



PRESERVING BEACH No 7

THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

DUANE SILVERSTEIN



Scanning the Bay of Bengal on a map, one will find a group of islands named the 'Andamans'; the uninitiated may even consider it Thai or Burmese property based on proximity.


Although it's 1200 kilometres away, this group of islands belongs to India. The British government used the remote Andamans as a penal colony to incarcerate political dissidents during their colonial era in India, earning the islands the dubious nickname, 'kalapani', meaning 'black water.' It is no longer a penal colony now and the waters are a sparkling blue, teeming with 240 species of coral and green, leatherback and Olive Ridley turtles.

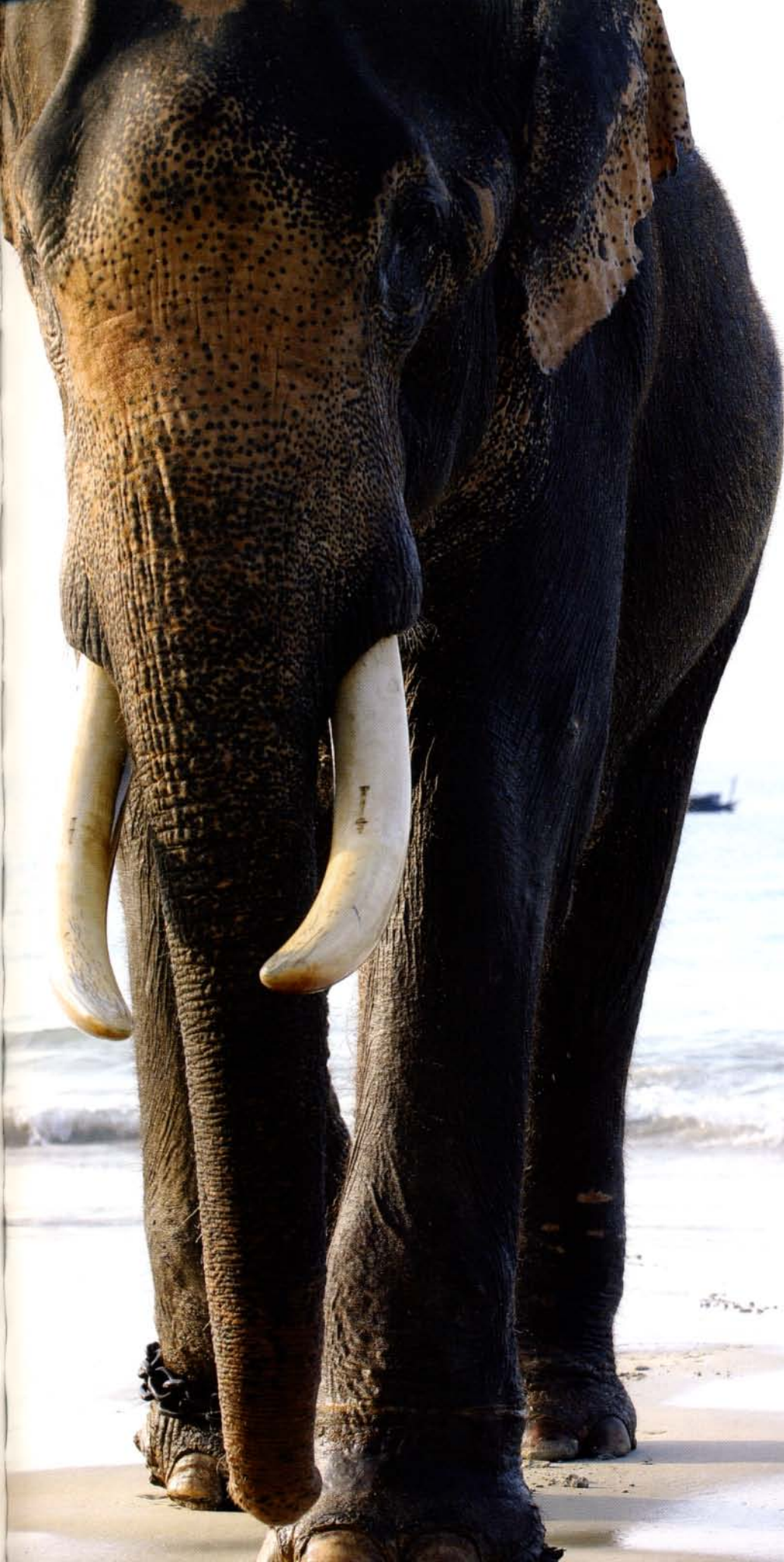
Havelock Island which is easily accessible from the main point of entry at Port Blair, offers excellent snorkeling and scuba-diving opportunities. It is also home to the oddly named 'Beach Number 7' which Time Magazine reported as the most beautiful beach in all of Asia. Unfortunately, the waters of this breathtaking beach, called Radha Nager have been over fished and sea turtle eggs indiscriminately poached. Seacology, an NGO with the sole purpose of preserving the environment of islands throughout the



globe, approached the people of Havelock Island and explored options to protect the marine resources in Radha Nager. The villagers proposed the funding and construction of a much needed environmental education centre and recycling containers for the plastic refuse that seem to plague most islands. In reciprocation, they will establish a 2,175 acre marine reserve where fishing and turtle egg collection will be prohibited. The staff at the nearby Barefoot eco-resort volunteered to assist with the enforcement at the marine reserve while overseeing the construction and operation of the proposed environmental centre. Being congruent to the "win-win-participative" that Seacology supports and promotes globally, the proposal found favour and our enthusiastic endorsement.

A few years ago our delegation visited for the Environmental Centre's ground-breaking ceremony, we were introduced to an irresistible and most unique marine experience – snorkeling with an elephant. Beach Number 7 and the adjacent Barefoot Resort are home to Rajan, the Andaman's only swimming elephant, which uses its trunk as a snorkel while paddling the water with its massive legs. This was truly a once in a lifetime experience and remains a great talking point among dive buddies.

The completed Barefoot Seacology Centre has hosted several important environmental training sessions for local teachers and students. The marine reserve is also making an encouraging difference. For the first time in decade the volunteers from the Barefoot Resort recorded instances of leatherback turtles nesting on the beach. There were also at least 15 documented occasions of Green sea turtles nesting this year. Thanks to the efforts of the people of Havelock Island, the staff of the Barefoot Resort, and some funding from Seacology, the waters of Beach Number 7 are once again teeming with marine life. 



Left:
**THE AUTHOR AND RAJAN
THE ELEPHANT** on Beach
Number 7 (Marsha Williams)

Opp. page:
STUDENTS TAKING PART
in an environmental workshop
in the Barefoot Seacology
Centre on Havelock Island
(Samit Sawhny)

