

Beyond the Shore



Beyond the Shore is an attempt to tell a fuller, more real story of the ocean - one that does not separate ecology from the lives shaped by it.

The natural world and the knowledge of it gives us insights an understanding of the rhythms of winds and tides, the behaviour of sea turtles, the language of corals, and the patterns that hold marine worlds together. The social world and sciences that investigate it, help us see how these worlds are inhabited, interpreted, and reshaped by people - from fisherfolk drawing on generations of knowledge to communities adapting to environmental change and governance systems deciding who gets to use the sea and how.

In this exhibition, the aim is to let these perspectives speak to each other rather than stand apart. By placing ecological evidence alongside lived histories, and species alongside communities, we highlight that conservation is never just about protecting nature in isolation. It is about understanding relationships - between humans and nature, livelihoods and regulations, cultural memory and biodiversity loss, understood through diverse disciplines and situated knowledge. When these two realms meet, conservation becomes richer, more grounded, and more just. Therefore, the exhibition becomes not only a space to admire marine life, but also a place to recognise the social worlds that depend on it and the collective responsibility of sustaining both.

As you move through the exhibition, you will encounter these dualities across coastal and island landscapes. Each place offers its own complex vocabulary of people and marine life.

We invite you to step into these worlds, to linger with their contrasts and continuities, and to leave with a more attentive understanding of our oceans and the lives shaped in conversation with them.

Life and livelihoods, ashore and offshore

Photo by **Bipro Charan Behera**

Along the shores of Rushikulya and Gahirmatha, the arribada takes place: thousands of turtles arriving together, a display of biological order so vast that it briefly reshapes the coastline's rhythms. In recent years, better protection and monitoring have led to larger arribadas, an encouraging sign that the species is recovering. These beaches, once vulnerable to disturbance, now offer the turtles a safer passage - evidence that deliberate, sustained conservation can indeed shift the trajectory of a species.

Life and livelihoods, ashore and offshore

Photo by **Bipro Charan Behera**

But protection, even when well-intentioned, has a way of rearranging human life. As these stretches of sand become regulated nesting zones, artisanal fisherfolk find parts of their everyday world cordoned off. Areas where they launched boats, cast nets, or crossed after dusk are now sites of prohibition. It isn't the idea of conservation that troubles them but the erosion of access on which their livelihoods depend.

Small scale fishers need strong access to the coast and its near shore waters, where fish gather to feed on the nutrients, drawing both people and animals into the same narrow band of sea. This overlap, unintended yet inevitable, places turtles at risk from certain forms of fishing such as ring seine fishing, and impacts fisherfolk using other nets when blanket bans are issued. The solution is not to choose between turtles and people but to recognise that conservation is strongest when it actively and transparently involves those who depend most on the health of coasts for their livelihoods..

Echoes of Colour to Shadows of the Future

Photo by **Chaitanya Arjunwadkar**

In some parts of the Andamans, the sea reveals a reef still intact and flourishing. Corals grow in layered forms that feel both deliberate and unhurried, holding colours that shift gently with the light. Schools of fish move through them with an ordinary ease, as if following a pattern they have known for generations. The underwater world here feels cohesive, balanced - a reminder of how these ecosystems function when left with enough space to breathe. Coral reefs support nearly a quarter of all marine life, shaping coastlines, sustaining fisheries, and providing protection from storm surges. These intact patches therefore offer more than aesthetic calm; they reveal the essential work corals do in maintaining the stability and productivity of tropical seas.

Echoes of Colour to Shadows of the Future

Photo by **Chaitanya Arjunwadkar**

Not far from these thriving patches the narrative shifts - corals now face pressures that rarely appear in travel brochures. The greatest threat is global warming: rising sea temperatures and increasing ocean acidification push these sensitive organisms beyond their limits, making bleaching events more frequent and far harder to recover from. Local disturbances - such as poorly regulated tourism and coastal development - add smaller but cumulative strains to reefs already weakened by a warming ocean.

The decline is not always dramatic. It often begins with a slight paling, a brittle edge, or a stretch of reef that no longer shelters the life it once held. These shifts are early signs of a system losing its stability, reminders of how global warming, intensified by local pressures, is steadily reshaping the underwater world of the Andamans.

Invisible Meadows, Visible Loss

Photo by Ishaan Khot

Lakshadweep has long been known for its remarkably nature-responsible pole-and-line tuna fishery - a method passed down through generations, requiring skill, restraint, and an understanding of the ocean's rhythms. It is a system that has endured because it takes only what the sea can replenish, allowing both tuna populations and local livelihoods to remain stable over time. In many ways, it stands as one of the clearest examples of how tradition and sustainability can reinforce each other.

Invisible Meadows, Visible Loss

Photo by **Adith Swaminathan**

Yet the islands are witnessing a quieter shift beneath the water. Green sea turtles, whose protection has allowed their numbers to flourish, graze heavily on the seagrass meadows that function as nurseries for baitfish and other lagoon fishes. As these meadows thin out, the small fish that pole-and-line fishers rely on are becoming harder to find. The irony is subtle but real: a conservation success for one species is gradually creating strain for a community that has fished responsibly for decades. The challenge, then, is not to choose between turtles and tuna fishers, but to understand how their lives intersect - and to shape solutions that honour both ecological balance and cultural continuity.





