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Lakshadweep Islands (Physical Geography)

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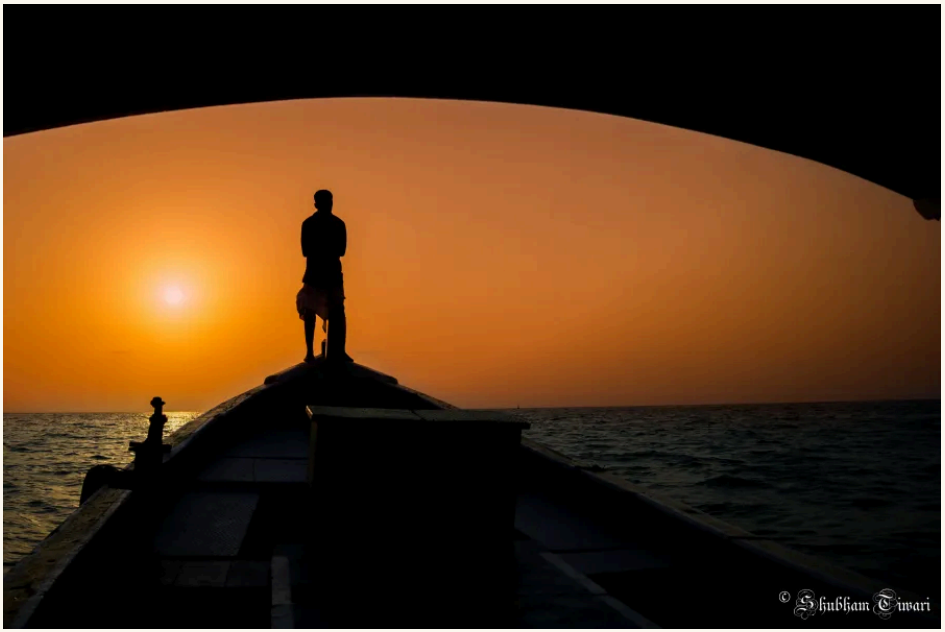
Lakshadweep Islands (Physical Geography)

India’s smallest Union Territory formed a completely different way than its island cousin in the Bay of Bengal. No sunken mountains here, just coral, growing for millions of years.



Kavaratti Island, the capital of Lakshadweep. Photo: The.chhayachitrakar, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Lakshadweep, at a glance

A name that means “a hundred thousand islands,” on a territory built entirely from coral

01
Just 36 islands

India’s smallest Union Territory by land, about 32 square kilometres in total.

02
Built from coral

Formed by coral growth, unlike the Andaman and Nicobar Islands’ sunken mountain range.

03
A drowned volcano’s trace

Sits on the Laccadive-Chagos Ridge, believed to be the same Reunion hotspot that formed the Deccan Traps.

04
Renamed in 1973

Once called the Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi Islands, before taking its current name.

AtollA ring-shaped coral reef enclosing a lagoon, left behind after a volcanic island sinks.
Subsidence theory Darwin’s explanation for atoll formation: coral keeps growing upward as its island slowly sinks.
Laccadive-Chagos Ridge The submarine ridge Lakshadweep sits on, also carrying the Maldives and Chagos Archipelago.

Nine Degree Channel Separates Minicoy Island from the main Lakshadweep group, including the Amindivi Islands.

India’s Smallest Union Territory

Must Know

How big is Lakshadweep, really?

“Lakshadweep” means “a hundred thousand islands” in both Sanskrit and Malayalam, but the actual territory has just 36 islands. It is India’s smallest Union Territory, with a total land area of only about 32 square kilometres. Lakshadweep is a group of coral islands in the Arabian Sea, about 220 miles west of the Malabar Coast. Kavaratti is its capital, and one of only 10 inhabited islands out of the 36 total.

What does the archipelago actually contain?

