

TRAVEL  
ADVENTURE

Chidiyatapu is home to stunning dive sites for both beginners and seasoned divers



In a world consumed by chaos, crowds, and the relentless tug of connectivity, solitude has become the most elusive of luxuries. And truly savouring meaningful indulgence often requires more than spending power—perhaps the nerve to abandon the map and venture beyond the familiar.

Recently, my curiosity won over convenience and drew me to Chidiyatapu —a quiet peninsula at the southernmost tip of South Andaman Island. The Andaman & Nicobar Archipelago, adrift nearly 1,200 kilometres from mainland India, nearer to the coasts of Myanmar and Thailand, already feels like India's last frontier. On its edge lies the so-called “Bird Island,” just 25 kilometres (a 45-minute drive) from Port Blair's Veer Savarkar International Airport, but seemingly a world away from the capital's bustle. The drive itself is a slow unfurling of emerald forests, peppered with glimpses of the sea.

Home to about 40 families, mostly farmers and fisherfolk, Chidiyatapu is where everyone knows each other, and life moves at the tempo of the sun and sea. Here, Wi-Fi falters, and time slows.

**A haven for divers**

Despite its languid pace, this sleepy hamlet has quietly earned a reputation among those who seek adventure in silence. Chidiyatapu draws divers from across the world—beginners chasing their first descent and seasoned professionals seeking uncharted waters. And at the heart of its emerging diving scene is Lacadives, a PADI 5-Star dive centre poised on a prime stretch of beach with an enviable view.



# A DOORWAY TO THE DEEP

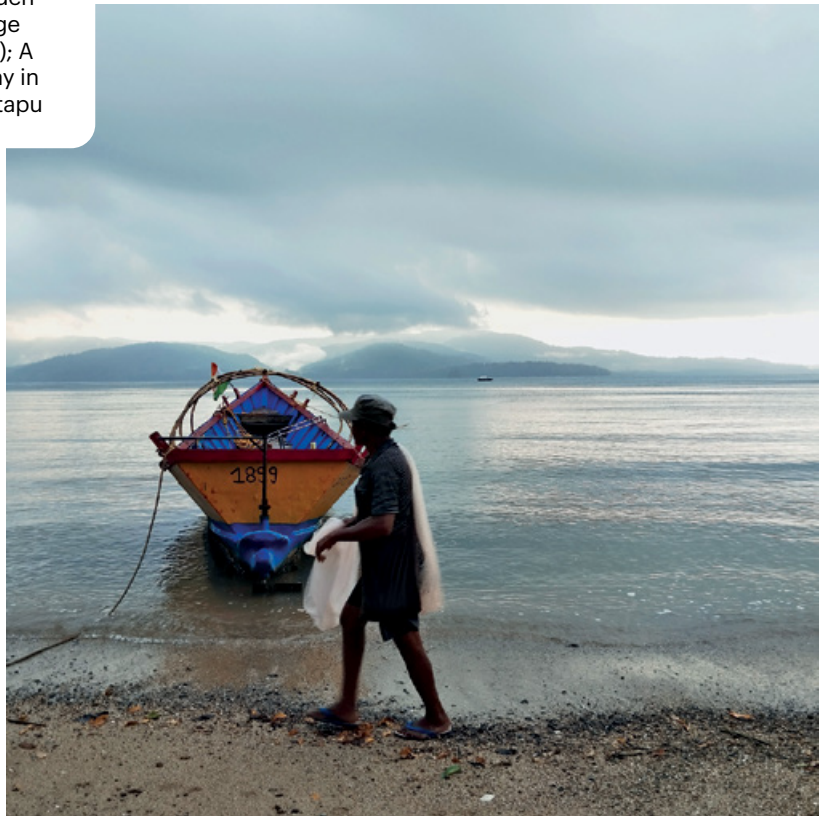
Havelock pulses with life, but Chidiyatapu offers the Andamans' quiet soul, granting the rare privilege of diving beneath the surface without another soul in sight. Here luxury isn't a room, it's an ocean.

Shikha Shah





Big Tree's sunlit wooden cottage (Above); A rainy day in Chidiyatapu



While Lacadives introduces travellers to the marvels of the underwater world, its sister property Big Tree Cottages, nestled in the middle of a reserve forest, just a short 15-minute stroll away, offers a quiet retreat on land—together creating a seamless experience of Andaman life, above and below the surface.

Both ventures are spearheaded by Sumer Verma, one of India's top divers and an award-winning underwater photographer, and Prahlad Kakar, the legendary adman who helped introduce scuba diving to India.

### Discovering the treasures of the Andaman Sea

In this quiet, almost-forgotten corner of the Andamans, open-water certification takes on a distinct charm. Training begins with confined-water dives in a pool or calm lagoon, where you learn essential scuba skills—assembling gear, breathing underwater, clearing your mask and regulator, controlling buoyancy, sharing air, and making safe ascents and descents. It's a quick reminder that diving is equal parts science and technique, far from the effortless ease seen on Instagram.

Soon, it's time for the open water. Each morning starts at the dive centre with a briefing on the day's objectives and dive site before you head out by boat for two dives.

Just ten minutes from the centre lies Fish Point, a shallow, calm reef off Mundapahar Beach. With a maximum depth of 11 metres (36 feet), it's ideal for beginners. Those first breaths underwater feel both exhilarating and unnerving—equalising takes practice, and a flicker of fear reminds you how unnatural this environment is.

