

Andaman Escapology

The exotic Andaman Islands' dazzling cruising waters and marine ecosystem are part of the colorful culture of the amazing country that is India. Sailing to the Andamans has been in vogue for the past decade, but superyachts are a more recent phenomenon.

By Linda Cartlidge



The remote and enchanting Andaman and Nicobar Archipelagos consist of a group of 572 Islands, of which only 36 are inhabited. Located to the South East of India between the latitudes 6 to 14 degrees North and longitudes 92 to 94 degrees East in the Bay of Bengal, the Andamans Archipelago chain lies along an arc approximately north-south covering a distance of nearly 800

kilometers. Formed by a submarine mountain range separating the Bay of Bengal from the Andaman Sea, the chain long ago provided the perfect stopover for world passage making between Asia and Europe.

Onshore splendour

Considered the 'The Jewels in the Crown of the Bay of Bengal', the Andamans offer unique

and irresistible underwater attractions, virgin beaches, active volcanoes and uninhabited islands redolent with powder white beaches, coral reefs, lush green rain forests and abundant bird life. On arrival, a visit to the quaint colonial capital of Port Blair is highly recommended, not only to complete arrival procedures but also because the capital is a kaleidoscope of history, nature and water



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sports. Among its attractions is the “Cellular Jail”, with its notorious history as a colonial prison used by the British to exile political prisoners to the remote archipelago. Many notable freedom fighters such as Batukeshwar Dutt and Veer Savarkar, among others, were imprisoned here during the struggle for India’s independence it is now one of the famed national monuments of India.

Departing from the capital, vessels can head either north or south, both courses offering amazing island views along the way with the best anchorages easily reachable.

Cruising highlights

Andaman adventure cruising includes visits to many islands only accessible by boat, with literally hundreds of deserted islands to explore, each one appearing more spectacular than the last. Mr. R. Rathnam of Asia Pacific Superyachts - Andamans & India, is an expert on Andamans superyacht journeys and can provide an Itinerary of highly recommended islands for a fascinating journey. He suggests the islands of Passage, Barren, South Button and Narcondum as among those Andamans islands of unmatched natural beauty - along

with the magnificently pristine beaches at Havelock Islands and the surrounding area.

For those interested in snorkeling and scuba diving, an incredible dive site is Button Island, which is counted among the best dive spots in the world and provides an almost untouched marine ecosystem. North Button has lovely long sandy beaches on either side of the isolated island frequented by incredible species including the giant oceanic leatherback turtle. An article published on the Worldwide Dive & Sail website chronicles the adventures of a group of 14 divers from the

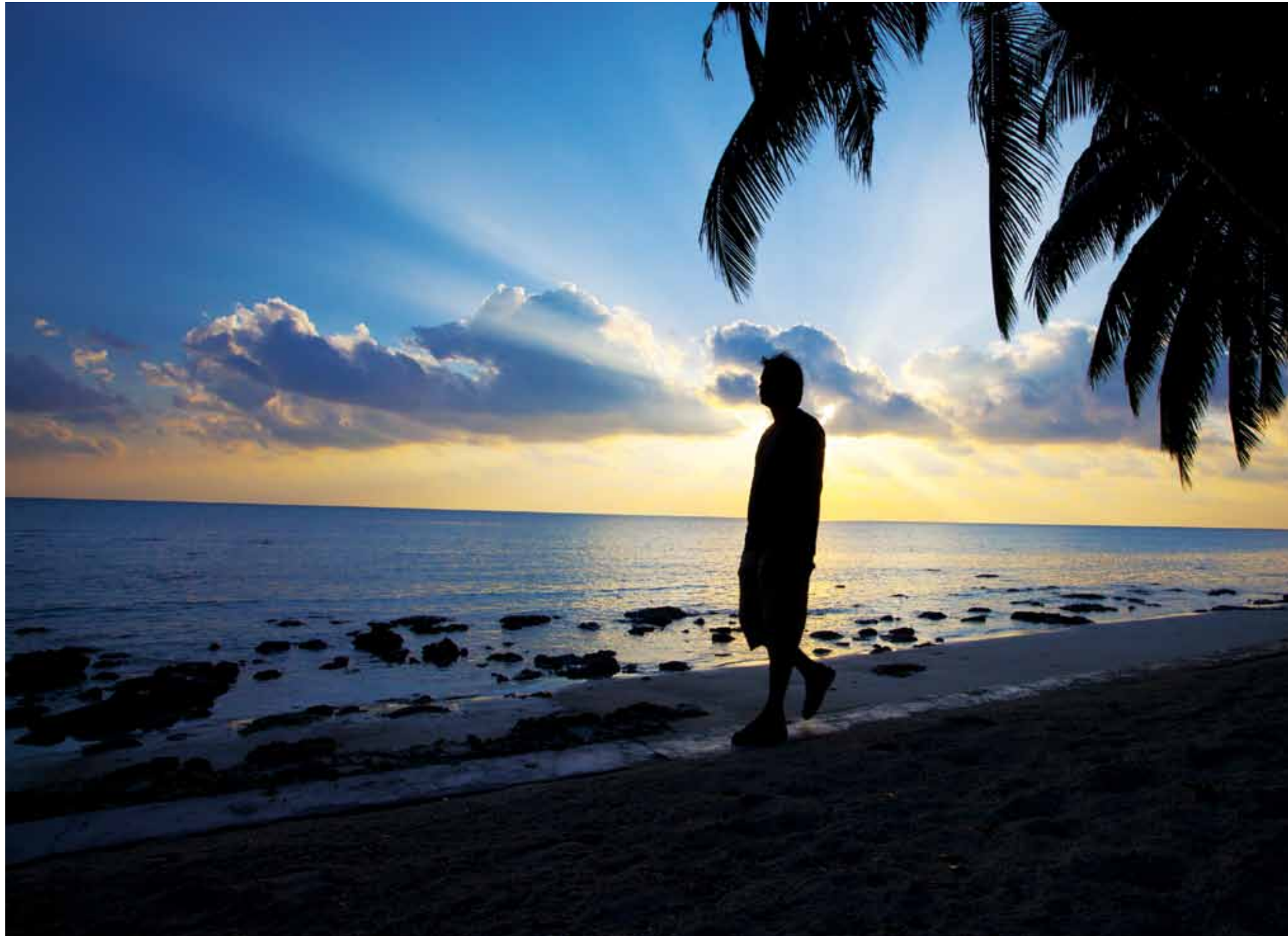
USA, UK, Portugal, Germany, Belgium and Netherlands, written by one of Mr. Rathnam clients, Thomas Erbe. The writer shares fantastic dive experiences at the north-east site of Passage Island and on to Cinque Island, then north to Havelock Island where he reported, “A perfect dive at Dixon’s Pinnacle just south-east of Havelock Island was found to be a ideal hunting ground for different species of trevallies fish.” Havelock Island is one of the most sought after premium destinations in the Andaman and Radha Nagar Beach, a celebrity among the Andaman beaches, was rated as

