Islands are now 2m lower than they were previously – so the water in these areas is now 2m deeper than charted.

If you are using a GPS or chartplotter in the Andaman Islands then the WGS84 datum is out by nearly half a mile. You will need to apply a correction of 0.092’S, 0.106’E to make everything line up.

Environmentally-friendly Yachting

The Andamans is a unique and pristine wilderness area. Help to preserve it during your visit so that it will be there for everyone to enjoy for the future:

• Do not anchor on coral.
• Take your rubbish away with you.
• Do not collect any shells or coral from the beaches.
• Enjoy the great fishing but be sensible and keep only a few fish that you will eat.
• Stay away from the restricted tribal areas (your germs could wipe an entire tribe out).
PORT BLAIR & THE SURROUNDING AREA

**PORT BLAIR**

Port Blair is the main town and the only Port of Entry in the Andaman Islands. It is a quaint, dirty, crowded and friendly Indian town that looks as though it has been ripped out of the colonial 1930s and dropped into the 21st century. Port Blair has an airport with daily connecting flights to Chennai and Kolkata. Yachts are still an unusual sight in the Andaman Islands with only 30-40 visiting yachts each year. Port Blair is however a busy commercial and naval harbour – it has all of the facilities you are likely to need but you may have to look harder than usual to find them. Your dinghy will need to leave your dinghy tied up at one of the jetties near Chatham Island. Theft from dingies or yachts is not an issue in Port Blair. A local entrepreneurial boy called Mupardee will magically appear and offer to look after your dinghy, move it around the ferries and fishing boats, make sure it is not chafing against the jetty, keep it clean and fetch and carry for you. He does a good job.

**Provisioning**

Aberdeen market has excellent fresh vegetables, herbs, spices and fruit. It also has very fresh (walking!) chicken and mutton. If you are used to supermarkets with pre-packaged goods the market will be quite an experience. Anumod Bakery has fresh bread, homemade biscuits, tinned goods and ice cream. It does not make sense to buy fish in the Andamans as it is so easy to catch. Alcohol is difficult to buy in Port Blair.

**Fuel and Water**

Good quality fresh water is available from barge or the dockside – enquire at the harbourmaster’s office. Diesel fuel can be brought by tanker to the dockside by prior arrangement with the harbour master. As this is remarkably complicated it is best to employ an agent to arrange this for you. Alternatively you can jury rig a tank from the India Oil station at Phoenix Bay. Fuel is relatively expensive in the Andaman Islands. Spares and Repairs Port Blair has excellent boat repair facilities but no experience of yachts. Boats of up to 500 tons can be lifted, there are skilled mechanics, sandblasting and spraying facilities and fabricating workshops. Most spare parts can be flown in overnight from the Indian mainland by arrangement with “Agency House”.

**Restaurants and Hotels**

Bay Island Hotel is the best in Port Blair with spectacular views of the harbour entrance and a good restaurant. The Gem Continental has great Tandoori in the evenings. TSG and Sinclair Hotel also have good restaurants but it takes hours for the food to arrive.

**Communications**

There are a variety of Internet cafes, GSM mobile coverage, GPRS and hundreds of manned phone booths with ISD/STD signs in Port Blair.

**Officialdom**

The Andamans is very bureaucratic and even the simplest thing requires reams of paperwork. Your visit is unlikely to change this. Dress smartly and be polite and everything will go smoothly. If you turn up at a government office wearing shorts, sandals and a string vest and are rude and arrogant then expect whatever you want to take several days to a week.

**Anchorage**

**PORT BLAIR, CHATHAM ISLAND**

11°41.166N 92°43.502E

Use of this anchorage has been largely discontinued due to increased ship traffic in the area. If you have a very small dinghy then ask Port Control if you can anchor here for check-in and check-out. Anchorage B is now the preferred anchorage for yachts.

**CHATHAM ANCHORAGE**

1 mile from Chatham Island, Port Blair

Approach from the south and anchor in 8-14 metres with good holding and excellent protection. The bank comes up very quickly further north. From here you need to run your dinghy across to Chatham Island to go ashore. Do not swim here – following the tsunami there are several crocodiles in the harbour that have been eating the local fishermen.