A 30-minute surface interval lets your body recover before you plunge back in to explore another section of the reef. As your breathing steadies and confidence grows, the underwater world sharpens into focus. The Andaman Sea reveals itself as a living

BEST TIME TO SCUBA DIVE IN THE ANDAMANS  
Between early October and late May



THE ANDAMAN SEA REVEALS ITSELF AS A LIVING MASTERPIECE—CLOWNFISH NESTLED IN ANEMONES, MANTA RAYS GLIDING PAST, AND SCHOOLS OF SNAPPERS WEAVING THROUGH CORAL. ARTIFICIAL REEFS, NOW THRIVING ECOSYSTEMS, ADD NEW DIMENSIONS TO THE SEASCAPE.





## TRAVEL

### ADVENTURE

#### WORD TO THE WISE

Opting for a PADI-certified dive centre ensures your training is safe, structured, and globally recognised. Lacadives—a PADI 5-Star centre—meets you at your comfort level and trains you at your pace Their 4–5 day Open Water course starts at ₹28,000. Alternatively, experience Discover Scuba Diving (DSD) for ₹6,500. <https://www.lacadives.com> <https://www.padi.com>

#### STAY

If you prefer boutique stays, **Big Tree Cottages** offers eight charming, TV-free rooms housed within four duplex wooden cottages, each featuring a balcony overlooking a lush green canopy—perfect for curling up with a book and a cup of coffee. They serve freshly prepared meals and a warm, home-away-from-home atmosphere.

Tariff starts at ₹12,000 (includes breakfast) <https://bigtreecottages.in>

**Symphony Samudra Beachside Jungle Resort and Spa** combines natural beauty with refined luxury. The resort offers 85 rooms across five categories, an infinity pool used for confined diving sessions, and the scenic Sunset Lounge. Its restaurant serves dishes inspired by the flavours of the neighbouring countries of Burma, Thailand, and Indonesia.

Tariff starts at ₹9,200 per night (includes breakfast) <https://www.symphonyresorts.com>



The open-air Big Tree Café is the ideal place to savour the day's fresh catch, swap stories with dive buddies, or quietly relive your moments underwater.

masterpiece—clownfish nestled in anemones, manta rays gliding past, and schools of snappers weaving through coral. Artificial reefs, now thriving ecosystems, add new dimensions to the seascape.

The Andaman Islands' extensive coastline supports exceptional biodiversity: over 1,200 fish species, 350 echinoderms including starfish and sea urchins, and 1,000 molluscs such as octopus. Keep an eye out for dugongs, dolphins, sting and manta rays, turtles, sea snakes, and even the occasional whale. With 179 vibrant coral species, these reefs truly are the “tropical rainforests of the sea.”

The deeper you descend into the hushed, cobalt layers of the Andaman Sea, the world above fades away, revealing the wonders—and fragility—of its underwater ecosystems. Che Nala, or “Six Channels,” lies beneath a collapsed jetty, shaped by debris that forms a unique topography from 4 to 17 metres deep. Sunken tractor tyres offer shelter for fish, while coral-clad pillars attract macro life. Expect parrotfish, sweetlips, snappers, trevally, angelfish, and stingrays resting on sandy patches.

For new divers, few sites rival the awe of Parrot's Rock! Wedged between South Andaman and Rutland, this rocky cluster teems with parrotfish weaving through sweeping beds of purple soft corals. Sloping from 5 to 20 metres, it's home to gorgonians, moray eels, turtles, sea cucumbers, groupers, and scorpionfish. Barracudas flash by, clownfish peek from anemones, and triggerfish guard their nests. Strong drifts carry you through this underwater theatre—an unforgettable reminder to simply go with the flow.

#### Ocean to table

By the time you surface, expect to feel renewed, satisfied, and ravenous. Lunch no longer feels routine—it's a well-earned reward. The open-air Big Tree Café, with its cool red-oxide floors, gently sloping thatched roofs, and lush greenery, is the perfect spot to unwind. Meals are slow, deliberate affairs: everything is pre-ordered, and cooked in small batches from fresh, seasonal, local ingredients—many sourced from the on-site farm. You might dig into prawn khow suey fragrant with lemongrass and coconut, steamed fish wrapped in banana leaf, or a hearty bowl of tangy Malabar fish curry. The Andaman table is a delicious melting pot of South Indian spice, Bengali comfort, and the unmistakable influence of the sea. Breakfasts are just as inviting, with fresh smoothies, seasonal fruit, eggs made to order, and classic South Indian favourites.

#### Reflections at dusk

Evenings in Chidiyatapu unfold unhurriedly over steaming cups of chai as the sun slips below the horizon—often as early as 5 pm—painting the sky in soft oranges and pinks. A few tourists may wander past, but they disappear just as quickly, restoring the island's calm. It's the perfect moment to log your dives—whether in a notebook or on the PADI app—and trace your progress. Each entry reminds you how every breath underwater builds quiet confidence, and how the vast blue world that once felt foreign now feels liberating.

As reflective evenings ease into nights of clinking glasses, shared bites, and stories under a canopy of stars with the local dive community, you realise that you've learned more about island life than any guidebook could ever convey.