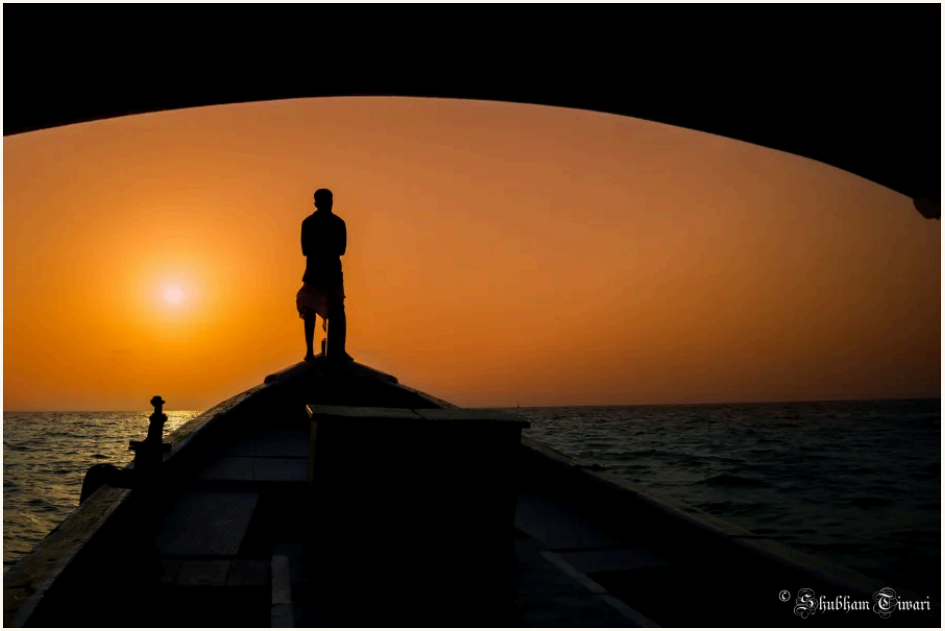
The archipelago includes 12 atolls, 3 reefs, and 5 submerged banks, spread across roughly 30,000 square kilometres of sea. That huge sea area against just 32 sq km of land shows how little of this Union Territory sits above water. It is administered directly, with no district-level state government layer, and only around 65,000 people live here, making it India’s least populous Union Territory too.

> **Quick check 1.** Q1. True or False: Lakshadweep, India’s smallest Union Territory, has a total land area of roughly 32 square kilometres. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How an Atoll Actually Forms

Good to Know

How is Lakshadweep's origin different from the Andaman Islands?



A coral lagoon near Kavaratti, Lakshadweep.

Lakshadweep's islands formed from coral growth, not from a sunken mountain range, the key difference from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Charles Darwin's subsidence theory explains how atolls like these typically form: a fringing reef grows around a volcanic island, then the island slowly sinks. The coral keeps growing upward as the island sinks, until only a ring-shaped reef around a lagoon remains, the volcanic peak long gone underwater.

What do the islands themselves look like?

The islands are flat, with no hills or rivers at all, and their highest point is only about 5 metres above sea level. Andrott, the largest island, is just 4.84 kilometres long. This flatness makes the islands unusually exposed

to sea-level rise and storm surge, with almost no natural high ground to retreat to. Pitti, a tiny uninhabited coral islet, is kept deliberately free of people, protected as a bird and turtle nesting sanctuary.

Quick check 2. Q2. True or False: Lakshadweep's islands formed from coral growth, unlike the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are the exposed peaks of a submerged mountain range. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 3. Q3. True or False: according to Darwin's subsidence theory, coral keeps growing upward as a volcanic island sinks, eventually leaving a ring-shaped reef around a lagoon. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Think it through, before reading on. Lakshadweep sits far west of the mainland, and Andaman and Nicobar sit far east. So do these territories run on their own local time zones?

Show the explanation

No. Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar, and the mainland all share one single Indian Standard Time, despite the huge east-west spread. A second trap sits right next to this one: IST is often misstated as behind GMT, when it is actually five and a half hours ahead.

Exam Point of View

Test Yourself

Remember the trap. One country, one clock: Lakshadweep and Andaman-Nicobar both run on IST, and IST sits ahead of GMT, not behind it.

A Volcanic Trace With No Volcano Left

Great to Know

What lies beneath Lakshadweep's coral?

Lakshadweep sits on the Laccadive-Chagos Ridge, a submarine ridge that also carries the Maldives and the Chagos Archipelago further south. Geologists believe this ridge is the volcanic trace of the same Reunion hotspot that formed the Deccan Traps, left behind as India drifted north over it. The ridge formed as India separated first from Madagascar, then later from the Seychelles, tens of millions of years ago.

Why does Minicoy feel so different from the rest of Lakshadweep?

Minicoy, Lakshadweep's southernmost island, sits far closer to the Maldives than to the rest of the archipelago, and it shows. Its people speak Mahl, a dialect of the same Dhivehi language spoken in the Maldives, not Malayalam like most of Lakshadweep. It also follows matrilineal inheritance, with women owning property and heading households. The Nine Degree Channel separates Minicoy from the main Lakshadweep group, including the Amindivi Islands.

