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# Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Physical Geography)

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# Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Physical Geography)

These islands aren’t really islands. They’re the peaks of a mountain range that sank beneath the sea, and one peak is still active enough to erupt.



Havelock Island, part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Photo: Dr. K. Vedhagiri, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, at a glance

A drowned mountain range in the Bay of Bengal, with one peak still active enough to erupt

01
A sunken range

The submerged extension of Myanmar’s Arakan Yoma mountains, not a coral formation like Lakshadweep.

02
Two groups, one channel

The Ten Degree Channel splits Andaman from Nicobar, between Little Andaman and Car Nicobar.

03
India’s only active volcano

Barren Island, formed by the same plate boundary that pushed these islands up.

04
Reshaped in 2004

The Indian Ocean tsunami killed over 2,000 people and sank Indira Point’s ground by 4.25 metres.

**Arakan Yoma**A mountain range in Myanmar; these islands are its submerged, still-visible peaks.
**Ten Degree Channel**Runs along 10°N, separating the Andaman group from the Nicobar group.
**PVTG**Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, a formal category for India’s most isolated tribal communities.

**Indira Point**On Great Nicobar, India's actual southernmost point, unlike mainland Kanyakumari.

## A Sunken Mountain Range

Must Know

### What are the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, geologically?

**The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the submerged extension of the Arakan Yoma mountain range of Myanmar.** Only the highest ridges of that drowned range stay above the sea, forming a chain of about 572 islands in the Bay of Bengal, of which only 38 are permanently inhabited. They sit where the Indian plate is being pushed under the Burma microplate, a convergent boundary that shapes almost everything else here. That origin sets them apart from Lakshadweep, which formed from coral growth on a submerged plateau, not a drowned mountain range. Andaman and Nicobar form a single Union Territory, with Port Blair, now renamed Sri Vijaya Puram, as its capital.

### What separates the Andaman group from the Nicobar group?

**The Ten Degree Channel, running along 10°N latitude, separates the Andaman group in the north from the Nicobar group in the south.** Specifically, it runs between Little Andaman, the southernmost Andaman island, and Car Nicobar, the northernmost Nicobar island. It's a different channel from the Gulf of Mannar or Palk Strait, which sit near Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, not here. Saddle Peak, on North Andaman at about 733 metres, is the highest point in the whole group, taller than Mount Thuillier's 642 metres on Great Nicobar, an easy pair to mix up.

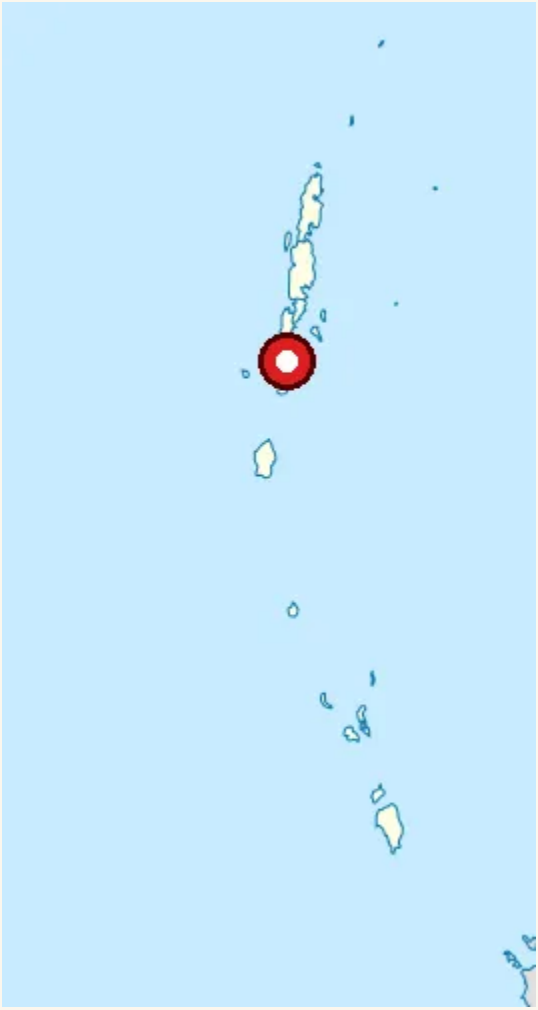
**Quick check 1.** Q1. True or False: geologically, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the submerged extension of the Arakan Yoma mountain range of Myanmar. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

