India - Southern

Andaman Islands Endemics Extension

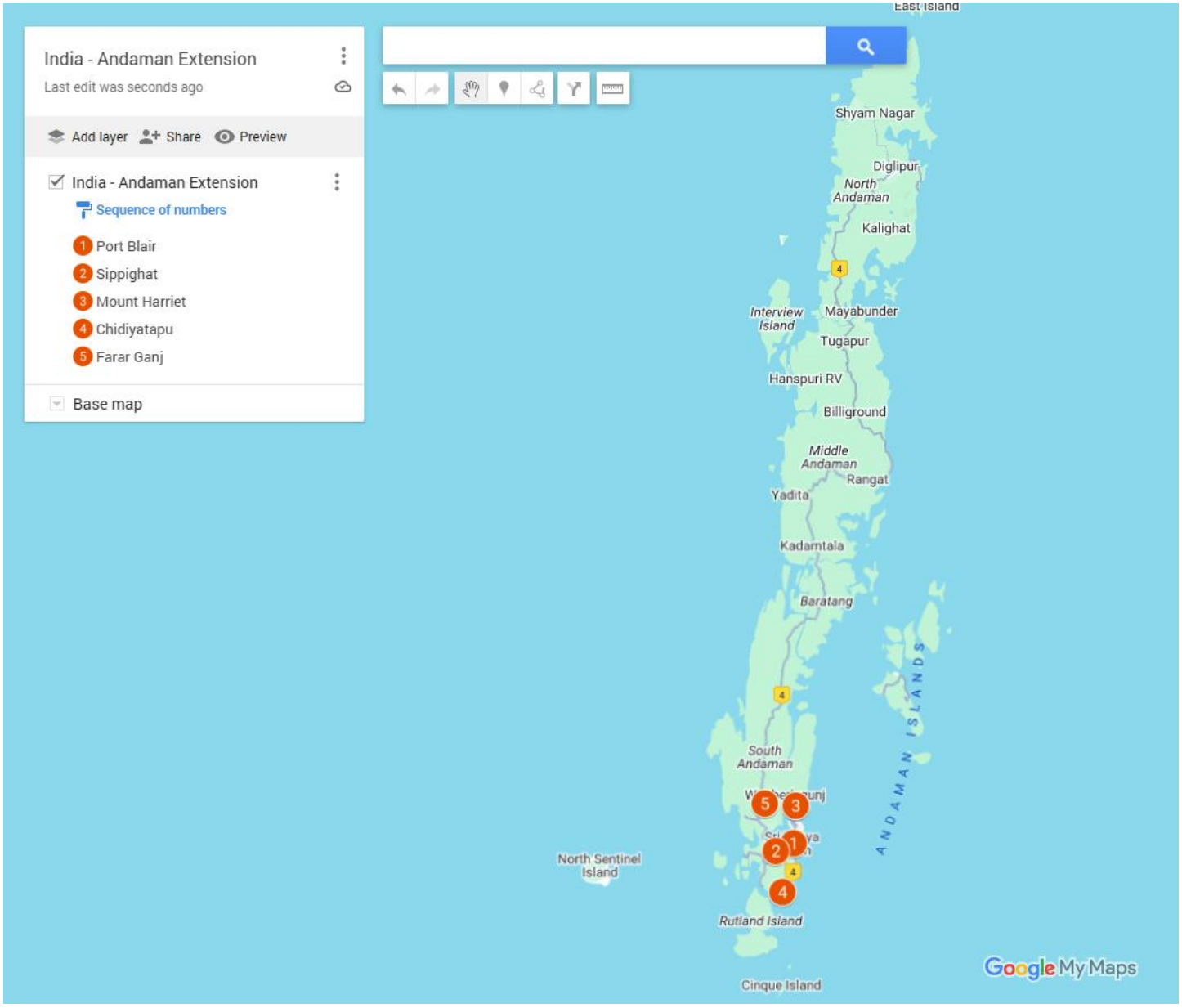


White-headed Starling by David Hoddinott

Our extension to the Andaman Islands will see us flying across the Bay of Bengal to Port Blair, Andaman Islands. Located some 1,100 kilometres to the east of peninsula India, this archipelago is far closer to southern Myanmar and Sumatra. Consequently, the many endemic species present have more in common with the Malaysian sub-region than with the Indian sub-continent. The archipelago is made up of 200 or so small islands with patches of pristine tropical rainforest and palm-fringed sandy beaches! Based in a single location for the duration of our time on the islands, this is a relaxed and easy birding destination.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Port Blair**
Days 2 to 4	**Sippighat, Mount Harriet, Chidiyatapu, Farar Ganj & Port Blair area**
Day 5	**Port Blair area & final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Andaman Woodpecker by David Hoddinott

Port Blair & Sippighat area. Port Blair, the capital city of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is Located at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, these two island groups are politically part of India. Possibly formed due to the subduction of the Indian tectonic plate below the South-east Asian Plate, the islands at one point may have provided a contiguous land route between Myanmar and Indonesia.

