

Ten of the islands are inhabited. At the 2011 Indian census, the population of the Union Territory was 64,473. The majority of the indigenous population is Muslim and most of them belong to the Shafi school of the Sunni sect. The islanders are ethnically similar to the Malayali people of the nearest Indian state of Kerala. Most of the population speaks Malayalam with Mahi (or Mahl) being the most spoken language in Minicoy island. The islands are served by an airport on the Agatti island. The main occupation of the people is fishing and coconut cultivation, with tuna being the main item of export.

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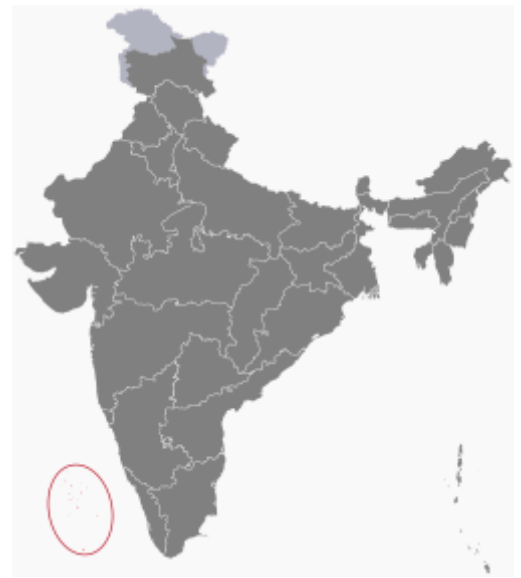
History

Lakshadweep

Union Territory



Minicoy, an island in Southeastern Lakshadweep



Coordinates: 10.6°N 72.6°E

Country	 India
Formation	1 November 1956
Capital	Kavaratti
Government	
• Administrator	Farooq Khan IPS (Retd.)
• MP	Mohammed Faizal P. P. (Nationalist Congress Party)
Area	
• Total	32.69 km ² (12.62 sq mi)
Area rank	36th
Population (2011 Census)	
• Total	65,473
• Density	2,000/km ² (5,200/sq mi)

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References

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Languages ^[1]	
• Official	Malayalam, English
• Spoken	Dhivehi Language (Mahl)
• Additional	Hindi
Ethnicity	
• Ethnic groups	≈83% Malayali ≈17% Mahls
Time zone	IST (UTC+5:30)
ISO 3166 code	IN-LD
Vehicle registration	LD,LH
No. of districts	1
Largest city	Andrott
HDI	▲ 0.796
HDI Year	2005
HDI Category	high
Literacy	91.85%
Website	www.lakshadweep.gov.in

History

A mention of the region in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, by an anonymous author, is one of the earliest references.^[6] There are references to the control of the islands by the Cheras in the Sangam *Patirruppattu*. Local traditions and legends attribute the first settlement on these islands to the period of Cheraman Perumal, the last Chera king of Kerala.^[7] The oldest inhabited islands in the group are Amini, Kalpeni Andrott, Kavaratti, and Agatti. Archaeological evidence suggests that Buddhism prevailed in the region during the fifth and sixth centuries AD.^[6] According to popular tradition, Islam was brought to Lakshadweep by an Arab named Ubaidulla in AD 661. His grave is located on the island of Andrott.^[8] During the 11th century, the islands came under the rule of the Late Cholas^[6] and subsequently the Kingdom of Cannanore.^[9]

In the 16th century, the Portuguese ruled the seas between Ormuz and the Malabar Coast and south to Ceylon. As early as 1498, they took control of the archipelago (called Laquedivas by them), later on to exploit coir production, until the islanders expelled them in 1545. In the 17th century, the islands came under the rule of Ali Rajahs/Arakkal Bheevi of Kannur, who received them as a gift from the Kolathiris. The islands are also mentioned in great detail in the stories of the Arab traveller Ibn Batuta.^[10]

