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## TALES OF COCONUT COUNTRIES AND ISLANDS AROUND THE WORLD

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**T**he coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera* Linn) is a member of the family Arecaceae and is of great social and economic importance for millions of people in the tropics and subtropics. The palm not only supplies food, drink, shelter, but also provides raw materials for a number of important industries. Each part of the coconut palm is useful to man in one way or another. Therefore the palm is looked upon with reverence and affection by the inhabitants of the coconut producing countries. Coconut tree is given eulogistic epithets such as '*Kalpa vriksha*' (Tree of heaven), the consols of the East, mankind's greatest provider in the tropics, tree of life, tree of abundance, tree of plenty etc.

The name Cocos probably derives from a Portuguese word meaning monkey, perhaps because its nut, bearing three germinating pores, resembles a monkey face. Its species name derives from Latin, meaning nut-bearing. In the earliest recorded description of the coconut palm, given by Cosmos of Alexandria in his *Topographia Christiana* written during 545 A.D., there is a reference to the 'Argell Tree' and its fruit the great nut of India. Marco Polo gave the name, *nux indica*, in 1280 when he was in Sumatra.

Later, the Arabs called the coconut 'jawz hindi'. Both names translate to "Indian nut" and when they arrived in England, they retained the "coco" name and "nut" was added. Almost all names of coconut in Indian languages are related, e.g., nariyal (Hindi), nariyel (Urdu), narial (Punjabi), nariyel (Gujarati), naral (Marathi), narokel (Bengali), narikelamu (Telugu), also nargil (Mongolian), tengai in Tamil and



Kerala, India

nalikeram / Thengu in malayalam. Certain places even countries are known by coconut because of coconut cultivation or due to existence of coconut palms in these regions.

### Kerala

The word 'Keralam' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kera' which means coconut and the Dravidian word 'Alam' which means place or land. A popular belief about coconut is that it represents *Deva vriksha* or 'tree of heaven' brought down by Lord Parasurama for the prosperity of the people of Malabar Coast. This strip of land is known as Kerala which literally means the land of coconut.

In Kerala approximately 3.5 million family's livelihood is coconut. Coconut is an integral part of the Kerala culture. From food to religious ceremonies, the coconut finds its mention in every place in the state. They also feature in the local cuisine of the state. Coconut

trees form a crucial part of the lifestyle, economy and geography of Kerala. Coconut trees in Kerala contribute a lot to overall economy in India.

### Anju thengu

Anchuthengu, formerly known as Anjengo, is a coastal town near Kadakkavoor in Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala. This old Portuguese settlement lies between Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram. Literally the word 'Anjuthengu' means 'five coconut palms.' The whole land is cultivated with coconut trees. The place possesses great archeological and historical importance. In 17<sup>th</sup> century, the English East India Company selected Anjengo to set up their first trade settlement in Kerala. Queen of Attingal granted the place to the British for trading. They established a factory and a fort here with the permission of the queen. Many ancient churches, an old light house, a 100 year old convent and school, tombs of Dutch

and British and the Anjengo Fort are the major points of attraction here. The churches are built in accordance with the principles of the Portuguese architectural style. The fort played an important role in the war of Mysore in 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### Ayiram thengu

Ayiram thengu is coastal area located in Kollam district of Kerala. The meaning of "Ayiram thengu" in Malayalam is thousand coconut palms.

### Thengapattinam

Thengapattinam is a beautiful town located on the shores of Arabian Sea in the southern part of Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu. Thengapattinam is surrounded by natural boundaries on all sides - the Arabian Sea, the Kuzhithurai River and a Mountain ridge. And then, there is the star attraction, the estuary, where the river joins the sea. Coconut trees are found abundant here, and the place gets its name from coconut trees. 'Thenga' means coconut in Tamil and 'Patanam' means town. Thengapattinam - as the name suggests, is replete with coconut trees, was an important town during the days of Chera Kings, when trade relations ex-



Coconut Island (Hawaii Island)

isted with the Middle East and the Arab world.

Chilappathikaram, the Tamil epic refers thengapattinam as the capital of "thenga nadu" - one of the 48 countries of lemuria, otherwise known as 'kumari kandam', where the Dravidian civilizations (known as the 'cradle of civilizations') flourished. The world renowned historical research traveler 'dalami' refers this place as a 'harbour town' in his book written in AD 100. It is believed that Karunan Thadangal, the king of 'thenga nadu' ruled from Thengapattinam.

