



BIRDING TOUR INDIA: ANDAMAN ISLANDS ENDEMIC

TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



*We will search for the endemic **Hume's Boobook** (photo Shakti Vel) while birding in the Andaman Islands.*

TOUR OUTLINE

This short (five day) Andaman birdwatching tour will focus on the endemic birds found on the Andaman Islands, part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands archipelago. We will be based on South Andaman Island during the tour. Currently, unfortunately, the Nicobar Islands are off limits to foreigners, but once they open we will extend this Andaman birding tour to include a Nicobar Island birding tour for a number of additional Nicobar Island endemic birds.

We will have one base on the tour, meaning a more relaxing tour and no unnecessary accommodation changes. The endemic birds found on the island will be our main targets, and will include **Andaman Teal, Andaman Nightjar, Andaman Coucal, Andaman Wood Pigeon, Andaman Cuckoo-Dove, Andaman Green Pigeon, Andaman Crane, Andaman Serpent Eagle, Andaman Masked Owl, Andaman Scops Owl, Hume's Boobook, Andaman Boobook, Andaman Woodpecker, Andaman Cuckooshrike, Andaman Drongo, Andaman Treepie, Andaman Bulbul, White-headed Starling, Andaman Shama, and Andaman Flowerpecker**. The tour also provides opportunities for a range of more widespread species that have endemic subspecies on these islands, and which might, in the future, get elevated to full species status.

Should you wish to extend your time in this part of the world, you could combine this Andaman Island birdwatching tour with some of our other tours in [India](#) or [Sri Lanka](#). If you would like to extend your stay in the Andaman Islands, the islands also offer great snorkeling and scuba diving due to crystal-clear waters and great underwater visibility, where you can explore vibrant coral reefs, diverse marine life, and underwater ecosystems. We can happily arrange extra activities for you before or after your Andaman Islands birding tour, just mention this when you are [booking the tour](#).

PASSPORT, VISA, LOCAL LAWS, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, AND CUSTOMS

In addition to the regular Indian entry requirements described in the India general information document, for this Andaman birding tour you will require a Restricted Area Permit (RAP). The Andaman Islands are a restricted area and all foreign nationals need a permit to visit. This permit is usually issued upon arrival at Port Blair Airport and is typically valid for 30 days. Please carefully read through the information provided in the permit for a full list of what is and isn't allowed (the permit states lots of what could be termed "common sense" rules, a couple of the main ones are mentioned below), and please feel free to ask our knowledgeable local guides if you require any clarifications when you meet them. The situation regarding the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) has been somewhat fluid. At present (September 2024), obtaining the RAP is more of a formality with nothing needing to be done prior to arrival. Upon your arrival at Port Blair airport, officials may ask you some questions regarding your stay and the places you intend to visit (this information will be emailed to you with your tour information documents ahead of departure). Immigration staff at the airport will then issue you with the RAP.

One of the most important rules in the RAP is that you don't interact with indigenous tribes. Certain indigenous tribes, like the Jarwa and Sentinelese found in the more remote areas, are protected by law. Any interaction, photography (even from a moving vehicle), or even attempting to visit areas inhabited by these tribes is strictly prohibited and illegal. The RAP specifies this, and other rules that must be abided by foreigners while visiting. If you ignore these

rules you could find yourself in serious trouble and the situation would be out of our control. It might also have implications for other people in the tour group, our tour leader, and local guides, so please ensure you follow to the letter all rules and instructions given.

DAILY ACTIVITIES, PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS, AND TOUR PACE

Our Andaman bird tour focusses on finding as many of the currently recognized International Ornithological Committee (IOC) endemic bird species, as well as those with a high potential to get elevated to endemic species status in the future. We also pay attention to what other taxonomic groups are doing (e.g. Handbook to the Birds of the World Alive (HBW Alive)/BirdLife International and Clements/eBird) in the region, as these may also become future IOC splits. Our aim is to give you the best value possible from the tour, which might include future armchair ticks, which everyone likes!

Our days will likely include early morning birding sessions (e.g. 05:00 – 11:00 hrs.), a break during the heat of the middle of the day (11:00 – 14:30/15:00 hrs.), followed by an afternoon and evening birding session (14:30/15:00 – 18:00 hrs.). There are several endemic nightbirds to go after in the Andaman Islands and on some evenings in the tour we will focus on these. Luckily, it is dark relatively early, so owling sessions can hopefully be completed by 20:00 hrs., but will continue as long as necessary (and we do have a few nights available for owling if required). It is likely that on the nights we do owling, we might have a later dinner to allow us to focus on the owls at the prime time for potential sightings.

Our birding will take us to pristine forest, where we will likely spend the majority of our time. We will bird at Chidyatapu Biological Park and Mount Harriet National Park, where the vast majority of our endemic target birds occur. We will also be sure to visit other habitats, such as the Sippihat (swamps and saltmarsh), North Wandoor, and other locations, where we will check waterbodies, swamps, mangrove forests, and mudflats for a wide assortment of exciting birds. Our birding activities will primarily be conducted on roads, trails, and forest tracks with varying terrain. The walks will range from easy, short strolls to slightly more moderate hikes, especially around areas like Mount Harriet. Although there is some elevation gain at Mount Harriet, where we might be birding up to around 1,200 feet (365 meters altitude), it is considered quite manageable. The peak of the mountain is 1,578 feet (481 meters).

HEALTH, VACCINATIONS, AND PESTS

The requirements for visiting the Andaman and Nicobar Islands currently (September 2024) appear to be the same as those required for entering India. Please refer to the details provided in the “Health, Vaccinations, and Pests” section of the India general information document for full recommendations. A great source of data is the “Travel Health Pro” website and information specific to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands can be seen here. Please also refer to the information on traveling to India/the Andaman Islands provided by your own government.