**ROSS ISLAND**

2.5 miles from Chatham Island, Port Blair

Anchor in 6-8 metres just south of the jetty ashore. You need to ask permission from Port Control before you anchor here. Ross Island used to be the administrative centre of the Andamans under British Colonial rule. It now has limited interest with crumbling brick buildings, spotted deer, a variety of ornamental dustbins and a local coconut seller. This is a very useful anchorage to use if you want to return to Port Blair without re-entering the harbour (and all the associated paperwork to get back out again). From the anchorage take your dinghy across to Aberdeen Jetty. There is a small boat marina here with a tidal sill so as to arrive at mid tide or above. Aberdeen Jetty is in the middle of Port Blair town.

**CORBYN'S COVE SOUTH BAY**

5 miles from Chatham Island, Port Blair

Corbyn’s Cove provides a reasonable anchorage in light North-East conditions. Enter the bay north of Snake Island to find a spot in the middle on a sandy bottom in 6 – 10 metres. While there is road access to Port Blair 7 miles away it can be very difficult to find transport. This anchorage is very exposed to ground swell if the North-Easters are blowing strongly.
No 7 beach is 7 miles of white sand backed by tropical forest. Anchor safely anywhere along this beach in 8-12 metres. Ashore there are several resorts, restaurants and access to the main village of Havelock by road.

Elephant Bay is a favoured washing spot for the retired logging elephants. It’s a good day anchorage but can be prone to a swell, so overnight stays are not recommended. Anchor in 12-15 metres away from the coral heads. There is good snorkelling here.

This anchorage is the main point of entry to Havelock Island with daily ferries arriving from Port Blair and other islands. The village has a friendly atmosphere with a variety of stores selling fresh goods and general supplies. Land your tender on the beach to the west of the jetty. There are a couple of suitable places to anchor on either side of the marked channel.

On approach, call Havelock Port Control on Ch.16. The approach to this anchorage is well marked and lit. When approaching from the east, watch the northern point of the island on the sandy bottom; watch out for the coral bommies and the fringing reef.

Anchor in 12-18 metres on the east side of the southern point of the island on the sandy bottom; watch out for the edge of the reef.

There is good snorkelling and diving along the reef edge and good fishing. While the extended reef offers some protection, if the swell rolls in from the northeast, it is better to move north to anchorage (E).

The west side of Henry Lawrence Island provides a well protected anchorage in strong North-Easterlies. Kwangtung Strait is entirely navigable with a deep water channel throughout. Anchor in 15-20 metres on a sandy bottom anywhere along the eastern side of the straight. Good holding and very well protected. Strong currents.

The fringing mangroves are interesting to explore by dinghy or kayak with many crabs, monitor lizards, sea eagles and the occasional dugong. The northern side of the strait in the narrows has an interesting drift dive but visibility is poor.

Beautiful anchorage away from the villages on Havelock. Anchor in 12-15m clear of the reef edge. Great fishing along the reef edge to the southern point. Good snorkelling.

Well protected anchorage off the white beach that stretches around Neill to the north. Ashore along the northern facing coast there is a small backpacker resort and restaurant. There is good snorkelling to the south along the reef edge. The reef to the south of this anchorage extends much further than is charted.
Charka Juru and Inglis

**Swimming Dog Reef**
18 miles from Laccam Harbour

Superb protection in this anchorage, especially at the start and end of the season when the wind can blow strongly from the South-East. Anchor in 20-25 metres clear of the reef edge. The island is inhabited by a single lonely dog that swims out to boats for company or food.

**Charka Juru**
19 miles from Laccam Harbour

Idyllic anchorage in calm weather immediately off the small white beach on Henry Lawrence Island. Approach from the north with care as the reef comes up vertically from 12 metres; anchor in 20 metres and back in slowly. Great snorkelling along the reef, superb kayaking in the mangrove estuaries to the south-east and a perfect white beach backed by tropical rainforest. This anchorage is not suitable overnight in strong North Easterly conditions.

**Outram Island**
20 miles from Laccam Harbour

A well protected anchorage in strong North Easterlies, tucked behind the fringing reef. Anchor in 12 metres on a sand bottom just off the low sandstone cliffs. Superb fishing along the reef edge with many giant groupers. It may be possible to surf off this reef during the North-Easterlies as there is a substantial left hand break. The reef off the south point of Outram Island extends much further south than is charted.

