

P a r a d i s e f o u n d



AMANPULO, PHILIPPINES

A small speck of lusciousness amid a sea of cerulean blue, Pamalican Island has developed a big reputation. This remote isle in the Cuyo Archipelago was once part of a plantation but today, the 2.4km-long slither is home to just one award-winning hotel by luxe group Aman. A private plane is needed to get here: the 70-minute flight from Manila across the Sulu Sea reveals a turquoise halo – the hotel's reef and crowning glory – before your descent to the jungle-shrouded airstrip. Offering a slick, peaceful alternative to some of South East Asia's more saturated destinations, a total of 42 *casitas* (Filipino-style

houses) sprawl from the shore to the hilltop, a few floating amid the rainforest canopy. Each has direct beach access via hushed sand pathways and you could easily go a full day without seeing another soul, with only the whisper of swaying palms disturbing your reverie. Pillow-strewn decks and hammocks are scattered around the resort, while a clubhouse has a pool. Local seafood and island-grown vegetables feature at the two restaurants. **INSIDER TIP** A floating pontoon bar is available to rent; it's a fantastic spot for offshore sunbathing and canoodling. **THE DETAIL** Doubles from £825. aman.com

Photos by John W McDermott
and Frank Montanarao



Passports at the ready: it's time to channel your inner Robinson Crusoe as Blossom Green discovers 14 of the world's best castaway hotels, where sun-kissed days and unrivalled privacy are guaranteed



MIRIHI ISLAND RESORT, MALDIVES

The Maldives is hardly short of private-island escapes but, surprisingly, many lack the sense of privacy we seek. Enter Mirihi, a pleasingly petite paradise that packs a punch when it comes to escaping the crowds. Upon arrival, a jaw-slackening stroll along a stilted deck awaits before guests are invited to remove their shoes and not put them back on again until they leave. You can barely make out the nearest island neighbour from this unspoilt atoll in the South Ari region, and views over the hypnotic crash of the Indian Ocean go on for days, interrupted only by the odd frolic of dolphins on the horizon.

The dreamy, independently owned resort is a pocket-sized 350m by 50m (one of the country's smallest) and can be easily traversed in 20 minutes. A haven for lazy days, expect morning pootles along the shore to breakfast, a snorkle in the reef before lunch, afternoon ping pong in the shade and, of course, plenty of sun worship on your private terrace. The buffet at breakfast, lunch and dinner is absolutely superb and a fine-dining overwater restaurant offers intimate dinners looking out to sea. **INSIDER TIP** Book one of six beach villas for maximum privacy. **THE DETAIL** Villas from £330. mirihi.com



CALALA ISLAND, NICARAGUA

The owners of Calala Island have pinpointed the remote westerly reaches of the Caribbean Sea for their Shangri-la. There are no other luxury resorts in these parts and, as such, you can expect quite the journey: three flights and a boat transfer. But you won't care when it comes into view. Calala channels the charm of Barbados 50 years ago: raw beauty, warm hospitality, a sense of taking a step back in time. The acid-green blot floats on blue waters in stark contrast to the rustic colour palette of the interiors. Four wooden villas feature thatched roofs, locally crafted furniture and tinkling seashell curtains. Toast your wise choice of destination with coconuts full of the house special rum and tonic on your deck all day (the bar only closes when the last guest goes to bed). Evenings consist of sumptuous suppers by Lorne Emerson, who's worked in some of Europe's top restaurants. Lobster carpaccio and 72-hour Nicaraguan short beef is on our plate.

INSIDER TIP Kayak to Little Calala and watch pelicans swooping for their lunch.

THE DETAIL Villas from £1,100, full board. calala-island.com

SIX SENSES ZIGHY BAY, OMAN

A world away from the high-gloss hustle of Dubai, yet only a two-hour drive east, Six Senses Zighy Bay is developing cult status. Poised on the Musandam Peninsula, its rugged remoteness is breathtaking and, unlike many resorts, suits the full gamut of traveller, from couples to families and groups of friends thanks to its clever Omani-village design. Villas akin to personal enclaves punctuate date palm-fringed walkways and

feature dusty sundecks, shaded sofas and private pools. You could easily stay ensconced for the duration, with barbecues and plenty of quality in-room dining options. Alternatively, rock climbing, mountain biking, paragliding, dhow cruises and two huge swimming pools can make for an active escape.

INSIDER TIP With kids? Go for a spacious two-bed villa.