There is a low risk of Malaria in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Awareness of risk and bite avoidance is recommended, but, as for all medical scenarios, we recommend consulting your doctor or travel clinic to seek their professional advice, this information is just a guide.

The chances of leech encounters is considered low due to our Andaman bird tour occurring in the

dry season, however it is always best to carry some salt or leech socks as a precaution in case of unseasonable wet weather occurring in the lead up to, or during, our tour!

FOOD, DRINKS, AND MEALS

The food in the Andaman Islands pulls on inspiration from across India and the wider region. The Andamans are a paradise for seafood lovers, as the staple food includes rice, coconut, and lots of freshly harvested seafood from the oceans of the Bay of Bengal. The Andaman Islands are home to a wide variety of cuisine, with South India, Bengali, and Andhra influence. Some top food on the Andaman Islands include fish curry, macher jhol, chicken tikka masala, coconut prawn curry, barbequed (grilled) food, tandoori fish, grilled lobsters, squid fry, khadi crabs, and Amritsar kulcha (stuffed Indian bread).

Despite all of the delicious fish/seafood (and chicken) dishes on offer, it is possible to get vegetarian and vegan meals. Please do let us know of any allergies or dietary preferences as soon as possible (e.g. on your booking form), so we can accurately pass this information on to our team on the ground in advance. If you are unsure about the quintessential Indian cuisine, then you must try Indian ‘Thali food’, which is more like a cultural exploration, and makes for a complete meal itself. This traditional feast makes for the perfect assortment of delicious regional dishes on a single platter. Every region has its own take on thali too, so there’s always something different and interesting to try. Typically for the region, rice is the staple food in the Andaman Islands, with the addition of delicious breads like roti and naan as supplements. For vegans a chili curry is apparently a “must-try” dish, but only for spice-lovers!

There are usually western food options available for breakfast, consisting of familiar foods such as eggs, fruit, toast, and jam, as well as more local fare.

Please note that some meals may be taken “in the field” while out birding, and others may be taken in restaurants (so we may have boxed breakfasts and/or boxed lunches on some occasions). On some evenings our meals might be a bit later to allow us to spend the required time owling, so we can search for the region’s endemic nightbirds. If you require food/meals at a specific time (e.g. to coincide with taking of medication), we suggest you bring a supply of snacks, such as cereal/protein bars, as supplementary food options since meal times cannot be guaranteed to be regular during the tour.

ACCOMMODATION

The duration of our stay on the Andaman Islands will be spent at a comfortable hotel in Port Blair (hotel details and weblink will be provided in the final itinerary we send you). The hotel’s location is convenient for the airport, but also great for getting to and from the birding sites we will visit. The accommodation provides an enjoyable place to rest and refresh after time birding in the field, where it will be hot and humid. Our hotel features contemporary interiors and excellent service and all of the facilities one would expect from such a place. All rooms come with a desk, television, and private bathroom fitted with a shower (and free toiletries!), and all have air conditioning. Wi-Fi is available. The hotel has a restaurant, bar, room service, laundry service, and a fitness center.

ELECTRICITY

Power outages can occur in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, more so on the remote islands than where we will be based during this Andaman birdwatching tour (on South Andaman Island), but it doesn't hurt to be prepared for the worst-case scenario. We therefore suggest having a portable charging device (e.g. a power bank) to keep your phone etc. charged should a power cut happen (a flashlight/torch can also be helpful in this situation). Just make sure your power bank meets current airline regulations for travel and this should be packed in your hand (carry on) luggage, not your hold luggage.

COMMUNICATIONS

Airtel or Jio sim cards should work in Port Blair but there may not be signal (or only limited signal) in some of the areas we will be birding, so we advise you download whatever you might require as "available offline" (e.g. maps, travel guides, Merlin, etc.), before you arrive. Our accommodation in Port Blair, where we will be based for the four nights of the Andaman bird tour, has Wi-Fi.

TRANSPORTATION

On this Andaman birding tour we will be getting around in air-conditioned large cars, due to restrictions on busses/vans in some areas. We will also likely take a brief vehicle ferry ride a couple of times to move between Port Blair and northern birding sites (such as for birding at Mount Harriet), this will save time on longer and potentially more congested road routes.

The key Andaman birding sites we will visit are easily accessible from Port Blair, so we won't spend excessive time in vehicles, most sites will be between 30-60 minutes' drive from our accommodation base in Port Blair.

WEATHER/CLIMATE

The Andaman Islands have a tropical climate. The best time for birdwatching in the Andaman Islands is from October to April, when the weather is cooler and drier. The monsoon season (May to September) can bring heavy rains, making some areas difficult to access. Our Andaman birdwatching tour takes place in January or February, expect average temperatures of around 88°F (31°C) during the day and 72°F (22°C) at night at this time of the year. January and February are usually the drier months of the year, however, with the humidity levels, it will still feel muggy. We will likely have around 12 hours of daylight each day during the tour, with sunrise around 05:30/06:00 hrs. and sunset around 17:30/18:00 hrs. (which is usefully early, given we will have to spend time looking for owls at night).

CURRENCY, MONEY, AND TIPPING

As for the rest of India, the Indian Rupee (INR) is the official currency in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. ATMs are available in Port Blair (where we will be based for the duration of the tour), they may be infrequent away from the city, but this shouldn't pose a problem on this tour.

We would always recommend getting cash in India at your earliest convenience, so possibly at your airport of international entry, such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai etc. It's not uncommon for ATMs to be down or run out of cash, so getting in early can be good. Small denomination notes are useful for tipping (please refer to the "Tipping" section of the India general information document for an outline of tipping).



*A widespread species throughout Southeast Asia, we will look for the Andaman Island endemic subspecies of **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo** during our Andaman bird tour.*