**Inglis Island North**
19 miles from Laccam Harbour

This magnificent island makes the effort of getting to the Andamans worthwhile. The island is deserted, covered with pristine rainforest and surrounded by white beaches and coral reefs. Anchor about 200m due west of the end of the sand spit in 6-8 metres on a sandy bottom. There is all tide dinghy access on to the sand spit. This anchorage is not suitable in easterly winds of more than 20 knots. The off-lying rocks to the north of Inglis Island do not appear on Admiralty charts.

**Inglis Island South**
18 miles from Laccam Harbour

Anchor in 8 metres on a white sand bottom. The channel between Inglis and Henry Lawrence Island is easily navigable. This anchorage is not suitable in easterly winds of more than 20 knots. Inglis Island is ideal for a walk around but keep an eye open for snakes.

**South Button**
18 miles from Havelock Island

The Button Islands have idyllic deserted beaches and stunning underwater life.

**Middle Button**
20 miles from Havelock Island

Anchor in 25 metres on sand in the position shown keeping well clear of the reef edge (if you anchor any shallower than this then you will be destroying magnificent coral fans). There is sometimes a small mooring close to the southern reef edge which is suitable for tying your dinghy up. There is great diving around this island and spectacular snorkelling – particularly off the north eastern side.

**North Button**
25 miles from Havelock Island

The horseshoe bay on the southern side provides excellent protection. Anchor in 10-12 metres on a sandy bottom, well clear of the reef. The sand spit at the western end Button provides all-tide dinghy access to the beach. This anchorage is easy to enter at night if returning from the volcano islands of Narcondam or Barren. The snorkelling and swimming here are superb with mantas rays, dolphins and giant leatherback turtles frequently seen.
Navigating Homfray Strait on a yacht is a unique experience with the narrow waterway dwarfed by the towering trees on either bank. Anchoring overnight along the strait is fascinating with the sounds of the jungle close at hand – just make sure you have lots of mosquito repellent.

Homfray Strait opens up the islands to the north west of the Andamans – an area that is very rarely visited. The strait is perfectly navigable with care. Depths shown on the chartlet are reduced to LAT. Passage through the eastern part of the strait should be timed for high tide. The high voltage electricity pylons which used to cross the strait and restrict mast height to 25 metres were removed in 2006.

At the western end of the narrow part of the strait is a mud bank with coral bombies around it. This bank is usually marked with a pole with a cross on it. Stay well to the eastern side through this section. Be aware that there are many very large salt water crocodiles that live in the strait and restrict mast height to 25 metres were removed in 2006.

Admiralty charts of this area are largely fictional with entire islands missing and reefs drawn in the wrong place. The chartlet provided is more accurate, but use it with care.

This is a superb anchorage in a natural harbour. Approach from due south and anchor on a white sand bottom in 6-8 metres surrounded by reef. South Reef Island has spectacular beaches and snorkelling. The gap between South Reef Island and Interview Island is not navigable by keelboat.

Another natural harbour formed by the fringing reef. Anchor on a sand bottom in 8-10 metres surrounded by reef. The southern channel of the reef gap provides all tide access to the beach. This is a great area for walking.

Yet another perfect “marina” formed by a gap in the fringing reef. Anchor on a sand bottom in 8-10 metres surrounded by reef. Access to the beach is at high tide only. There is great fishing off the edge of the reef in this area.

Anchor in 15-20 metres off the reef edge on a sand bottom. The reef comes up very quickly here. To the west is a small mangrove estuary which provides easy access into the jungle – there is some superb walking in this area. This is a great base from which to explore the extensive mangroves along the eastern coast by dinghy. I would not recommend taking a keel yacht to the east of Interview Island.

Call on Ch.16 on approach and report to the harbourmaster’s office on arrival. Fresh vegetables, meat and fish are available, as are telephone and fax facilities.

There is a government rest house close to the harbourmaster’s office overlooking the bay, with a good restaurant and friendly people.

Austen Strait is too shallow to be navigable by a keel boat but is a very interesting dinghy trip. Be aware that there are many very large salt water crocodiles that live in Austen Strait so keep a good lookout.