**Quick check 2.** Q2. True or False: the Ten Degree Channel separates Little Andaman from Car Nicobar, and Saddle Peak on North Andaman is the highest point in the whole group. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## India’s Only Active Volcano

Good to Know

## What holds India’s only confirmed active volcano?



The Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

**Barren Island, in the Andaman group, holds India’s only confirmed active volcano.** That volcanic activity comes from the same plate boundary that pushed the islands up in the first place. The Andaman and Nicobar Command, headquartered at Port Blair, is India’s first and only tri-service theatre command, combining the Army, Navy, and Air

Force under one officer. It was set up in 2001, after the Kargil War exposed gaps in service coordination, specifically to watch over the Strait of Malacca approach. It is not a British-era creation, whatever some exam options claim.

**Quick check 3.** Q3. True or False: Barren Island, in the Andaman group, holds India's only confirmed active volcano. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

**Think it through, before reading on.** An exam question lists four "peaks of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands": Saddle Peak, Mount Thuillier, Mount Diavolo, and Lhotse. Which one doesn't belong?

**Show the explanation**

Lhotse. Saddle Peak, Mount Thuillier, and Mount Diavolo are all genuine island peaks. Lhotse sits on the Nepal-Tibet border in the Himalayas, with no connection to these islands at all. Exams slip in a real but unrelated peak, betting you won't notice.

Exam Point of View

## Test Yourself

**Remember the trap.** Anchor each real peak to its island, Saddle Peak to North Andaman and Thuillier to Great Nicobar, so a fake Himalayan name stands out immediately.

## The 2004 Tsunami and Its Aftermath

Great to Know

### What did the 2004 tsunami do to these islands?

**On 26 December 2004, an undersea megathrust earthquake off Sumatra sent a tsunami into the islands, killing over 2,000 people and leaving roughly 40,000 homeless.** In the southern Nicobar Islands, the tsunami reached heights of up to 15 metres. That earthquake permanently shifted parts of the coastline, sinking some areas and raising others, along the same fault that feeds Barren Island's volcano. Indira Point, on Great Nicobar, India's southernmost point, was one of the most striking casualties: the ground under its lighthouse sank by about 4.25 metres, leaving much of the tower standing in seawater. The original lighthouse was abandoned unmanned after the disaster, and a new one finally became operational in 2018.

## Who lives on these islands, and how did the British use their isolation?

The islands' indigenous groups include the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa, and Sentinelese in the Andamans, and the Nicobarese and Shompen in the Nicobars. The Sentinelese, on North Sentinel Island, remain almost entirely uncontacted, and outside visits there are legally prohibited. Between 1896 and 1906, the British built the Cellular Jail at Port Blair to exploit this same remoteness, earning it the name "Kala Pani," or black waters. It later held freedom fighters including Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, cut off from the mainland by the same sea that isolates these islands' tribes today. The jail now stands as a national memorial.

**Quick check 4.** Q4. True or False: the 26 December 2004 tsunami killed over 2,000 people in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

**Quick check 5.** Q5. True or False: the land around Indira Point subsided by about 4.25 metres during the 2004 earthquake. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

**Quick check 6.** Q6. True or False: all six tribal groups of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, including the Nicobarese, are classified as PVTGs. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

# Current Affairs

Current Affairs

## What cleared its last hurdle here in 2026?

In February 2026, the National Green Tribunal cleared the Great Nicobar Island Development Project, dismissing petitions that sought to stall it. **Its centrepiece is a container transshipment port at Galathea Bay, on Great Nicobar, just 40 nautical miles from the Strait of Malacca shipping route.** Here's why it matters here: Galathea Bay sits at the foot of Mount Thuillier, the same Nicobar peak this article's opening section already names. (Source: The Tribune, February 2026)

## Quick Q&A

What are the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, geologically?