Asia’s most beautiful beach by TIME magazine.

Volcanic adventures

A different type of experience on a visit to the Andamans is sailing out to view the remote volcanic islands of Barren and Narcondum, about 100 miles to the east of the main Andaman Islands and rising almost vertically from ocean depths of more than 2000 metres. Narcondum is a long extinct volcano but Barren is still very much alive. The only active volcano in South Asia tops off thousands of miles of untouched jungle and lies 300 metres

above sea level, with spectacular lava flowing into the sea. Diving and snorkeling around these islands is nothing short of incredible with enormous, colourful coral and reef fish as well as sharks and manta rays. The first eruption was reported back in 1787 and the deep void of the face of the volcano is an uninhabited ‘barren’ region (hence the name). The volcano last erupted in 2006 and was filmed by NASA as part of their Visible Earth series. The island is a natural habitat for wild goats that exist by drinking saltwater, a unique feature of this breathtaking island.



Natural abundance

Exotic and thriving, North Reef Island is 49 miles from Homfray Strait and home to many more species of wildlife. Included amongst the best fishing locations in the world, this small island ranks as one of the most spectacular in the Andamans. Surrounded by an extensive coral reef with an incredible marine life that includes a thriving turtle community. Superb jungle walks are a major attraction here and

vessels can anchor in 12-15 metres on a sand bottom clear of the reef edge at North Reef Bay.

These are just a few of the breathtaking, adventurous experiences and cruising options in the natural paradise of the sparsely populated Andaman Islands. The capital, Port Blair is well connected to mainland India with Kolkata in the East of India and Chennai in the south of India serving as primary gateways. You can fly or sail from these cities or cruise down

to Port Blair from Phuket in Thailand. Skippers will find Phuket an excellent departure port for reaching the islands by sea, as it lies 400 NM from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the voyage from Phuket takes around 2 days, with a day for checking in plus half-day to check out and two days for the return voyage. The best yachting season is from mid-December to end of April when warm, sunny conditions prevail along with a reliable 20 knot wind. ■

Guided Navigation

A major challenge when visiting a new wilderness destination is knowing where to go, where to anchor and what to see, along with trying to figure out the time-consuming checking in and checking out procedures. The best voyage in the Andamans starts with an agent who can handle the complex paperwork and sourcing of major supplies in advance (a big plus as the Andamans Islands lack a developed infrastructure). Although various guide books provide some indication for an itinerary, they invariably omit some of the best spots. Mr. R. Rathnam can prepare an itinerary specifically designed to the skipper's interests and will tailor an itinerary drawing on his extensive knowledge, which includes advice of navigational hazards such as salt water crocodiles.

For information on how your paperwork and the arrival/ departure process can be streamlined and your vessel taken care of, contact rathnam@asia-pacific-superyachts.com Mobile +91 99320 80776