

DEPARTURES

10 New Luxury Islands

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By Suzanne Weinstock
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Up-and-coming and under-the-radar island alternatives for popular resort and beach destinations.

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Tried-and-true island favorites such as St. Barths and Capri have long been wooing fashionable travelers. But these days, the new prestige in globetrotting lies in exploring far-flung destinations the masses have yet to invade. Even better: a vacation spot so exotic that no one has even heard of it. "We've been seeing strong interest in remote, off-the-beaten-path destinations, especially from travelers who have been to a region before and now want to discover its hidden side," says Scott Wiseman, president of luxury travel company Abercrombie & Kent USA.

Enter a new set of islands in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Caribbean and beyond. Take, for example, the Indonesian island Sumba. If Bali is too obvious a vacation choice, hop a short flight to this lush oasis, which now has its own luxury resort. You'll forget Bali even existed. Meanwhile, St. Barths is not the only *île de French* paradise: Deep in the Indian Ocean lies the

France-owned island Réunion, where you can start your day with a croissant before hitting the surf. And before it fully developed into a vacation destination for the rich and famous, Capri would have looked quite a bit like nearby Ischia, its rugged cousin.

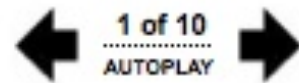
"Private and reassuringly hard-to-get, these islands entice diehard fans to get off the grid," says James Lohan, CEO and co-founder of the boutique hotel website Mr. & Mrs. Smith. They let vacationers "be the ruler of their own domain and feel like they have discovered someplace unique."

That's certainly the case at Makepeace Island, off of Australia's Sunshine coast. Richard Branson just started renting out the heart-shaped piece of land off this summer. Accommodations only house 22. Thailand's Koh Surin Nu is so secluded that the only way to stay overnight is in a rustic bungalow or camping out under the stars in Mu Koh Surin National Park.

So transition into being a trendsetter by picking a destination that bears some similarities to a familiar favorite. Then prepare to tack on extra travel time, since being an early adopter usually means adding an extra leg of travel. It's the moderate difficulty in getting there that keeps these places exclusive. Are you ready for an island less ordinary?



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Ischia, Italy

If You Love: Capri, for its natural beauty.

Instead Try: Ischia, which has the added bonus of a spa scene.

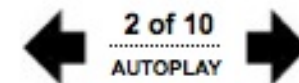
Getting There: Hop a hydrofoil from Naples, Sorrento or Capri.

You Should Know: Capri's neighbor also boasts thermal waters thought to have healing powers. Take advantage of the island's spas and volcanic mud, said to be a holistic treatment for a variety of skin and joint ailments.

What to do: The most popular spot is Negombo thermal park (negombo.it), with 12 thermal pools in Lacco Ameno.



© Hemis / Alamy



Mafia Island, Tanzania

If You Love: Zanzibar, Tanzania, for its history and gorgeous beaches and resorts.

Instead Try: Mafia Island, which has miles of white, deserted beaches visited by less than a thousand tourists a year. You can also experience Swahili culture while steering clear of backpackers.

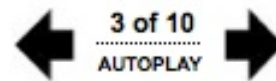
Getting There: It's accessible by plane from Zanzibar or Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.

You Should Know: The real beauty of Mafia lies in the village's past and present. Explore ruins dating back to the 11th century to get a feel for the region's history. Mingle with the friendly locals and shop for handmade goods in small villages such as Kirongwe (known for its clay pots) and Jimbo (famed for its plaited *ukili* leaf mats).

Where to Stay: To experience Mafia Island and nature at its fullest, stay in one of the seven open-air Treehouses at Chole Mjini (rooms from \$180; 255-769/204-159; afrikaafrikasafaris.com). Though it's therapeutically cut-off from cellular reception, it's not for the faint of heart. Alternatively, one can also stay at the Kinasi Lodge (rooms from \$300; 255-777/424588; kinasilodge.com), a cozy resort designed to feel just like home, with the added excitement of its own dive and snorkel center and Thai therapists at the ISIS Spa.



