

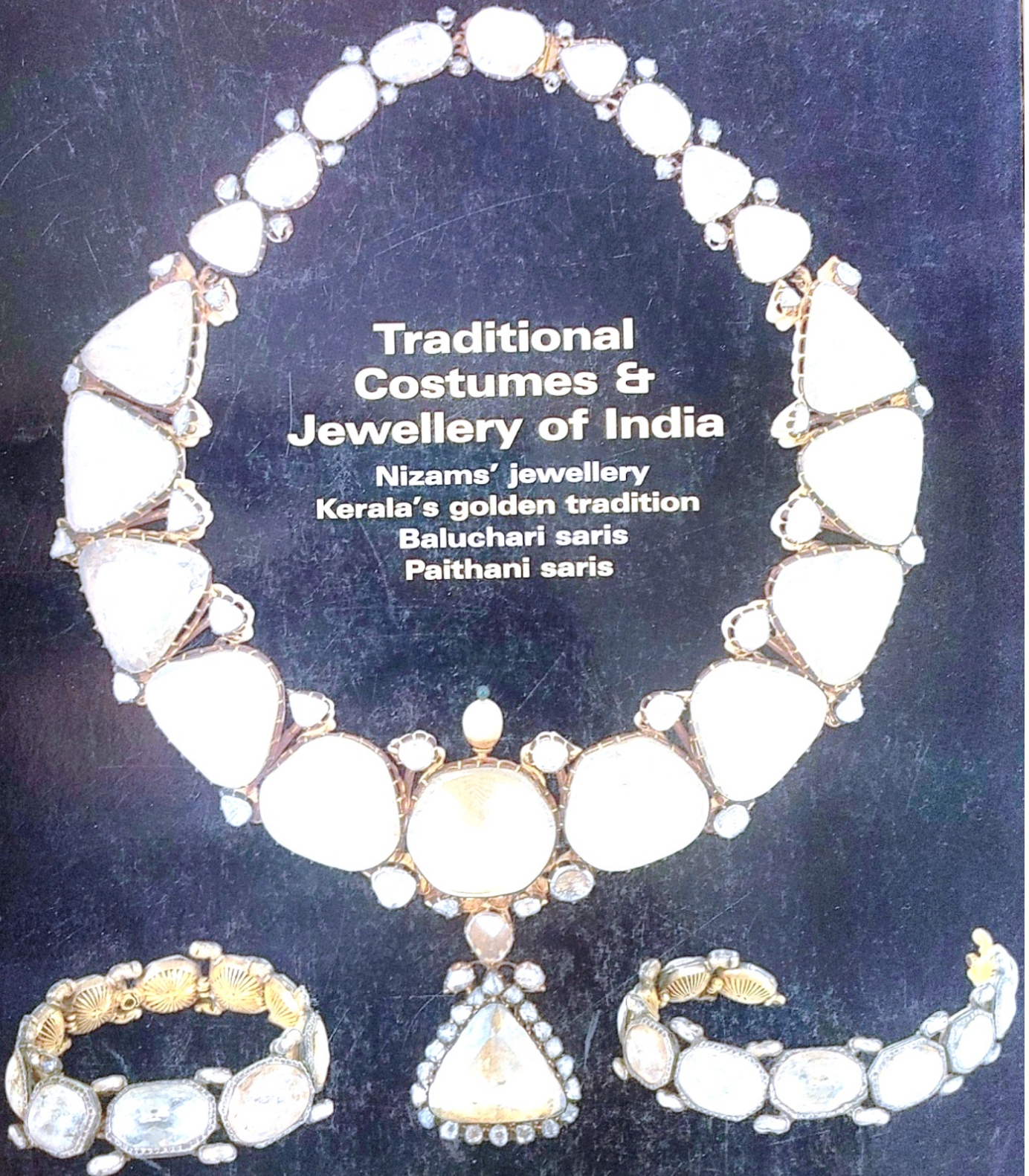
JETWININGS

FOR THE WELL-INFORMED TRAVELLER

OCTOBER 2005 • VOL 5 • ISSUE 10

Traditional Costumes & Jewellery of India

Nizams' jewellery
Kerala's golden tradition
Baluchari saris
Paithani saris



emerald and exotic

A holiday in the pristine Andaman Islands lingers in your memories, long after it is over.

text & photographs by Krishnan V



a trip to the Andamans requires a little more logistic planning than usual. This was my thought when, bags packed and camera equipment double-checked, we finally boarded our flight to Port Blair. As we flew over the islands, the pilot banked the aircraft to give us our very first glimpse of the turquoise blue waters and the dense green vegetation of the "Emerald Islands". It was unforgettable.

