



The Infiniti live-aboard yacht. **Below:** Deep-sea diving off the Andaman islands.

ADVENTURE

DIVING IN THE ANDAMANS

The virgin islands of Andamans await acquaintance as divers head to its uncharted corners to explore the pristine waters and the life it inhabits. By Taru Bahl



The warm, tropical waters of the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean are fast emerging as the preferred playground for diving enthusiasts. The islands that nestle in the Bay of Bengal are amongst the last frontiers in the world with minimal human footprint, only because they have been isolated from the world. With barely 26 of 576 islands inhabited, these ‘invisible islands’ are now seeing sporting activity, thanks to Indian government’s go-ahead to ‘environmentally conscious tourism’.

Capitalising on an early mover advantage are Sunil and Vismaya Firodia Bakshi, a Mumbai-based husband-wife duo, who amongst other things, discovered that love also meant diving

and surfing together. Taking their passion for diving to another level, they have positioned India on the international deep-sea diving map. After spending 18 months building the vessel in Thailand (a country with considerable experience of creating live-aboard vessels) and getting certifications in place, ‘Infiniti Live—aboard’ was launched last year as the country’s first scuba diving luxury passenger vessel in the Andamans.

Explore Treasure Islands

According to Sunil, “Some of the best diving in the Andamans take place at the volcanic islands of Barren (active) and Narcondam (dormant), and other uninhabited islands such as Passage Island

and Sisters Island. En-route, there is a good chance of a diver encountering whales, Manta rays, sharks, dugongs, dolphins and sting rays.

Beneath the waves, lie reefs barely touched and seen by other divers. Featuring several unique diving attractions including volcanic diving, frontier diving and bioluminescent night diving, there is much to choose from for both experienced and amateur divers.

On a Search Expedition

Imagine the thrill of stumbling upon a shipwrecked in the depths of the ocean, parts of it preserved naturally for decades, with thriving underwater artificial reefs and a vibrant marine life. And to know the

you can actually undertake a specialised wreck diving trip, a special form of a scuba diving that allows you to explore shipwrecks that have sunk into the ocean, unravelling their history, which is at once both enigmatic and tragic. Popular sites for wreck diving in the Andamans are 'Inket wreck' at Duncan Island and 'MV Mars' near Havelock Island.

Inket, a Japanese ship that sank during World War II valiantly displays its bow resting on its starboard side with hatches and cargo hold and an enormous propeller at the stern, sitting upright in 18 metres of water. MV Mars, a small fishing boat sank during a storm in 2006, coming to rest on the sandy bottom just off the reef, in 15 metres of water. The latter is a comparatively easy dive, ideal for students and beginners. Infiniti trains its divers in alternative finning methods, buoyancy control, and air management, and use guidelines and reels before setting them off on the wreck search expedition.

Calling Surfers

With waves breaking over shallow, sharp reefs, some of the popular ones to surf include Kumari Point, a long, fast, righthand barrel over reef in an isolated location on Little Andaman; Muddys, a long, rippable, punchy lefthand reef break; Jarawa Point, a rippable lefthander with limited land access on Little Andaman; Jackson Creek, another lefthand reef break on Little Andaman, Corbyn's Bay and Totem Reef.

For Sunil, who is an industrial engineer by profession, Infiniti Live—aboard has been a passion project. Come 2017, he plans to have similar vessels up and running in Lakshwadeep's coral islands and Gulf of Munnar. According to him, the last five years have seen rapid growth in the diving scene in India. Infiniti, by virtue of being an ocean going vessel has an advantage over other land-based operations. If their first year is any indication, this is one sport to watch out for, drawing as many Indians as foreign diving enthusiasts. So does one have to be fit, sporty, and young to go deep-sea diving? Sunil assures, "You do not have to be at the peak of your fitness to be a scuba diver. It is actually a bonding sport and a great way for generations to relax and bond—grandparents, parents, and kids."+



INFINITI FACT FILE

IDEAL TIME

November to April for diving, and February to April for surfing.

GETTING THERE

Fly in from Kolkatta or Chennai to Port Blair from where Infiniti's team will fetch and take you straight to the vessel, setting sail without much ado.

THE LIVE-ABOARD ADVANTAGE

The brand new 39 metres live-aboard vessel has four decks, eight guest rooms, lounges, an onboard crew, guest rooms with en-suite bathrooms, kitchen, diving platform, indoor dining room, large sun deck and indoor/outdoor lounge.

CERTIFICATIONS

Take the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certification (five days) in September-October and avail tie-ups with leading dive clubs in Mumbai, Pune, and Bengaluru.

FINANCIALS

For a 5 to 7 day trip, the cost is approximately ₹75,000.



Clockwise from top: The indoor lounge in Infiniti; A view off the coast of Duncan Island; The Grotto dive site; the outdoor lounge on Infiniti.