THE DETAIL Villas from £450. sixsenses.com

VILA VITA PARC, PORTUGAL

You don't always have to go far off the beaten track to find Man Friday-levels of seclusion. This jewel nestles in the heart of the Algarve, the wave-pounded strip of coast along Portugal's southernmost point, which lures thousands of holidaymakers each year. However, once inside the gates of Villa Vita Parc, it's a very different story. This resort's rooms and villas are sprinkled throughout 22ha of lush gardens which roll down to a secluded beach of champagne-coloured sand; the only private stretch in the region. The brilliant Moorish buildings dazzle against olive groves, while peacock-blue doors and fabrics that complement pottery by Porches provide a stylish taste of local colour. In terms of cuisine, this is the only hotel on our list with two Michelin stars. An evening at Ocean starts early with a glass of alvarinho by the huge windows, and ends late after a tasting menu showcasing the likes of violet prawns from nearby Tavira.

INSIDER TIP Opt for an Oasis Suite Premium, which has access to an enormous private roof terrace.

THE DETAIL Doubles from £265. vilavitaparc.com





JUMBY BAY ISLAND, ANTIGUA

Picture-postcard palm trees? Check. Mile upon mile of bleached white sand? Check. Easily accessed by a scenic boat ride two miles off Antigua's northern coast, Jumbay on Long Island was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493 and represents the Caribbean at its best. One of the larger resorts on our list, 7.2km of empty beaches maintain an escapist ethos, while lofty cottages and villas with wraparound terraces champion relaxation. The ocean-view infinity pool is a wonderful place to practise the art of doing nothing, and offers a kids' club through the day. Design leans towards old-school colonial across the 40 suites and winding bike paths sweep you from the tennis court to a bamboo massage at the spa, then up to the Estate House restaurant in a flurry of fauna. A supper of monkfish followed by rum baba and local black pineapple is your reward.

INSIDER TIP Add on a day to discover Antigua's mainland. Nelson's Dockyard was recently recognised by Unesco, having been in use since the 1740s. It has an excellent museum.

THE DETAIL Doubles from £880, full board. oethercollection.com



LA SULTANA OUALIDIA, MOROCCO

Tickling the Atlantic Ocean and framed around the curvaceous crescent of a saltwater lagoon, the beguiling village of Oualidia remains surprisingly under the radar. While attention turns south towards on-the-up Essaouira, Moroccan royalty have been enticed to Oualidia for years by the plump oysters, great surf and a fresh sea breeze to combat the stifling summer heat. A good couple of hours away from the brouhaha that is Marrakech, luxurious La Sultana is an ideal place to unwind. Indeed, this is the staycation of choice for many city slickers. A soothing oasis of apricot-coloured stone and glorious natural surrounds, quotidian pleasures include slow breakfasts amid hibiscus gardens, languid toe-dipping by the pool, refreshing mint tea and picnic lunches in the shade of a canopy set in a private dune. Afternoons call for bird-watching safaris by kayak to the salt marshes, or fishing trips to plunder the Atlantic for grouper and red mullet. While away evenings in the hammam before retiring to the white-and-cream dream that is your suite. The fudge-coloured dunes shape-shift in front of your eyes daily, and slumbers in the sun are disturbed only by the distant sound of the muezzin's call to prayer, which becomes a soporific addition to your stay.

INSIDER TIP Shop for souvenirs on a Saturday in the Oualidia souk, where traders put on less of a hard-sell than those in Morocco's cities.

THE DETAIL Doubles from £270. lasultanahotels.com



CAYO ESPANTO, BELIZE

An emerald dot five kilometres out to sea from the Belizean city of San Pedro, this private island has all the trappings of a hedonist's hide-out. Access is via a ten-minute speedboat ride, or else by helicopter from the capital. Seven beach houses are available, which, at over 100sq m, are among the most spacious on our list. Turquoise shutters fling open for indoor-outdoor living, while private pools ensure that your schedule of flitting from hammock to pool to ocean isn't disturbed. There's no pomp and no dress code, and you're only sharing the island with 17 other guests. A butler, or 'houseman', is on hand to organise paddle-boats for a day's exploration, or day trips to the mainland for lunches of Mexican-Caribbean cuisine at Wild Mango's. Leave the kids at home; this one's for lovers. **INSIDER TIP** Book Casa Aurora, which has the largest pool. **THE DETAIL** Villas from £1,125 full board, four-night minimum stay; entire island (sleeps 18), from £10,160. aprivateisland.com