These superb islands are rarely visited by yachts. However, by navigating through Homfray Strait, they can be included in a circumnavigation of the Andaman Islands. These islands are remote and wild. There are salt water crocodiles on the eastern side of Interview Island, so only swim on the western side and never swim at night in this area. Interview Island also has a small herd of wild elephant, occasionally seen on the beach or playing in the sea. Interview is also a superb island for jungle walks.

Maya Bandar and Austen Strait

About 50 miles north of the Button Group, Maya Bandar is the administration centre for Middle and North Andaman.

Anchor in 7-10 metres off Alves Island (a small backpacker camping area) about 2 miles from the village. Take the tender ashore. There is good coral off Alves Island.

Maya Bandar 12.55.424N 92.55.063E
82 miles from Chatham Island, Port Blair

MAYA BANDAR
12°55.424N 92°55.063E
82 miles from Chatham Island, Port Blair

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The Andaman Islands

The Cinque Island Chain

The Cinque Islands have some of the most spectacular beaches and anchorages in the Andamans. These islands are a specially designated National Park area. You have to pay an entrance fee of Rs.500 per person and Rs.1,500 per yacht for each day you spend in these islands. These fees are payable in advance to the Forestry Department in Port Blair prior to obtaining approval for your itinerary. The gap between North and South Cinque Islands is probably navigable by keel boat but this is not advised as there are many coral bommies in this area.

North Cinque South Bay

Anchor in the middle of the bay in 12-15 metres. Do not go in further than this or you will be anchoring on (and destroying) beautiful coral reef. There is superb snorkelling and diving all along the reef edge from here in both directions. With south-easterly winds there is a substantial ground swell in this anchorage so use anchorage (B).

North Cinque West Bay

This is an ideal anchorage in South-Easters. Anchor in 15 metres clear of the reef edge – the water is so clear you can watch your anchor hitting the sand!

North Cinque East Bay

Probably the most spectacular anchorage in the Andaman Islands. Approach on a North-West heading aiming for the centre of the sand spit which will bring you to a channel in the coral reef. Anchor in this channel in 7m. This anchorage has fantastically clear water, frequent visits from dolphins and mantas rays and the most perfect white sand spit ashore. This anchorage is well protected in North Easters.

North Cinque Deep Bay


South Cinque

Superb anchorage off a mile long pristine white beach backed by coconut trees and pandanus palms. Approach heading east aiming for the gap in the sand dunes ashore – there are rocks in the water to the north and south ends of this beach. Anchor in 5-6 metres – the water is so clear here it looks as though the yacht is floating in the air. There is superb walking ashore here with many spotted deer and monitor lizards. This beach is one of the few leatherback turtle nesting sites left in the eastern Indian Ocean.

North Reef Island

This small island must rank amongst the most spectacular in the Andamans. It is surrounded by an extensive coral reef with an incredible marine life – during a 10 minute snorkel in 2006 we counted over 50 turtles. The island is completely encircled by a white soft sand beach. There is great beach and jungle walking on this island.

North Reef Bay

Anchor in 12-15 metres on a sand bottom clear of the reef edge.

North Reef Point

Anchor in 15 metres on a sand bottom clear of the large coral bommies. The sand comes up very quickly from 25 metres. There is excellent snorkelling along the reef edge from this anchorage.

North Reef Bommie Bay

Anchor in 10 metres on white sand taking care to avoid the large coral bommie in the middle of this bay. There is superb fishing and snorkelling around this anchorage.

MacPherson Strait

MacPherson Strait is easily navigable, even by a deep draft vessel. The ends of the strait, Wandoor in the west and Chiryatapu in the east are connected to Port Blair by road.

Chiryatapu

Anchor in 10-12 metres on a mud bottom with excellent holding. This anchorage is very well protected. Chiryatapu is an ideal stop over when heading to or from Port Blair.

Jolly Buoy

Anchor in 20 metres well clear of the coral reef near to the 2 large steel moorings. There is great snorkelling on the outer side of the reef to the west of Jolly Buoy. You are not permitted to go ashore at Jolly Buoy.

Tarmugli

Anchor in 12-15 metres on a sand bottom off the edge of the coral reef. This is a picturesque anchorage with great sunset views. You are not permitted to go ashore on this island.

