

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

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NOTE ON THIS CHAPTER

This document provides updated information for pages 1037–50 of Lonely Planet's 10th-edition India guidebook. Information is presented in the same order as that found in the book. Information on specific places is limited to those covered in the book; many more establishments are open. Since conditions change rapidly, it is best to verify the situation before you travel, especially if you hope to stay at a specific property.

For updated information on India, see www.lonelyplanet.com/tsunami/india.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

Six months after the tsunami, the southwest monsoon is upon the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which means few, if any, travellers. The tsunami caused immense damage and loss of life in the Nicobar island chain, close to the epicentre of the undersea earthquake that caused the tsunami. Most of the survivors from the Nicobar Islands and Little Andaman were evacuated after the tsunami, and many are still living in relief camps in Port Blair until the government and aid organisations can rebuild homes and livelihoods. The Nicobar Islands, however, are, and always have been, off limits to tourists, foreigners and anybody other than indigenous islanders and Indian nationals with the appropriate permit. The Andaman Islands, which are open to foreign tourists, were relatively unaffected by the tsunami. Although high tides flooded most coastal areas and the low-lying parts of South Andaman were inundated, there was no significant damage to populated areas.

TRANSPORT

Due to the monsoon, ships between Chennai or Calcutta and Port Blair are currently suspended for tourists. Services should resume in September – check the Shipping Corporation of India schedules on www.and.nic.in. Jet Airways and Air India have daily flights from Chennai and Kolkata to Port Blair.

Inter-island ferries have been reduced slightly since the tsunami – initially because of a lack of tourists and now because of the monsoon – but they are still more frequent than those listed in the last edition of *India* as more services have been introduced in the past two years. Weather conditions permitting, there's a daily ferry from Port Blair to/from Havelock Island, going via Neil Island on either the outbound or return journey on alternate days.

Slow boats between Port Blair and Rangat also call at Havelock and Long Islands three or four times a week. There are overnight ferries from Port Blair to Diglipur at least three times a week, and ferries from Port Blair to Little Andaman three times a week, though tourists are currently discouraged from visiting Little Andaman as the harbour and accommodation at Hut Bay were damaged by the tsunami.

Road transport is operating normally around the main islands of South, Middle and North Andaman, though the bridge between Middle and North Andaman near Mayabunder (built since the last edition of *India*) was damaged by the tsunami, and the crossing can only be made by ferry.

PORT BLAIR

Apart from some initial flooding and damage to boats at Phoenix Bay, Port Blair came out relatively unscathed from the tsunami. Communications (ATMs, telephone, Internet etc) are operating normally – there's a blackout at least once a day, but that's normal.

Sights & Activities

Daily ferries to Ross Island are erratic, depending on tides. Ask at A&N Tourism or directly at Aberdeen Jetty. The forest museum has moved to the Chatham Sawmill. All other attractions are open and operating normally.

Places to Stay & Eat

Most hotels and guesthouses in Port Blair are either well back from the coast or too high to have been affected by the tide. The exception is Peerless Resort on Corbyn's Cove, which suffered some water damage to the cottages at the front. All hotels are open and operating normally. Because of the drop in tourists and low season, most are currently offering discounts of 50%.

AROUND PORT BLAIR & SOUTH ANDAMAN

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The Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park is currently closed to tourists because of reef damage, so there are no boats running to Jolly Buoy or Red Skin Islands and no diving or snorkelling operations here.

NEIL ISLAND

Due to the monsoon, the only accommodation currently open is the government-run Hawabill Nest Yatri Niwas.

HAVELOCK ISLAND

Havelock is the most popular tourist island in the Andaman chain, but it virtually shuts down during the monsoon season (late May–September). All beach-hut accommodation and diving operations are currently closed, but the government-run Dolphin Beach Resort is open.

LITTLE ANDAMAN

The worst affected of the Andaman island chain, Little Andaman suffered considerable damage at the main settlement of Hut Bay and many islanders were evacuated to Port Blair. Government rest houses north of Hut Bay are also damaged. Tourists are currently discouraged from visiting.

OTHER ISLANDS

Islands north of Port Blair reported high tides along the coast, but damage was minimal and no loss of life was reported. Middle Andaman (including Mayabunder and Rangat) and Long Island are currently unaffected. In North Andaman, Diglipur was unaffected and accommodation places in Kalipur are back to normal.