The Aminidivi group of islands (Androth, Amini, Kadmat, Kiltan, Chetlath, and Bitra) came under the rule of Tipu Sultan in 1787. They passed to British control after the Third Anglo-Mysore War and were attached to South Canara. The rest of the islands came under the suzerainty of the Arakkal family of Cannanore in return for a payment of annual tribute. The British took over the administration of those islands for nonpayment of arrears. These islands were attached to the Malabar district of the Madras Presidency during the British Raj.^[11]

Independent India

On 1 November 1956, during the reorganization of Indian states, the Lakshadweep islands were separated from Madras organized into a separate union territory for administrative purposes. The new territory was called Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi Islands before adopting the Lakshadweep name on 1 November 1973.^[12]

To safeguard India's vital shipping lanes to the Middle East, and the growing relevance of the islands in security considerations, an Indian Navy base, INS Dweepprakash, was commissioned on Kavaratti island.^[13]

A DX-pedition (VU7AG) by amateur radio operators was run on Agatti Island during November 2013.

Geography

Lakshadweep is an archipelago of twelve atolls, three reefs and five submerged banks, with a total of about thirty-nine islands and islets. The reefs are in fact also atolls, although mostly submerged, with only small unvegetated sand cays above the high-water mark. The submerged banks are sunken atolls. Almost all the atolls have a northeast-southwest orientation with the islands lying on the eastern rim, and a mostly submerged reef on the western rim, enclosing a lagoon. It has 10 inhabited islands, 17 uninhabited islands, attached islets, 4 newly formed islets and 5 submerged reefs.^[14]

The main islands are Kavaratti, Agatti, Minicoy, and Amini. The total population of the territory is 60,595 according to the 2001 census. Agatti has an airport with direct flights from Kochi.

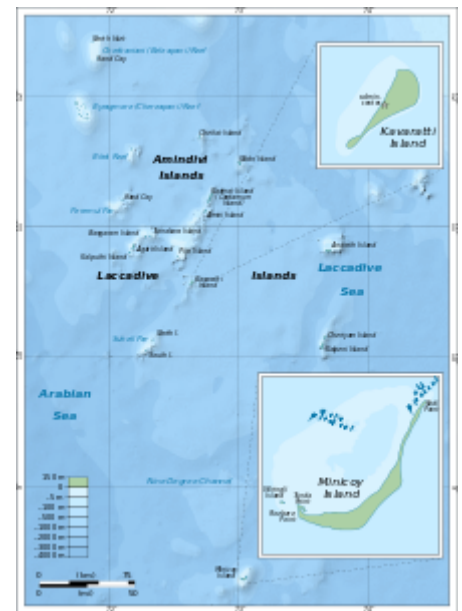
India's Coral Islands

The Aminidivi subgroup of islands (consisting of Amini, Keltan, Chetlat, Kadamat, Bitra, and Perumal Par) and the Laccadive subgroup of islands (comprising mainly Androth, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Pitti, and Suheli Par), both subgroups having a submarine connection between them through Pitti Bank. Together with Minicoy Island, a lonely atoll located at the southern end of the 200-km-broad Nine Degree Channel, they form the Coral Islands of India in the Arabian Sea. All these islands have been built up by corals and have fringing coral reefs very close to their shores.^[15]

Two banks further north are not considered part of the group:

- Angria Bank
- Adas Bank

The atolls, reefs, and banks are listed from north to south in the table:



Lakshadweep Islands map



One of the uninhabited islands in Bangaram Atoll, Lakshadweep



Satellite picture showing the atolls of the Lakshadweep except for Minicoy



Worms-eye view of the lighthouse in
Minicoy Island

<u>Atoll/Reef/Bank</u> <u>(alternate name)</u>	<u>type</u>	<u>Land</u> <u>Area</u> <u>(km²)</u>	<u>Lagoon</u> <u>Area</u> <u>(km²)</u>	<u>No. of</u> <u>islets</u>	<u>Pop.</u> <u>Census</u> <u>2001</u>	<u>Location</u>
Aminidivi Islands						
<u>Cora Divh</u>	bank	-	339.45	-	-	<u>13°42'N 72°11'E</u>
<u>Sesostri Bank</u>	bank	-	388.53	-	-	<u>13°08'N 72°00'E</u>
<u>Bassas de Pedro</u> <u>(Munyal Par, Padua Bank)</u>	bank	-	2474.33	-	-	<u>13°07'N 72°25'E</u>
<u>Cherbaniani Reef</u> <u>(Beleapani Reef)</u>	reef	0.01	172.59	2	-	<u>12°18'N 71°53'E</u>
<u>Byramgore Reef</u> <u>(Chereapani)</u>	reef	0.01	57.46	1	-	<u>11°54'N 71°49'E</u>
<u>Chetlat Island</u>	atoll	1.14	1.60	1	2,289	<u>11°42'N 72°42'E</u>
<u>Bitrā Island</u>	atoll	0.10	45.61	2	264	<u>11°33'N 72°09'E</u>
<u>Kiltān Island</u>	atoll	2.20	1.76	1	3,664	<u>11°29'N 73°00'E</u>
<u>Kadmat Island</u> <u>(Cardamom)</u>	atoll	3.20	37.50	1	5,319	<u>11°14'N 72°47'E</u>
<u>Elikalpeni Bank</u>	bank	-	95.91	-	-	<u>11°12'N 73°58'E</u>
<u>Perumal Par</u>	reef	0.01	83.02	1	-	<u>11°10'N 72°04'E</u>
<u>Amini Island</u> ¹⁾	atoll	2.59	155.09 ¹⁾	1	7,340	<u>11°06'N 72°45'E</u>
Laccadive Islands						
<u>Agatti Island</u> <u>(Agatti)</u> ²⁾	atoll	2.70	4.84	1	8,000	<u>10°50'N 73°41'E</u>
<u>Bangaram Island</u> <u>(Bangaram)</u> ²⁾	atoll	2.30	4.84	1	61	<u>10°50'N 73°41'E</u>
<u>Pitti Island</u> ¹⁾	islet	0.01	155.09	1	-	<u>10°50'N 72°38'E</u>
<u>Androth Island</u> <u>(Andrott)</u>	atoll	4.90	4.84	1	10,720	<u>10°50'N 73°41'E</u>
<u>Kavaratti Island</u>	atoll	4.22	4.96	1	10,113	<u>10°33'N 72°38'E</u>
<u>Kalpeni Island</u>	atoll	2.79	25.60	7	4,319	<u>10°05'N 73°38'E</u>
<u>Suheli Par</u> ³⁾	atoll	0.57	78.76	2	-	<u>10°05'N 72°17'E</u>
Minicoy Atoll						
<u>Investigator Bank</u>	bank	-	141.78	-	-	<u>08°32'N 73°17'E</u>
<u>Minicoy Island</u> ⁴⁾	atoll	4.80	30.60	2	9,495	<u>08°17'N 73°02'E</u>
<u>Viringili Island</u> ⁴⁾	islet	0.02	30.60	1	-	<u>08°27'N 73°01'E</u>
Lakshadweep		32.69	4203.14	32	60,595	<u>08°16'-13°58'N,</u> <u>71°44'-74°24'E</u>
1) Amini Island and Pitti Island are both on <u>Pitti Bank</u> , a largely sunken atoll with a lagoon area of 155.09 km ²						
2) Bangaram and Agatti Islands are connected by a shallow submarine ridge						
3) new international tourist resort, otherwise uninhabited, but with a population 61 at the 1990 census						
4) Minicoy Island and Vringili Island are both on <u>Maliku Atoll</u>						

