

ISLES AWAY

Idyllic alternatives to more popular destinations, these six off-the-beaten-path islands offer a true sense of escape.

By Gina DeCaprio Vercesi

The sway of a hammock. The rasp of palm fronds. The kaleidoscopic colors of a coral reef. Few vacations offer the feeling of pure escapism we get from visiting an island. But not all island getaways are created alike. For a truly secluded slice of paradise, we present six island retreats where you can leave your cares—and the crowds—behind.

Koh Yao Yai, Thailand ▶

With its dazzling emerald waters and otherworldly limestone sea stacks, Phang Nga Bay may just be Thailand's most recognizable destination. Right in the middle, 30 minutes by boat—yet worlds away—from Phuket's pizzazz, is Koh Yao Yai. The name means 'big long island,' which accurately describes this narrow spit of land that stretches for 18 miles from north to south. In between, rice paddies, rubber plantations and quaint fishing villages offer a window into southern Thailand's quieter side. Set on a secluded stretch of golden beach, the luxurious new **Anantara Koh Yao Yai Resort & Villas** is the only hotel of its kind on the island—and it makes a heavenly home base. Nearby, stroll Hat Laem Haad, a slim triangle of land that tapers into a scimitar-shaped sandbar before disappearing into the sea. Tour the island in a vintage sidecar or hire a wooden longtail boat and spend the day island hopping through Phang Nga Bay.



▼ **Lānaʻi, Hawaii**

Throughout the Hawaiian Islands, numerous places offer glimpses into old Hawaii. But on Lānaʻi, you'll get much more than a glimpse, from the rich paniolo (cowboy) history to the warm aloha spirit you'll feel strolling through Lānaʻi City. The town was founded when James Dole purchased the island in 1922 and established the largest pineapple plantation in the world. Today, most visitors come for the **Four Seasons Resort Lānaʻi**, which, like the other 98 percent of the island, is owned by Oracle billionaire Larry Ellison. Surrounded by lush, botanical gardens overlooking Lānaʻi's famed Hulopoʻe Bay, the resort

itself is sublime. Take a poke class with the culinary team, snorkel the marine reserve fronting Hulopoʻe Beach or play a round at the spectacular Jack Nicklaus-designed Mānele golf course. But for a full dose of Lānaʻi magic, rent one of the resort's shiny Jeeps for an island tour. Head north for an off-road adventure through Keahiakawelo (Garden of the Gods), a fascinating, red-dirt landscape full of massive boulders and rock spires. On the southern tip of the island, check out Kaunolū Village, the largest surviving ruins of a prehistoric Hawaiian village and King Kamehameha I's favorite fishing spot.



▲ **Little St. Simons Island, Georgia**

Tucked into the pristine wilderness of Georgia's Altamaha River delta about two hours south of Savannah, Little St. Simons Island has long been celebrated for its rustic luxury and enduring commitment to sustainability. In 2015, owners Hank and Wendy Paulson placed the 11,000-acre private barrier island in a conservation easement with the Nature Conservancy, ensuring that its fragile coastal ecosystems, which provide habitat for hundreds of native species, will be forever protected. Amid centuries-old live oaks draped in Spanish moss, the **Lodge on Little St. Simons Island** accommodates just 32 guests in six charming cottages. Days are spent adventuring with LSSI's naturalists—kayaking the tidal creeks, casting seine nets on the beach, hiking through lush, maritime forest, or searching for alligators on wildlife safaris. In the evenings, guests share stories over cocktails in the 1917 hunting lodge, where three family-style meals crafted from hyper-local ingredients are served daily as part of the all-inclusive experience.

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Islas Secas, Panama

Considered a biological hot spot, this necklace of 14 lush, volcanic islands in Panama's Gulf of Chiriquí remains one of the wildest places in Latin America. In 2019, conservation philanthropist Louis Bacon opened the luxurious **Islas Secas Reserve and Lodge** on Isla Cavada, the largest island in the archipelago. Guests stay in one of seven airy casitas, some with roll-up canvas walls, created by global design firm Hart Howerton. Each one features a private plunge pool or soaking tub, a dreamy four-poster bed and stunning Pacific views. An onsite concierge creates personalized daily adventures that showcase the grandeur of the surrounding ecosystem—seasonal whale watching trips, snorkeling and diving excursions, and bespoke marine safaris. When the sun sets, sip craft cocktails and dine on ultra-fresh ceviche beneath the soaring bamboo ceilings of Terraza, the resort's open-air dining room-meets-gathering house.



Photo: Jonathan Becker

▲ Guana Island, British Virgin Islands

Of the 50-odd islands, islets and cays spread throughout the British Virgin Islands, you'd be hard pressed to find a more idyllic hideaway than Guana Island. Since 1934, people have been coming to Guana to live out their castaway fantasies. Although the 18 cottages and villas, all built from local stone and coral, have been updated through the years (including a top-to-bottom, post-hurricane renovation in 2017), the resort's low-key elegance and kitschy charm remain the same as ever. While away the days exploring the 850-acre island, swimming and sunbathing at the seven deserted beaches, wandering through Guana's Eden-like orchard or fishing for tarpon off the dock. If adventure strikes, take out a paddleboard or hit the island's trails for a hike to the summit of Sugarloaf Mountain. Island-hopping day trips to some of the BVI's best-loved outposts—Virgin Gorda's Baths National Park, the Soggy Dollar Bar on Jost Van Dyke, Norman Island's Caves—are always on offer should you care to venture farther afield.



Kangaroo Island, Australia ▲

Kangaroo Island's prolific wildlife and pristine natural beauty have earned it the moniker "the Galápagos of Australia," and rightly so. More than one-third of the island—located a half-hour flight from the South Australia capital city of Adelaide—is national park or protected conservation land that provides safe haven for sea lions, fur seals, bandicoots, koalas, platypus, penguins and, of course, kangaroos. From late 2019 to early 2020, bushfires razed nearly half of the 1,700-square-mile island, including enormous swaths of Flinders Chase

National Park and the iconic **Southern Ocean Lodge**. But now, the landscape has begun to regenerate, with new vegetation blanketing the charred earth in lush hues of green. This December, the award-winning lodge reopens following a complete rebuild. Overseen by architect Max Pritchard, SOL 2.0 weaves modern enhancements, including extensive sustainability upgrades, into Pritchard's nearly flawless original design. SOL's 25 clifftop suites have been repositioned, giving each one an even more spectacular view of the wild bushland and Pacific Ocean. ☉