Quick check 4. Q4. True or False: Lakshadweep sits on the Laccadive-Chagos Ridge, believed to be the volcanic trace of the same Reunion hotspot that formed the Deccan Traps. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 5. Q5. True or False: the Nine Degree Channel separates Minicoy Island from the main Lakshadweep group, including the Amindivi Islands. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 6. Q6. True or False: the territory was renamed from the Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi Islands to Lakshadweep in 1956. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Current Affairs

Current Affairs

What new way of reaching these islands began in 2026?

In May 2026, India ran its first seaplane trials between Kochi and Lakshadweep, touching down on island lagoons at Agatti, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Kadmat, and Kiltan. **Most of these islands are too small and too flat for a conventional runway, so a lagoon becomes the only usable landing strip.** Here's why it matters here: it's a direct consequence of this article's own flatness section, no hills, no long islands, nowhere to build a proper airport. Until recently, Agatti was the only island with an airstrip at all, and every other island depended on a day-long ship journey from Kochi. (Source: The Week, May 2026)

Quick Q&A

How big is Lakshadweep?

About 32 square kilometres of land, India's smallest Union Territory.

How did Lakshadweep's islands form?

From coral growth around a sinking volcanic island, unlike Andaman and Nicobar's sunken mountain range.

What ridge does Lakshadweep sit on?

The Laccadive-Chagos Ridge, believed to trace the same hotspot that formed the Deccan Traps.

Why is Minicoy culturally different from the rest of Lakshadweep?

It sits closer to the Maldives, and its people speak Mahl and follow matrilineal inheritance.

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✅ MCQ on Lakshadweep

🎲 More Indian Geography Practice

Practice MCQs

1. Lakshadweep is India's smallest Union Territory, with a total land area of roughly how much?

A. 320 square kilometres

B. 3,200 square kilometres

C. 32 square kilometres

D. 32,000 square kilometres

See answer ↓

2. How does Lakshadweep's geological origin fundamentally differ from that of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands?

A. Both formed from coral growth, at different depths in the Bay of Bengal

B. Both formed from the same volcanic hotspot at the same geological time

C. Lakshadweep formed from coral growth; Andaman and Nicobar are the exposed peaks of a submerged mountain range

D. Lakshadweep formed from a submerged mountain range; Andaman and Nicobar formed from coral growth

See answer ↓

3. According to Darwin's subsidence theory, how does a coral atoll like those in Lakshadweep typically form?

A. A volcanic island erupts repeatedly, and each eruption layer becomes a new coral ring

B. A fringing reef grows around a sinking volcanic island; coral keeps growing upward, leaving a ring-shaped reef around a lagoon once the island submerges

C. Coral spontaneously crystallizes in open ocean water with no island present at all

D. Wind and waves carve a ring shape directly into solid volcanic rock

See answer ↓

4. Lakshadweep sits on which submarine ridge, and what is that ridge believed to be geologically?

A. The Laccadive-Chagos Ridge, believed to be the volcanic trace of the Reunion hotspot

B. The Carlsberg Ridge, believed to be an active mid-ocean spreading centre

C. The Ninety East Ridge, believed to be an extension of the Himalayan fold system

D. The Chagos-Laccadive Ridge, believed to be a fragment of the Deccan Traps that broke off and drifted south

See answer ↓

5. Lakshadweep was originally named the Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi Islands. In which year was it renamed Lakshadweep?

A. 1956

B. 1963

C. 1973

D. 1991

See answer ↓

6. The Nine Degree Channel separates Minicoy Island from which other island group?

A. South Andaman

B. The main Lakshadweep group, including the Amindivi Islands

C. Sri Lanka

D. Car Nicobar

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** Lakshadweep is India's smallest Union Territory, with a total land area of only about 32 square kilometres, though scattered over 30,000 sq km of sea. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** Lakshadweep's islands formed from coral growth on a submarine ridge, while the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the exposed peaks of a submerged mountain range — two very different origins. ↑ Q2
3. **B.** Darwin's subsidence theory holds that a fringing reef forms around a volcanic island; as the island slowly sinks, coral growth keeps pace, eventually leaving a ring-shaped atoll reef around a lagoon once the island is fully submerged. ↑ Q3
4. **A.** Lakshadweep sits on the Laccadive-Chagos Ridge, believed to be the volcanic trace of the Reunion hotspot, left behind as India drifted north over it after separating from Madagascar and the Seychelles. ↑ Q4
5. **C.** Lakshadweep became a Union Territory in 1956, and was renamed from the Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi Islands to Lakshadweep in 1973. ↑ Q5
6. **B.** The Nine Degree Channel separates Minicoy Island, at the southern end of Lakshadweep, from the main Lakshadweep group further north, including the Amindivi Islands. ↑ 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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