They are host to a veritable treasure trove of endemic wildlife, with most having stronger affinities with the Malaysian sub-region than that of the Indian sub-continent. One of the islands is also home to the Sentinelese (the only known surviving Palaeolithic people). Despite several contact attempts in the 20th century, the locals have reacted only with hostility. As such, they have had very little contact with outsiders. From what is known by distant observation, the Sentinelese maintain a hunter-gatherer existence, with no evidence of agricultural practices or even the use of fire.

Much of the Andamans are still covered in pristine forest and we will concentrate much of our time inside the forests during our time here. We will also make excursions to the mudflats and mangroves for waders and other coastal species.

The coastal mudflats are of interest for many wader species. Birding the flats will no doubt cause some interest from the local people who are always keen to find out just what it is that we are so interested in. While explaining the finer aspects of birdwatching, we will pan through the commoner waders looking for such interesting species as Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Terek Sandpiper, Great Knot, Little Tern and possibly White-bellied Sea Eagle overhead. Moving to mangrove margins should elicit Mangrove Whistler, Collared Kingfisher and Watercock, while we also stand good chances of finding Andaman Teal, Cinnamon, and Yellow Bitterns, Dusky, Clamorous Reed, Blyth's Reed, Black-browed and Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers, and possibly Ruddy-breasted Crake or Slaty-breasted Rail. Commoner species along the littoral zone include the recently split Grey-headed Swamphen, Chinese Pond Heron, Pacific Golden Plover, Long-toed Stint and Stork-billed Kingfisher.



Andaman Crake by David Hoddinott

Night birding here is a must, with a bevy of endemic species that include Andaman Masked Owl, Andaman Scops Owl, Hume's and Andaman Hawk-Owl, Andaman Nightjar as well as the *modestus* sub-species of Oriental Scops Owl, which is liable to be split in the future as Walden's Scops Owl.



Andaman Bulbul by David Hoddinott

Mount Harriet. Mount Harriet generally produces several mixed species flocks containing Andaman and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, White-headed Starling, Andaman Treepie, Freckle-breasted Woodpecker, the eye-searing Scarlet Minivet, Andaman Flowerpecker, Black-naped Monarch, and Andaman Cuckooshrike.

Alarm calls may give away the location of the highly attractive Violet Cuckoo or rare Andaman Serpent Eagle. We must also pay very close attention to disturbances in the leaf litter where Forest Wagtail is common, and both the cryptic Orange-headed Thrush and the mega Andaman Crake are also known to occur. We will also spend some late afternoons here trying to catch sight of two of the more difficult denizens; Andaman Cuckoo-Dove and Andaman Wood Pigeon as they return to their roost sites.

Chidiyatapu. The forest patches around Chidiyatapu provide steady forest birding, and perhaps our only chance to find the elusive and rarely seen Andaman Crake – though this would be considered a major bonus should we be so lucky. Aside from the near-mythical crake, we will see many of the commoner endemics here with Andaman Coucal and Andaman Woodpecker being particularly evident. *Psittacids* are well represented with Vernal Hanging Parrot rather commonly seen alongside three species of *Psittacula* parakeets: Alexandrine, Red-breasted and Long-tailed. Andaman Shama, Andaman Bulbul, and White-headed Starling make up the remaining endemics in this forest. We will also be keeping a keen eye overhead for Edible-nest and White-bellied Swiftlets and the much larger Brown Needletail.

If the Andaman Extension is not availabale as a scheduled tour option, it can be taken as a Tailor-made Tour.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Comfortable. Suitable for most birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Mostly forest & forest edge, some open areas. Several key endemics & localised species that may require repetitive effort.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks, several slopes. Some trails are narrow & may be muddy.
Vehicles / Roads		Average quality roads. Limited driving. Vehicles are manufactured to local requirements, so tend to be a squeeze/on the small size for Western foreigners.
Photography		Worthwhile to good. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances		Spicy food, strong smells of various types. Can be cool at altitude & early mornings. Land leeches will be present; numbers depend on rain fall.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 5;
- All lodgings during the tours;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Any accommodation needed between the Andaman Extension & the Main tour;
- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Camera fees;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- Fitness: The Andaman Extension does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health and reasonably fit as most of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- Accommodation is very comfortable. There is no camping on this trip.

Arrival and Departure Details

The Andaman Extension will depart from Port Blair on day 1 and conclude in Port Blair after breakfast on day 5.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Veer Savarkar International Airport, Port Blair (IATA: IXZ) is the main port of entry and departure and is most easily reached via Chennai International Airport (IATA: MAA).

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.