

# Life in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands



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E4



**Y**ou want to know what life in Andaman and Nicobar Islands is like?

You have come to the right person. I was born and brought up there. And let me begin by telling you one thing, there is no place like home.

I have been studying in TKM for the past two years and I know quite a lot about Kerala now. I even picked up a bit of Malayalam, especially the swear words (smiles). And even though Kerala is known as God's own country and even though I love this place, my heart still longs for my home. Granted that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are not as well developed as Kerala, only 30 of the 600 Islands are inhabited.

Yet there is a different feel to my place. Life is much more relaxed over there. There is none of the rushing about which is so common in Kerala. Also even though I live in Port Blair, I am not joking when I say that I know atleast 5% of the people over there. Yes, Port Blair isn't very large; only 100,000 people live there. But that's way more than what a normal Keralite would know throughout his entire lifetime. I will tell you why. It's because in Port Blair (and all across the Andaman) we give a huge importance to huge weekend outings with friends and family. This is how we spend our free time; visiting friends and family. Even though Port Blair is our biggest it doesn't have a single mall or branded show room. We have only one theater. It is different from Kerala.

Another difference between A & N and Kerala is, unlike Kerala, we didn't have any

'civilized' people back in the 1900's back then, there were only 'adivasis'. There are adivasis even now. They still live exactly the same way their forefathers lived hundreds of years ago. It was in 1910 that the British government began using some of these Islands to build prisons. These prisons were first filled with hardened criminals and then by freedom fighters. They stayed in the Andamans even after their release because they didn't have a home in the Indian mainland by then. That was how so called civilized man first came to the A & N. In the 1960's, the Indian government actively promoted relocation of many refugees to the Andamans.

That was how A & N Island became a mini-India. Here we have people from all parts of India, be it Tamil Nadu, Bihar, West Bengal or Kerala, we have them all.

The greatest advantage I gained from living in such a diverse society is that I understand the social fabric of India better. Another skill I have gained is that, just like every Andaman Youth, I can fluently speak three languages namely, English, Hindi and Tamil (my mother tongue).

Another thing about us Andamanese is that for us earthquakes are a way of life. Most of our buildings are constructed with reinforced cement concrete (RCC). That's probably why most of our buildings still stood after a major earthquake (9.0 on the Richter scale) in 2004. We aren't also so blessed with water sources as Kerala is. For us, especially during the summer months, water scarcity is a huge problem. That's



also one reason why we don't allow many tourists into the Andamans. Our water is barely sufficient for us and an extra demand from tourists will make life really difficult for us.

Our seafood cuisine is one of the best in the world. May be I am biased. All of us are biased when we talk about our home's food, yet I still think that if you haven't tasted the Andamanese seafood. You have lost a huge opportunity to taste food imported straight from the heaven.

I was saving this for the last, the things that are in the DNA of every true Andamanese, the sea and the beaches. Ah I boast not when

I declare that we have the most pristine, virgin beaches in the world. White sand as far the eye can see....the waves that come crashing one on top of the other....The azure sea shining with a blue brighter than the feathers of a peacock's breast....The gentle breeze that caresses your hair like a gentle grandfather...The stunning coral reefs containing species unknown even to marine biologist... Ah you have to see it to understand what I am trying to convey...Words fail me.. Hmmm yes, to really understand what life in Andaman is all about, you have to actually visit it. And when you do the door to my house is always open for you...