We halted for the night at the rather decent Hornbill Nest Resort. The next morning we would catch the ferry

for Neil Island. After depositing our luggage in our room, we headed for a quick bite at the Peerless Resort, a few miles down the road, with comfortable sitouts and a restaurant. Post-lunch, we headed to the sunset point at Chiriyatapu. It is a long drive and takes a good part of an hour to get there. The scenery en route, especially after one gets past Port Blair town, is simply breathtaking.

Sunset point

Chiriyatapu, which translates as Bird Island, is aptly named because of its

rather rich avian life. Just bear in mind that the sun tends to go down quite fast in these parts and it is a good idea to get to Chiriyatapu by early evening. Walk around in the sand, with the gentle waves lapping at your feet, with an incredibly golden sunset in the background. One feels at absolute peace with the world, transported away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. This was one sunset that we did not want to end.

Our next stop was the annual fair at Port Blair. The highlight of the fair was performances by folk dance troupes



from all over India. We were lucky to see a brilliant performance of the Chhau dance, which held us absolutely enthralled.

Edenic

Next morning we got up early to catch the ferry for Neil Island. Neil Island is about a two-hour ferry ride from Port Blair. The cab which was expected to be at our hotel by six thirty did not show up until almost seven thirty and we had to literally make a dash to catch the ferry. These ships are the

LEFT: Neil Island Jetty
ABOVE: Tall trees line the path from Pearl Resort, all the way to the sparkling sands

lifeline of the Andamans. They ferry food, personnel, people and mail between the islands. Ours was a basic ferry, with the decks full of cargo and people sitting wherever they could find some space. It had a sitting cabin hall, but we decided that the fresh salt spray in our faces would be much more enjoyable and decided to hang out on the foredeck.

Usually tourists prefer to go to Havelock Island since it has a relatively better tourist infrastructure and more beach hotels, but we decided to break away from the pack and explore Neil Island instead. Neil has only three "resorts"—the Tango Beach resort, Cocoon Huts and Pearl,

Soma shop

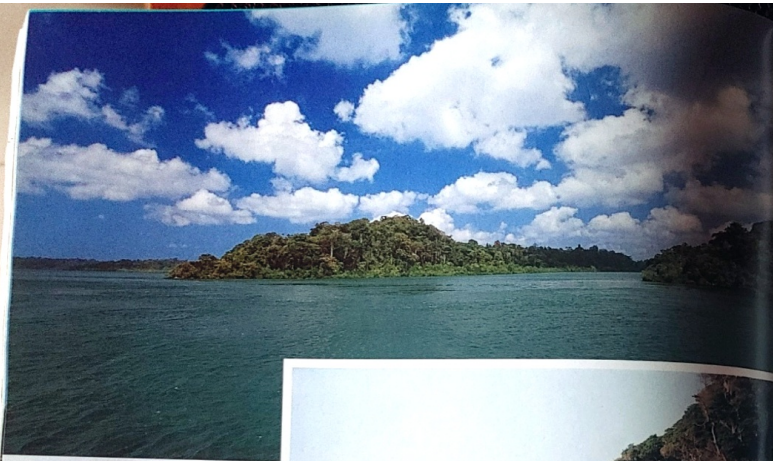


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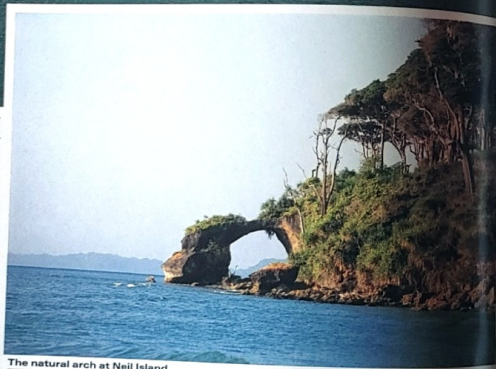


View from the ferry en route to Jolly Buoy Island

and we plumbed for the last. In my experience, the staff at the resorts in the Andamans is always very friendly and one can get simple but delectable food made to order. Frequent foreigner traffic to these spots has developed the culinary skills of the locals to suit international tastes, so don't hesitate to ask for your favourite 'foreign' dish...you may be pleasantly surprised!