Flora and fauna

The Lakshadweep Archipelago forms a terrestrial ecoregion together with the Maldives and the Chagos.^[16] It has over 600 species of marine fishes, 78 species of corals, 82 species of seaweed, 52 species of crabs, 2 species of lobsters, 48 species of gastropods, 12 species of bivalves, 101 species of birds.^{[17][18]} It is one of the four coral reef regions in India.^[19] The corals are a major attraction for the tourist. Pitti Island, is an important breeding place for sea turtles and for a number of pelagic birds such as the brown noddy

(*Anous stolidus*), lesser crested tern (*Sterna bengalensis*) and greater crested tern (*Sterna bergii*).^[20] The island has been declared a bird sanctuary.^[21] Cetacean diversity off the Lakshadweep Islands and in adjacent areas is higher than other areas although a lack of scientific study results in poor understanding and conservation promoting. These include various whales (e.g. pygmy blue, Bryde's,^[22] sperm^[23]), smaller cetaceans (e.g. orca,^[24] pilot whale^[25]) and dolphins.^{[26][27][28][29]}

The region does not have a rich flora and almost all the plants can be found on the mainland of India. There is also an absence of forest in the region. Nearly 400 species of flowering plants have been documented, including three species of sea grasses *Cymodocia isoetifolia*, *Syringodium isoetifolium* and *Thalassia hemprichii*, other angiosperms as *Pandanus*, *Heliotropium foertherianum*, *Tournefortia argentea* and *Pemphis acidula* as well as fungi, algae, lichens are also found. The common flora of the coral sands include coconut groves and coastal shrubs as *Pemphis acidula*, *Cordia subcordata*, *Scaevola taccada*, *Thespesia populnea*, *Suriana maritima*, *Dodonaea viscosa*, *Guetarda speciosa* and seaweeds such as sea lettuces, *Codium* and *Hypena*.^{[17][30]}



Ducks on a beach at Kavaratti, Lakshadweep

Government and administration

Lakshadweep forms a single Indian district and is governed by an administrator appointed by the President of India under article 239 of the constitution. The present administrator is Mr Farooq Khan IPS^[31] There are 10 Sub Divisions of the territory. In Minicoy and Agatti the Sub Division is under a Deputy Collector while in the remaining 8 islands developmental activities are coordinated by Sub Divisional Officers. The Collector cum Development Commissioner who is also the District Magistrate oversees matters coming under District Administration, such as revenue, land settlement, law and order. The District Magistrate is assisted by one Additional District Magistrate and Ten Executive Magistrates with respect to enforcement of law and order. Administrator in his capacity as Inspector General of Lakshadweep Police has command and control of the Lakshadweep Police. Administration Secretariat is in Kavaratti.^[32] The union territory comes under the jurisdiction of the Kerala High Court at Kochi along with a system of lower courts.^[33] The territory elects one member to the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Parliament of India).^[34]



Plate in Western Script is from the Laccadive Islands

Demographics

According to the 2011 census Lakshadweep has a population of 64,429,^[35] roughly equal in number to that of the Marshall Islands^[36] This gives it a ranking of 627th among the 640 districts in India.^[35] The district has a population density of 2,013 inhabitants per square kilometre (5,210/sq mi).^[35] Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 6.23%.^[35] Lakshadweep has a sex ratio of 946 females for every 1000 males,^[35] and a literacy rate of 92.28%.^[35]

Most people of Lakshadweep are descendants of migrants from the Malabar Coast of southwest India and the islanders are ethnically similar to coastal Kerala's Malayali people. More than 93% of the population who are indigenous, are Muslims and the majority of them belong to the Shafi School of the Sunni Sect. The southernmost and second largest island of Minicoy has an ethnically Mahls population that are native to the Maldives.^{[14][37]}



NASA picture of Maliku Atoll with Minicoy Island

Religion

The inhabitants of Lakshadweep were known to practice different religious customs. Then Islam was propounded by the Sheikh Ubaidullah^[39]

The spread of Islam has contributed to the religious identity of Lakshadweep. Eid-ul-Fitr, Muharram, Eid-ul-Adha and Milad-un-Nabi are the prominent occasions when the people of the island gather in various mosques.