The submerged extension of Myanmar's Arakan Yoma mountain range.

What separates the Andaman group from the Nicobar group?

The Ten Degree Channel, between Little Andaman and Car Nicobar.

Where is India's only active volcano?

Barren Island, in the Andaman group.

What happened here on 26 December 2004?

A tsunami from an undersea earthquake off Sumatra killed over 2,000 people and reshaped the coastline.

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## ✅ MCQ on The Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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## Practice MCQs

**1. Geologically, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are best described as what?**

**A.** A coral atoll built up on a submerged plateau

**B.** A cluster of volcanic islands unrelated to any mainland range

**C.** A delta formation built by Bay of Bengal river silt

**D.** The submerged extension of the Arakan Yoma mountain range of Myanmar

See answer ↓

**2. What separates the Andaman group of islands from the Nicobar group, and which is the highest point in the whole group?**

**A.** The Eight Degree Channel; Mount Harriet, about 383 metres, on South Andaman

**B.** The Ten Degree Channel; Saddle Peak, about 733 metres, on North Andaman

**C.** The Palk Strait; Saddle Peak, about 733 metres, on North Andaman

**D.** The Ten Degree Channel; Mount Thullier, about 642 metres, on Great Nicobar

See answer ↓

**3. Barren Island, in the Andaman Sea, holds which distinction?**

**A.** It is India's only confirmed active volcano

**B.** It is India's most densely populated island

**C.** It is India's largest coral atoll

**D.** It is India's highest island peak

See answer ↓

**4. What major event on 26 December 2004 struck the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and roughly how many people died as a result?**

**A.** A cyclone from the Bay of Bengal, killing over 1,000 people

**B.** A volcanic eruption on Barren Island, killing over 500 people

**C.** An undersea megathrust earthquake off Sumatra triggered a tsunami, killing over 2,000 people

**D.** A landslide following heavy monsoon rain, killing over 300 people

See answer ↓

**5. By roughly how much did the land around Indira Point subside during the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami?**

**A.** About 10 metres

**B.** About 15 metres

**C.** About 0.5 metres

**D.** About 4.25 metres

See answer ↓

**6. Of the six tribal groups in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which one is NOT classified as a PVTG?**

**A.** Sentinelese

**B.** Nicobarese

**C.** Onge

**D.** Jarawa

See answer ↓

# Answer Key

1. **D.** The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are geologically the submerged extension of the Arakan Yoma mountain range of Myanmar, with only the highest ridges staying above the sea. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** The Ten Degree Channel separates the Andaman group from the Nicobar group; Saddle Peak on North Andaman, about 733 metres, is the whole group's highest point. ↑ Q2
3. **A.** Barren Island, in the Andaman Sea, is India's only confirmed active volcano, and South Asia's only one too. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** On 26 December 2004, an undersea megathrust earthquake off Sumatra triggered a tsunami that struck the islands, killing over 2,000 people and leaving roughly 40,000 homeless. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** The correct answer is **About 4.25 metres**. A survey concluded that the southern end of Great Nicobar subsided by this much in 2004. The lighthouse tower there now stands with 4.25 m under the sea. The other options are far from the measured value. Memory hook: 2004 sank the south by 4.25 m. ↑ Q5
6. **B.**
   The Nicobarese are the one group of the six that is not a PVTG. They number about 27,000. The Jarawa, Sentinelese and Onge are PVTGs, along with the Great Andamanese and Shompen.
   ↑ Q6

## Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3
4. **True.** ↑ 4
5. **True.** ↑ 5
6. **False.** ↑ 6

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