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Réunion Island, France

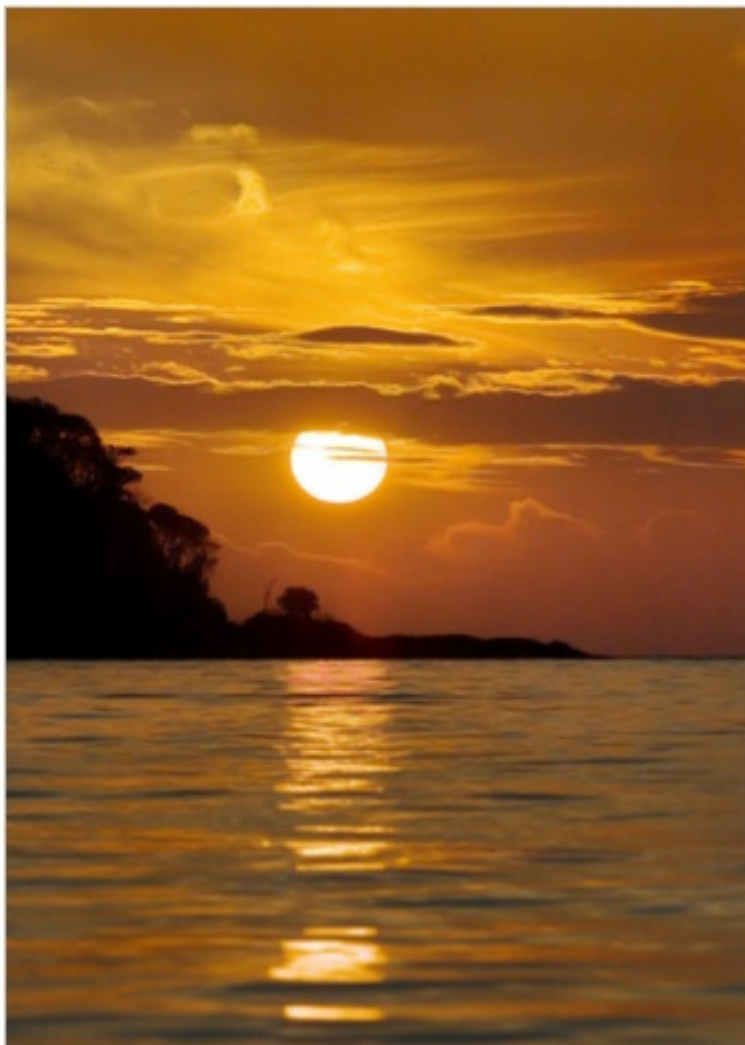
If You Love: St. Barths, for its chic French vibe.

Instead Try: Réunion, a French region in the Indian Ocean, about 500 miles east of Madagascar. Réunion is about as French as you can get outside France itself.

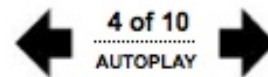
Getting There: Take a direct flight from Paris.

You Should Know: What sets the island apart from its motherland —apart from the inactive volcano

near its center—is the African, Indian and Asian influences on its French cuisine. Try the French-Asian fusion at L'Atelier de Ben (12 Rue de la Compagnie; 02-62/418-573; atelier-de-ben.com) in Saint-Denis, or the Creole food at Flagrant Délice (115 Rue François de Mahy; 06-92/872-803) in energetic St. Pierre.



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Koh Surin Nua, Thailand

If You Love: Koh Phi Phi Le, Thailand, for its once quiet stretches of white sand.

Instead Try: Koh Surin Nua, one of five islands that make up Thailand's Mu Koh Surin National Park.

Getting There: It's reachable only by a boat from Phuket, virtually guaranteeing you'll be one of the only visitors. (There's also no commercial activity to draw visitors.)

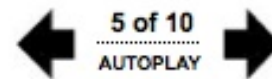
You Should Know: Phi Phi Le might not sound familiar, but the Leonardo DiCaprio film *The Beach* changed the island from an untouched getaway into one of Thailand's more popular tourist destinations. But Thailand's Koh Surin Nua island is still genuinely pristine.

Where to Stay: Head to Mu Koh Surin National Park. Stay in a rustic bungalow or camp out under the stars—it's the only one of the five islands that allows overnight guests (*Mu Koh Surin National Park*;

66-76/491-378).



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Pátmos, Greece

If You Love: Skiathos, for the quaint Greek island life.

Instead Try: Pátmos, the northernmost island of Greece's Dodecanese chain.

Getting There: Fly into Sámos, Kos or Léros Island and take a hydrofoil to reach Pátmos.

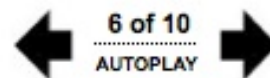
You Should Know: Ever since *Mamma Mia!* was filmed on Skiathos and neighboring Skopelos, tourism has exploded, so it's well

worth moving on to a Greek island that isn't overrun. Like Skiathos, Pátmos has beautiful beaches (sand beaches are only on several of the Greek islands) and a healthy dose of charm. It also has a history of spirituality (it was once the pilgrimage location of choice for Christians for its association with St. John the Divine) and it's easy to see why: The island's mostly untouched terrain makes it a serene retreat.

Where to Stay: Venture to the picturesque town of Chorá, which offers a mix of classic Greek whitewashed buildings and medieval mansions like the charming and bright four-bedroom Petra Villa (rental from \$1,330; *Chora, Patmos Island*; 30-224/703-4020; petrahotel-patmos.com). It's close to the cave of the apocalypse, where St. John is believed to have written the "Book of Revelations."



© Travelbild.com / Alamy



Isla Robinson Crusoe, Chile

If You Love: The Galapagos, for its famed wildlife.

Instead Try: Isla Robinson Crusoe, a pirate enclave turned national park and world biosphere reserve.