Religious observance in Lakshadweep is characterized by certain festivals that are found in its core ethnic groups. Moulod is one such religious event when the islanders offer prayers to the divine power and eat in groups. The festival of Ratheeb is another uncommon occasion which originated in the Kavaratti region of Lakshadweep. The grave of Sheikh Kasim, one of the respected saints is praised during Ratheeb by the people of the island to gather his holy blessings.

The Sunni branch of Islam is the predominant faith.

Languages

The principal languages of Lakshadweep are Malayalam, Jeseri (Dweep Bhasha) and Mahl.^[41] The people of all the northern islands speak a dialect of Malayalam with the influence of Tamil and Arabic similar to Arwi. The people of Minicoy, the southernmost atoll, speak Mahl, a variant of Divehi language spoken in the Maldives.

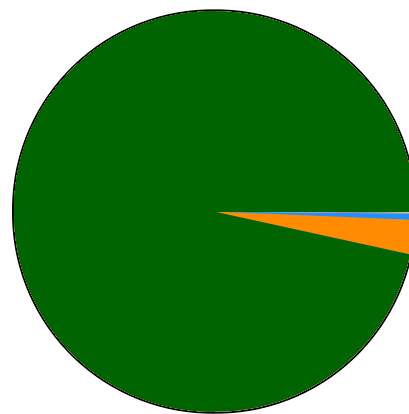
Malayalam with Malayalam script was introduced as the official language of Lakshadweep during the British raj. Previously a type of Arabic script (Arabi Malayalam) was used for the language. The policy was continued by the Indian government. Malayalam serves as a link language on the islands including on the Mahl dominated Minicoy Island.^[42] The dances here include:-Lava Dance, Kolkali dance & Parichakli Dance.

Economy

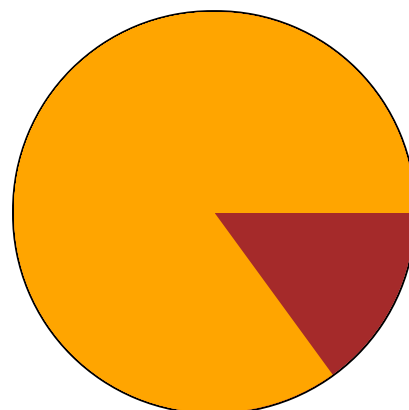
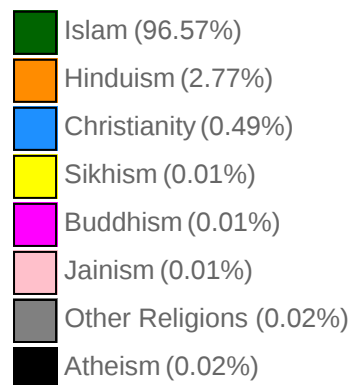
Lakshadweep's gross territorial domestic product for 2004 is estimated at US\$ 60 million at current prices. There is little economic inequality in Lakshadweep and the poverty index is low. Coconut fibre extraction and production of fibre products is Lakshadweep's main industry. There are five coir fibre factories, five production demonstration centres and seven fibre curling units run by the government of India. These units produce coir fibre, coir yarn, curled fibre and corridor mattings.^[43]

Fisheries

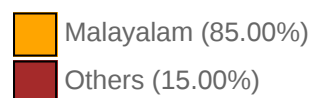
Lakshadweep comprises the only coral atolls of the country. With a vast lagoon of 4,200 km² (1,600 sq mi), it has territorial waters of 20,000 km² (7,700 sq mi), Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 4 lakh (400,000 km² [150,000 sq mi]) and coastal line of about 132 kilometres (82 mi). There is an estimation of about one lakh tonnes (100,000 tonnes [110,000 tons]) of tuna and tuna-like fishes and about an equal quantity of shark in the sea around Lakshadweep. Fishing is the main livelihood of the islanders.^[44] Freshly caught tuna is processed by drying it in the sun after cooking and smoking. The resultant product, known as 'mas', are popular products exported from these islands to southeast Asian countries.^[45] Eleven workshops in islands and two boat building yards cater to the needs of fishermen. There are 375 boats in operation in Lakshadweep.^[46]