### Coconut Island (Hawaii Island)

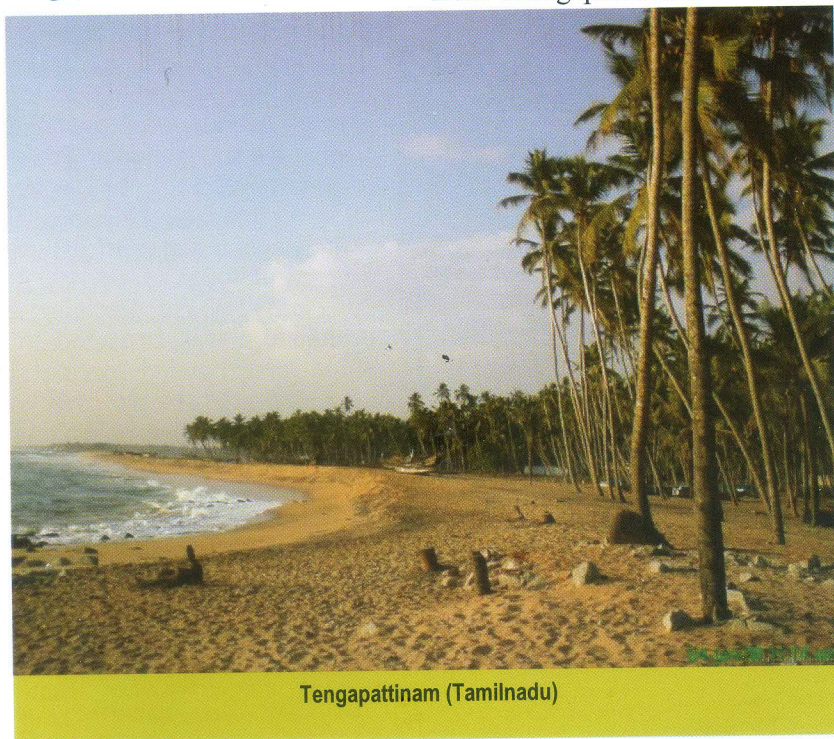
Coconut Island (Mokuola) is little island is located in Hilo Bay and can be accessed from Liliuokalani Gardens via a pedestrian footbridge. Its Hawaiian name is Mokuola (meaning "island of life" or "healing") since it was site of an ancient temple dedicated to healing, but today it is more commonly known as Coconut Island. The island is owned by the state and is the facility for the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, part of the University of Hawaii. It is the only laboratory built on a coral reef.

### Coconut Island (Poruma Island)

Coconut Island (Poruma Island, Puruma in the local language) is an island 130km northeast of Thursday Island, Queensland, Australia in the Great North East Channel near Cumberland Passage, Torres Strait. This island is one of the Torres Strait Islands. The population of the island is about 180 inhabitants. The ancestors of Coconut Island built their houses out of grass, coconut leaves and trees that floated down from the Fly River jungles of Papua New Guinea.

### East Side (Coconut Coast), Kauai

Kauai's East Side is sometimes referred to as the Coconut Coast for the groves of coconut palms



Tengapattinam (Tamilnadu)

that grow in its resort areas. The most populated district on the island, about 16,000 of the island's 62,000 residents reside in the Wailua/Kapaa area.

### Coconut Grove

Coconut Grove is the oldest continuously inhabited neighborhood of Miami, Florida in Miami-Dade County, United States. The neighborhood is roughly bound by North Prospect Drive to the south, LeJeune Road to the west, South Dixie Highway and Rick-enbacker Causeway to the north, and Biscayne Bay to the east. The neighborhood's name has been sometimes spelled "Cocoanut Grove" but the definitive spelling "Coconut Grove" was established when the city was incorporated in 1919. The fate of Coconut Grove, which is today home to Miami's City Hall, was largely linked to the U.S. Navy, Coast Guard and Pan American World Airways.