Cinque Islands

The Cinque Islands have some of the most spectacular beaches and anchorages in the Andamans. These islands are a specially designated National Park area. You have to pay an entry fee of Rs.500 per person and Rs.1,500 per yacht for each day you spend in these islands. These fees are payable in advance to the Forestry Department in Port Blair prior to obtaining approval for your itinerary. The gap between North and South Cinque Islands is probably navigable by keel boat but this is not advised as there are many coral bommies in this area.
PASSAGE ISLAND

There are limited but good anchorages around Passage Island. Superb fishing, diving and snorkelling here.

**PASSAGE WEST**
20 miles from Chiriyatapu

Position yourself due north of the southern point and due west of the small rocky point on Passage Island (see the chart provided) – if you look carefully you can see a sand patch here which is clearly visible in 18 metres of water. Anchor in the middle of this sand patch. There is excellent fishing, diving and snorkelling here.

**PASSAGE EAST**
19 miles from Chiriyatapu

Anchor in 20 metres clear of the reef on a sandy bottom.

SISTERS ISLAND

Anchor to the north-west of the southern point of Sisters. This is a great anchorage during calm weather (March and April) but it is very rocky the rest of the time. There is a pristine white coral and sand beach here with some spectacular rock pools at the north eastern end of the beach.

**THE SISTERS**
22 miles from Chiriyatapu

Little Andaman is the southernmost of the Andaman Islands. It was badly hit by the 2004 tsunami which destroyed much of the harbour and the most of the town of Hut Bay. It is presently being rebuilt.

**HUT BAY**
10.36.46SN 92.33.785E
55 miles from Chiriyatapu

Contact Hut Bay Port Control or Little Andaman Port Radio when approaching. Anchor off the front of the town. Some local provisions are available ashore. It is possible to hire bicycles – a great way of exploring Little Andaman.

**CROCODILE CREEK**
37 miles from Chiriyatapu

There is a small gap in the coral reef here that can be navigated with care giving access to a flat lagoon behind the reef. Do not swim here – the mangrove estuary behind is full of huge salt water crocodiles.

**JACKSON CREEK**
44 miles from Chiriyatapu

Anchor in the centre of the bay for a good holding on sand. Beware the southern point and the extended reef, especially when approaching from the south.

Saltwater crocodile tracks have been spotted here. Keep someone on lookout when swimming.

**WEST BAY**
52 from Chiriyatapu

Tuck in on the north corner for good safe holding. Long white beaches and lush rainforest ashore provide the backdrop.
Barren Island is a spectacular active volcano that last erupted during the earthquake that caused the 2004 tsunami. It is still very active; it howls and screams, throws volcanic grit landing on you in this anchorage. This is undoubtedly the most spectacular anchorage at Narcondam. Common sense dictates you should have a long hard look at the volcano before anchoring here at the bottom of the lava flow. You will need a good bow and stern anchor to anchor here. Basically you want to end up between these in deep water. This spot is exceptionally well protected and is out of the volcanic dust fallout.

Anchor in 5-7 metres in front of the abandoned police post. There are silly numbers of mantas in this anchorage. Anchor in 15-20 metres on a sand and broken coral bottom. This is an unlikely looking but good and easy anchorage if conditions are calm. Get as close to the point as possible and anchor in 10m on black volcanic sand. The bottom slopes away gradually to 15 metres and there is then a wall that vanishes into the depths.

Anchoring is generally difficult as the island is surrounded by near-vertical drop-offs to over 1000 metres deep. There is incredible diving here with vertigo inspiring drop-offs to over 1000 metres deep. Underwater the landscape is even more spectacular than above, with live coral set against a black volcanic ash backdrop. There are lots of large pelagics and big sharks. Fishing is superb but you often catch half-a-fish as something else eats it as you are trying to wind it in.

Narcondam summit walk.

On the west side of island look for a distinctive deep valley that runs up the volcano to just below the summit (see chart). Land here on a rock pebble beach. Ignore the deep valley and walk north along the beach about 150 metres to some large boulders - behind these is a steep sided gulley; walk up this. After about 200 metres strike right out of the gulley on some large tree roots and climb steeply for about 400 metres on a heading of about 140º to just below the ridgeline. Stay below the ridgeline and turn left paralleling the ridgeline until you get to a very large fallen tree. Head up to the ridgeline and then walk up through mature forest to the summit.

Ascent time 3 hours; descent 2 hours. This is not a gentle stroll. You need to be reasonably fit and agile to attempt it.