When you are about to land on India's archipelago of Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea, 490km west of the closest Indian city of Kochi, you'll see shades of blue all around.Google searches for "Lakshadweep" soared to the highest they'd been In 20 years, according to The Economic Times. Travel articles suddenly appeared in mainstream media outlets, and YouTube videos and Instagram reels flooded the internet. MakeMyTrip, one of India's biggest travel booking portals, claimed a 3,400% increase to in-platform searches for Lakshadweep after Modi's visit. The phone lines of Lakshadweep's Society for Promotion of Nature Tourism and Sports (SPORTS) that handles tourism in the territory have never been busier. From one or two tourist inquiries a day, they have been getting at least 10 a day since last month, said Abdul Samad, one of SPORTS' two water sports instructors who helped Modi snorkel in the island in January. Meanwhile, Cordelia Cruises, which has been sailing from Mumbai, Kochi and Goa to Lakshadweep since September 2021, has witnessed a 2,500% increase in booking queries since Modi's visit. New beach and water villas are already being planned on the islands of Suheli and Kadmat, Samad confirmed, and India's finance minister Neermala Sitharaman even mentioned Lakshadweep in her budget speech on 1 February while talking about better connectivity to India's islands to grow tourism. A blip in the Arabian Sea, Lakshadweep's 36 islands include 12 atolls, three reefs and five submerged banks. Its 10 inhabited islands have a population of about 70,000, mostly reliant on fishing and coconut cultivation. The pristine, white-sand islands are not like other beaches found along India's coastline. Lakshadweep, which means a lakh (100,000) islands in the Sanskrit language, are the only atolls in India and lie just above sea level, explained Vardhan Patankar, who has worked in Lakshadweep for 15 years and is conservation director of GVI, which facilitates conservation projects around the world. These atolls are remnants of ancient volcanoes that erupted and then gradually sank to just above sea level, growing a ring of corals that jut out of the ocean's surface. Like most islands in the world, Lakshadweep has been impacted by climate change. According to The Lakshadweep Research Collective, the archipelago's land cover is rapidly shrinking due to coastal erosion, with the loss of an entire island (Parali 1, in Bangaram atoll) recorded in 2017. The islands have witnessed four major ENSO-related temperature anomalies (a climate phenomenon that causes variation in winds and sea surface temperatures) in the past two decades, together with three catastrophic cyclones within the last few years, resulting in widespread coral bleaching. According to current, conservative predictions of scientists, Lakshadweep will submerge in the sea by 2050," said Patankar."It's mesmerising, really," said Shradha Menon, a geologist from the Indian Institute of Technology, who visited the islands three times in the last two years to study their carbon sedimentation.Pictures of him walking on the white beaches and snorkelling in its crystal-clear waters were uploaded on his official account on X (formerly Twitter) and his YouTube channel, garnering hundreds of thousands of views.Lakshadweep is one of the best places to snorkel and scuba dive in India due to the atolls' shallow waters and abundance of marine life and corals."The visibility underwater is exceptional and as a result the reef looks spectacular during snorkelling and diving sessions," said Patankar.While underwater, you may see snappers, groupers, moray eel, butterflyfish and black botched sting rays."If there is added pressure on the island due to tourism and other development projects or industrial fishing, it could be disastrous to the islands and its ecology, hastening the submergence.""Lakshadweep, which is just a few metres above the sea level, is

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.protected by the coral reefs," said Patankar

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