Religion in State (2011)^[38]



Languages of Lakshadweep in 2001^[40]



Tourism

Due to its isolation and scenic appeal, Lakshadweep was already known as a tourist attraction for Indians since 1974.^[47] This brings in significant revenue, which is likely to increase. Since such a small region cannot support industries, the government is actively promoting tourism as a means of income in Bangaram and Kadmat islands. Bangaram is projected to become a major destination for international tourism.^[48] Marine fauna are plentiful. Water sports activities such as scuba diving, wind surfing, snorkelling, surfing, kayaking, canoeing, water skiing, sportfishing, yachting and night sea voyages are popular activities among tourists. Tourists flock to these islands throughout the year, except during the South-west monsoon months when seas are extremely rough. The government has also proposed to set up two customs clearance check-in offices so that tourists can enter directly instead of getting permission from the nearest customs office in Kochi, which is 260 nautical miles (300 mi; 480 km) from these islands. These will be the smallest customs offices in India. Tourism is expected to get a big boost after these offices open as the islands lie on one of the busiest cruise ways.



A beach side resort at Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep



Agatti island, Lakshadweep

Desalination

A low-temperature thermal desalination plant opened on Kavaratti in 2005, at a cost of ₹50 million (€922,000). The experimental plant, which uses the temperature difference between warm surface seawater and much colder seawater at 500m depth to generate potable water as well as energy, was slated to produce 100,000 litres/day of potable water from seawater.^{[51][52]} Production costs in 2005 were ₹220-250/m³ (€4.1-4.6/m³); the cost was supposed to drop to ₹30-60/m³ (€0.55-1.11/m³) with increased capacity.^[53]

The technology was developed by the National Institute of Ocean Technology. It can be used to produce drinking water and also for power generation and air conditioning. In addition, the deep seawater contains extra nutrients for fish, an important source of food and income for the local population. The government plans to set up desalination plants with a capacity of 10 million litres/per day on all islands and coastal areas.^[51] In 2009, the NIOT announced plans to build plants on Minicoy, Agatti and Andrott.^[54]

Local symbols of Lakshadweep

Animal	Butterfly fish ^{[49][50]}	
Bird	Noddy tern ^{[49][50]}	
Tree	Bread fruit ^{[49][50]}	
Flower	Not designated	

Transport and tourism



Agatti Airstrip

Agatti Aerodrome on Agatti Island is the only airport in Lakshadweep. Alliance Air, a subsidiary of the state-owned carrier, serves Agatti and flies to Kochi and Bengaluru on the mainland. Kingfisher Airlines, had flights connecting Kochi and Bangalore to Agatti before the airline ceased operations. The other islands are linked by the



Passenger ship MV Aminidivi of the Lakshadweep Islands administration docked at Old Mangalore port

Pawan Hans helicopter or boat service.^[55] Six ships connect Kochi, Calicut(Beyport) and Lakshadweep: MV *Kavaratti*, MV *Aminidivi*, MV *Minicoy*, MV *Arabian Sea*, MV *Lakshadweep Sea* and MV *Bharath Seema*.^[56]

Tourists need a permit to visit the islands; foreign nationals are not permitted to visit certain islands.^[57] According to the current alcohol laws of India, alcoholic beverage consumption is not permitted in the Lakshadweep Archipelago except on Bangaram Island.^[58]

See also

- Lakshadweep (Lok Sabha constituency)
- Lakshadweep Police
- Coral reefs in India

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Further reading

- R. C. Majumdar: The History of Ancient Lakshadweep, Calcutta, 1979

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