Getting There: During the high season (October through April), take a two-and-a-half hour commercial or charter flight from Santiago, Chile. The planes that fly in are the very small ones, and there are not a

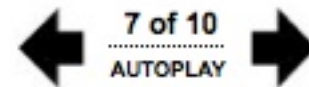
lot of flights (nor are the schedules that reliable).

You Should Know: It's so off the beaten path that only about 700 international tourists visit per year. (However, the island does receive visits from the big cruise lines such as Holland America, which could bring in many more people on any given day.) Wildlife-spotting excursions are popular since the island is rich with native plant and animal species, including the Juan Fernández fur seal (nearly extinct a century ago) and the rare Juan Fernández hummingbird. It's also worth taking a dive to see the *SMS Dresden*, a German cruiser that sank off Isla Robinson Crusoe's shores during World War I.

Where to Stay: Since the island is such a hidden gem, truly-luxe accommodations haven't made landfall yet. Robinson Crusoe's best rustic offering is Hotel Aldea Daniel Defoe (rooms from \$100; *Daniel Defoe 445, Robinson Crusoe Island*; chile-hotels.com/dandefoe.htm), which boasts a full activity list including deep sea fishing, scuba diving and photo safaris.



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Cyprus

If You Love: Ibiza, for its beaches and never-ending nightlife.

Instead Try: Cyprus. Ayia Napa, Cyprus's chief clubbing town, has given the island a reputation as an up-and-coming party destination.

Getting There: Take an hour and 40 minute flight from Greece.

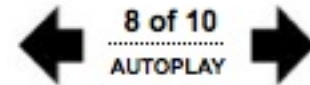
You Should Know: Cyprus emerged as a music destination about a decade ago. Initially focused on garage music, a subgenre of

electronic dance music originating in the UK, the island is now exploding with headliner DJs who spin the full-spectrum of electronic mixes.

What to Do: The Sunday afternoon party at Guaba Beach Bar (*Amathuntos 7 Limassol; guababeachbar.com*) is legendary, with headlining DJs such as Gareth Emery and Dash Berlin passing through every summer. And don't miss a night at Castle Club (*20-22 Louka Louka, Ayia Napa; thecastleclub.com*).



© Courtesy of Makepeace Island



Makepeace Island, Australia

If You Love: Necker Island, Richard Branson's private paradise.

Instead Try: Makepeace Island. Branson just started renting out the heart-shaped piece of land off Australia's Sunshine Coast this summer.

Getting There: Take a boat or helicopter from nearby Noosa, just north of Brisbane, Australia.

You Should Know: Be sure to

bring an entourage—up to 22 people—as the only way to stay on Makepeace is to reserve the island in its entirety. Its facilities include three rich-hued wood bures along with the main Bali guest house, with private decks attached to each of its four bedrooms. (*Island rental from \$7,900; 61-8/8351-7185; makepeaceisland.com*)

What to Do: Although the Balinese-style accommodations are beautiful, you're bound to spend most of your time in the massive lagoon pool, with areas for swimming laps and diving, as well as a spa that's big enough for 15 people.



© Coutersy of Nihiwatu

Sumba, Indonesia

If You Love: Bali and its romantic resorts.

Instead Try: Sumba, to avoid the surf-and-party crowd.

Getting There: Charter a flight from Bali to Sumba, in eastern Indonesia.

You Should Know: The island is home to a single luxury resort, Nihiwatu (*rooms from \$495; Kuta PoLeng Complex Block C/2 Kuta; 62-361/757-149; nihiwatu.com*).

The getaway only hosts about 20 people at any given time in its seven one-bedroom bungalows, two two-bedroom villas, and one three-bedroom estate.

What to Do: Nihiwatu limits the number of surfers to 10. Have the staff plan a day for you at a remote bay one hour or so south of the hotel, where you can swim, fish, snorkel, hike and hang out on the white sand beach. A personal chef will prepare your lunch. It's not fancy, but it's perfect for the setting.



© Robert Harding Picture Library Ltd / Alamy

Montserrat, West Indies

If You Love: Volcanic Caribbean islands such as Nevis.

Instead Try: Montserrat, which is resort-free and just one island over from Nevis.

Getting There: Take a 15 minute flight from neighboring Antigua or a one hour boat ride from Antigua.

You should now: The lack of development in Montserrat gives that *way* off the beaten path feeling, despite being relatively accessible.

While Nevis's volcano is extinct, Montserrat lets visitors get near its active volcano (last showing activity in 1995).

Where to Stay: There's only one hotel on the island, but plenty of guesthouses and villas. Stay at the charming six-bedroom Olveston House (*rooms from \$110; 664-491-5210; olvestonhouse.com*), which, though modest, has an idyllic wraparound porch and sweeping views of the volcano. The guesthouse, once home to Beatles producer George Martin, boasted a recording studio where Martin hosted the likes of Sting, Eric Clapton and Paul McCartney. Martin still owns the property and pops in from time to time.