LES ROCHES ROUGES, FRANCE

Give the glamourpuss hotels of St Tropez and Cannes the cold shoulder and head to the Côte d'Azur's rugged coast at St-Raphaël for a classy alternative. Understated, chic interiors play on the tricolour with azure, white and ochre featuring heavily across the Fifties modernist style. Flanked by fragrant pine, tamarisk trees and pretty Mediterranean gardens, the hotel encourages a slow pace. Long, sun-filled days mean plenty of time to explore the area – hiking and sailing are popular – while afternoons call for games of *pétanque*. In keeping with the hotel's aesthetic, stone platforms poised around a seawater pool are decked out with loungers. It's every bit the French Riviera with all the *joie de vivre* and none of the ceremony. **INSIDER TIP** Pretty St-Raphaël is a ten-minute drive away. Try Le Bouchon Provençal for the five-fish bouillabaisse. **THE DETAIL** Doubles from £155. hotellesrochesrouges.com



THE WICKANINNISH INN, CANADA

Blink twice and you'll miss this family-run hostelry, which clings to a pine-shrouded peninsula on Vancouver Island's west coast. It has all the charm of a forester's cabin, with hand-crafted wooden archways and doors carved from cedar, yet is as sleek as the seals sliding along Chesterman Beach – which the hotel has direct access to. Spacious rooms, all with wood burners, look out over sweeping ocean panoramas, while a cocktail lounge boasts one of the biggest whisky collections in British Columbia, making this one very luxurious isolated getaway. **INSIDER TIP** Within striking distance, Meares Island and the Pacific Rim National Park have much to offer nature lovers. **THE DETAIL** Doubles from £255. wickinn.com





PETIT ST VINCENT

No cars. No news. No worries. A swirl of green hills and coral beaches, this undulating islet on St Vincent and the Grenadines was discovered by a US airman in 1963. He snapped it up and built a hotel for yachties. The odd one may still join you at the beach restaurant, but no sweat; your patch of heaven from one of the 22 open-front cottages guarantees you can disconnect, relax and enjoy. **INSIDER TIP** Golf fans should book a trip to nearby Canouan, which has a stellar course. **THE DETAIL** Cottages from £900, full board. petitstvincent.com



LIGHTHOUSE GREBENI, CROATIA

The best-value private island on our list and under three hours from the UK, this 19th-century lighthouse in Dubrovnik's bay proves that you don't have to break the bank for a slice of paradise. A sun-drenched terrace and pool are the ideal setting for sampling the local wines, while a speedboat is on hand around the clock to whizz you to the beaches of Babin Kuk. **INSIDER TIP** Pick up fresh octopus for the barbecue at Dubrovnik's Gruž Market. **THE DETAIL** Entire island (sleeps 8), from £525. villa-lighthouse-grebeni.travelsoft.hr



INN AT CUCKOLDS LIGHTHOUSE, USA

With clapboard houses painted brilliant white and no shortage of secret coves, Maine is New England at its most romantic. A private boat will whisk you from Southport Island into what feels like an Edward Hopper painting. This historic lighthouse has just two suites (which can be rented individually or together), and both are hazy dreamscapes of soft grey and blue. They each have sitting rooms complete with a selection of leatherbound Victorian novels plus coffee stations. Activities are gentle: spot porpoises, tuck into buttery lobster or plunder innkeepers Barb and Dan Aube's encyclopaedic knowledge of the building's fascinating history, which can be traced back to 1892. **INSIDER TIP** The West Suite's sofa converts into a very comfortable queen-sized bed complete with a locally made duvet, making this room the pick for groups. **THE DETAIL** Doubles from £450; entire island from £1,315. innatcuckoldslighthouse.com



CASA COOK KOS, GREECE

Renowned for its expansive beaches, Kos is the pick for perfect isolation out of the easy-to-access Greek islands. This Aegean rhapsody is on the windswept north coast with its own private stretch of sand. Cubist-style suites with rooftop terraces and private pools make up the accommodation. Days are best spent discovering crystal-clear coves and empty shorelines of uninhabited islets before retreating to the polished concrete rooms, and a cool respite from the non-stop summer sun. **INSIDER TIP** Blaze a trail to the beach for a horseback ride through the wild dunes. **THE DETAIL** Doubles from £126. casacook.com