A short walk through the tall trees that ring the resort lead us straight to the beach. Pristine white sand, crystal clear waters and not a soul in sight—it simply took our breath away. We walked in the crunchy sand, taking in the beauty of the evergreen forests and the myriad shapes and textures of logs and driftwood that dotted the beach.

The next morning, we went diving. As we launched off the boat into the depths of the ocean, the first thing that struck me was how cold the waters were! The current was strong and it took all my concentration to move in the required direction. The aquatic life at the dive site was incredible... but alas, before I knew it, the dive was over. A must see at Neil Island is the



The natural arch at Neil Island

natural arch. One can probably see it from the sea too, but the approach through the rocky coast is a treat for trekkers.

Frankly we did not feel like catching the ferry back to Port Blair at all, but then we had to pull ourselves away from paradise. As we approached Port Blair, we were welcomed by a school of dolphins, racing in front of the bow of the ship, holding young and old spellbound.

A date with history

The ferry ride to Jolly Buoy to see the

corals was a much-awaited event. Trips to these islands are controlled and rightly so. It helps preserve the fragile coral ecosystem from indifferent tourists. The boats leave in the morning and one can spend a few hours snorkelling before being herded back to Wandoor. Here again, the currents are quite strong and a few local guys swim and pull you along, while you hang on to an inflatable lifebuoy. The snorkel helps you to breathe in spite of being underwater, as you marvel at the beauty of the corals.

One of the must dos in Port Blair is

a visit to the Cellular Jail, intrinsically linked to the Indian freedom movement. The British used the islands as a penal colony, initially to hold regular criminals, and later to incarcerate political dissidents. For this purpose, they built the infamous Cellular Jail. The construction of the jail began in 1890 and was completed in 1908. The jail was built with seven wings, spreading out ironically like a seven-petalled flower. In its centre it had a tower with a turret. The tower connected the three-storey high wings with the isolated cells and hence the name Cellular Jail. Now, only three wings remain. Preserved as a memorial to the Indian freedom movement, whatever remains of the jail manages to convey a fair impression of the living hell it used to be. For a slice of history, do not miss the "Son et Lumiere" show here every evening, except on Sundays.

Seven days is just not enough to absorb these wonderful islands. Indeed, a trip to the Andamans requires a little more logistic planning than usual... ❧

FACTFILE

getting there

Jet Airways flies from Chennai to Port Blair daily.

best time to visit

October to March.

accommodation

Hotel Sinclairs Bay View (tel: 32937)

Peerless Resort (tel: 33462)

places to see

In Port Blair:

Chiriyatapu sunset (25 km from Port Blair), Cellular Jail, Jolly Buoy, Redskin Island, the corals

Madhuban (75 km by road/20 km by ferry and road from Port Blair):

This place is an exotic trekking area, north east of South Andaman.

Mount Harriet (55 km by road/15 km by ferry and road from Port Blair):

The highest peak in the South Andamans (365 metres high). One can trek upto Madhuban through a nature trail, glimpsing on the way rare birds, animals and butterflies.

Masterpieces

One created in marble
and other crafted in wool

The Taj and the Pashmina. They have stood the test of time through all these Centuries. In fact, the 600 year old shawl even predates the Taj by a couple of centuries! And the Shawl has evolved too, enriching itself, with the art and craft from various periods and places. With so much of history and sheer human genius crafted in to it, the shawl has been the preferred adornment of the Sultans, Mughals, Emperors, Counts and Lords & of course, the blue blooded jet setters of today. Ahujasons is proud to be associated with the Pashmina's grand revival. Isn't it time, you did too?

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