### Coconut Creek

Coconut Creek is a city in Broward County, Florida (United States), nestled between Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties. It is nicknamed Butterfly Capital of the World, because it is home to the world's largest butterfly aviary, Butterfly World, with over 80 species and 5,000 individual butterflies. The city took its name from the coconut trees that were



Cocos Island

planted in the area by early developers. Robert E. Bateman, one of the developers, named Coconut Creek after combining the names of Miami-Dade County's village of Indian Creek and the Miami neighborhood of Coconut Grove.

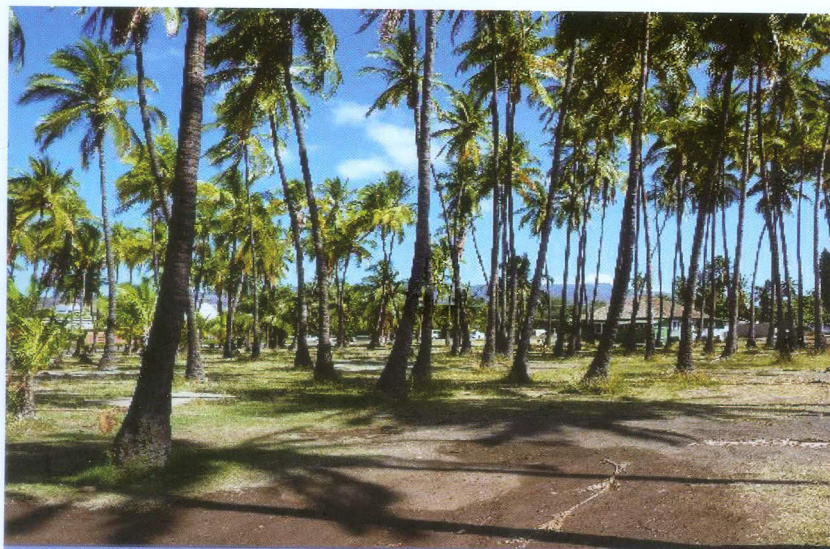
The city is a well-planned community with a unique environmental consciousness touting an abundance of trees, waterways, attractive landscaped roads, beautiful parks, and butterfly gardens throughout the neighborhoods. This is due to the city's progressive planning approach to creating a unique life-style for residents and businesses. Coconut Creek is the first in the state of Florida and eleventh in the coun-

try to be certified as a "Community Wildlife Habitat".

### Cocos Island

Cocos Island (Spanish: Isla del Coco) is an uninhabited island (except for a permanent ranger station) located off the shore of Costa Rica. It is one of 13 districts of Puntarenas Canton of the province of Puntarenas. It is one of the National Parks of Costa Rica. It is located in the Pacific Ocean, approximately 550 km from the Pacific shore of Costa Rica. With an area of approximately 23.85 km<sup>2</sup> and a perimeter of around 23.3 km, this island is more or less rectangular in shape. Cocos Island was declared a Costa Rican National Park by means of Executive Decree in 1978. Cocos Island National Park was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1997. In 2002, the World Heritage Site designation was extended to include an expanded marine zone of 1,997 km<sup>2</sup>. In addition, it is included in the list of "Wetlands of International Importance".

Cocos Island was short-listed as a candidate to be one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature by the New Seven Wonders of the World Foundation. As of June 2009, it is ranking second in the islands category. The famous



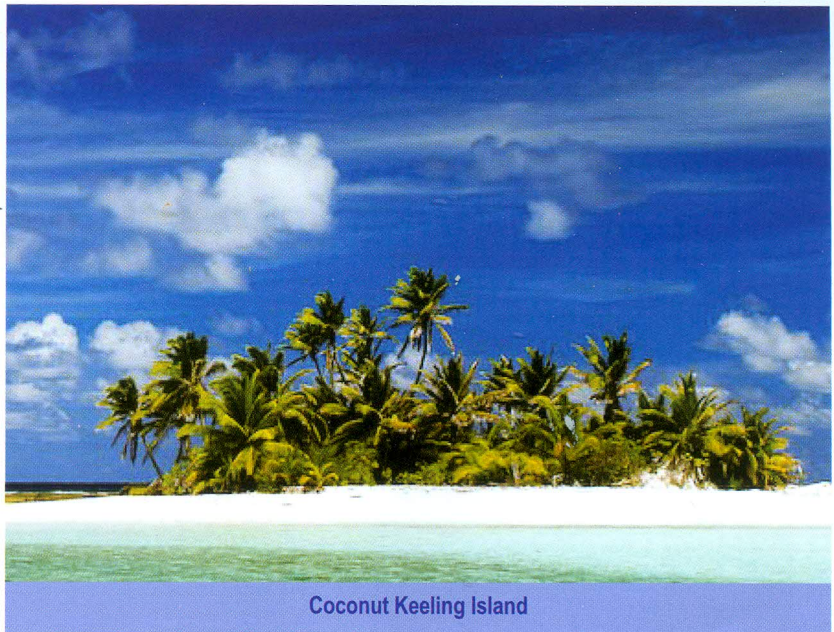
Coconut Grove

oceanographer Jacques Cousteau visited the island several times and in 1994 called it "the most beautiful island in the world". Cocos Island is home to dense and exuberant tropical moist forests. It is the only oceanic island in the eastern Pacific region with such rain forests and their characteristic types of flora and fauna. Purple Coral Tree (*Erythrina fusca*), Coconut Palm (*Cocos nucifera*), and Pond-apple (*Annona glabra*) are the predominant trees, with an understory of ferns, shrubs of the Rubiaceae and Solanaceae families, sedges and grasses, and herbaceous plants of the Leguminosae and Malvaceae families.

The general vegetation of Cocos Island has greatly changed since the island was first named and described by Europeans. Captain Wafer, during his visit in 1685 described the extensive coconut groves extending inland into the interior of the island. It is very unlikely that these groves developed naturally, and it seems evident that pre-European man must once have cleared considerable areas in the ravine bottoms and interior plateaus and ridges, utilizing the clearings for coconut plantations of substantial extent. It has been posited that these plantations were used to provide fresh liquid and food for pre-Columbian voyages (balsa rafts using *guara* navigation) between Guatemala and northwestern South America. After the Spanish conquest and its consequences, these voyages ended and the tropical jungle recovered the land that had been laboriously cleared by early human hands.

### Cocos (Keeling) Islands

The Territory of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, also called Cocos Islands and Keeling Islands, is a territory of Australia, located in the Indian Ocean, southwest of Christmas Island and approximately midway between Australia and Sri Lanka. Cocos (Keeling) Island is located on almost exactly the opposite side of the globe from Cocos Island, Costa



Rica.

The territory consists of two atolls and 27 coral islands, of which two, West Island and Home Island, are inhabited with a total population of approximately 600. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands consist of two flat, low-lying coral atolls with an area of 14.2 square kilometres, 26 kilometres of coastline, a highest elevation of 5 metres (16 ft) and thickly covered with coconut palms and other vegetation. The climate is pleasant, moderated by the southeast trade winds for about nine months of the year and with moderate rainfall.

### Coco Islands

Coco Islands are a pair of strategically important islands located in the eastern Indian Ocean, politically administered by Union of Myanmar under Yangon Region. They are allegedly leased to the People's Republic of China since 1994. Geographically, they are a part of the Andaman Islands archipelago and separated from the North Andaman Island (India) by the 20 kilometres wide Coco Channel. The Bay of Bengal lies to the west and the Andaman Sea to the east of the islands. The Burmese mainland is 300 kilometres to the north.

The Coco Islands consist of the

main Great Coco Island and the smaller Little Coco Island, separated by the Alexandra Channel. Table Island, a third small island located near the Great Coco Island, previously housed a lighthouse but is presently uninhabited. They are located on an ancient trade route between India, Burma and Southeast Asia, and there were numerous visits by traders, seafarers and pirates. In 1858, a large prison was built at Port Blair on South Andaman Island, mainly to house the thousands of 'mutineers' sent there after the 1857 Indian rebellion, and the Coco Islands were used as a source of food for the struggling penal colony, mainly by providing coconuts.

There are several myths and beliefs on coconut indicating the importance of coconut in everyday life. Even, until the early 1900's, a whole coconut was the accepted form of currency in the Nicobar Islands, just north of Sumatra in the Indian Ocean. In the South Pacific, pieces of coconut shell carved into coin-like spheres served as currency. There is a saying that "There are as many uses for the coconut as there are days in the year."

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