

# Hopping rich

Why limit yourself to just one island destination when some of the finest archipelagos in the seven seas are back open for business?

Island holidays are some of the dreamiest getaways, and whether it be relaxing on a beach or hiking through the mountains, there are many islands that promise endless adventure, leisure and the unique kind of tranquility that only an island can bring. Here are some of the best vacation spots for island hoppers who love to visit those tiny spots of land surrounded by ocean, one after another.

## CYCLADES

Just southeast of the Grecian mainland, this little group of islands in the Aegean Sea is the picturesque European island getaway experience everyone

has always imagined. The 56 islands, 24 of which are inhabited, are made up of some classic and well-known spots, as well as some smaller, less popular areas with just as beautiful sights. While Santorini and Mykonos are beautiful, they are also often overrun with tourists, so during the summer months head for the quieter isle of Kythnos – famed for its natural phenomena, which includes cave networks and hot springs. Serifos is the place to be for experiencing the arts and traditional Greek cuisine, while Sifnos nearby has many hills and even more good food, archaeological ruins and hiking trails. If a visit to a volcano is

desired, Folegandros promises a little more exclusivity than Santorini with all the same excitement. The possibilities here are endless for exploring and discovering, as each island offers something new to the experience.

## OKINAWA

Located in the East China Sea, these 160 plus islands are a fascinating look at Japanese culture from a different perspective than usual.

**Below: Oia town on Santorini**  
**Right: Aharen Beach on Tokashiki Island in the East China Sea and Orca watching on San Juan Islands**

While not all of these islands are inhabited, where there is civilization, travellers will find not the bustling high tech Japan of Tokyo, but a quiet country-like existence. The main island of Okinawa is just a starting point. From there, the Kerama Islands are a short trip, as well as Akajima and the Yaeyama Islands, where Japan's southernmost national park Iriomote can be found.

Jungle hiking, kayaking and diving are great activities to do here, though nearby Taketomi may be the place for those who love cultural heritage, with water buffalo carts and lion-dog shisa figures to see. There are also plenty of quiet beaches where travellers can relax, sunbathe or even go diving with manta rays.

## SAN JUAN ISLANDS

The 400 or so islands of San Juan, off the coast of Northwest USA, form an archipelago just off the coast of the adjacent states of Vancouver and Washington.



The laid back attitude of the people on San Juan and its neighbouring islands sets the tone for a relaxed, easygoing trip. It's all about getting out into nature here, with lots of options for hiking, biking, kayaking, spotting wildlife and camping. Whale watching is a favourite pastime for tourists here, as many sea mammals can be spotted in the waters. There is Lopez Island for winery tours, Shaw Island for escaping civilization altogether, and even Orcas Island, perfect for a long and strenuous hike up the tallest point on the island group, Mount Constitution.

## OUTER HEBRIDES

This group of islands is off the west coast of Scotland, though further than most island groups from the UK. Rich Gaelic culture is upheld in these small islands, with many native speakers and



practising of cultural traditions. While it may be a far cry from the beaches of European or Caribbean islands, the peat bogs and mountainous terrain here are equally as breath-taking, though the islands boast their fair share of white-sand beaches too. These islands are so small, they can be mostly traversed on foot, from

Vatersay all the way to Stornoway, a 252km journey known as the Hebridean Way. Along the way are ample opportunities for activities, such as sea kayaking, remote beach strolls, a visit to a genuine crafting village, prehistoric sites akin to Stone Henge, or even an Eat Drink Hebrides Trail where participants will get a tour of the

notable restaurants, distilleries, markets and farms throughout the islands.

## AZORES

Smack dab in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the nearest neighbour of the Azores is Portugal – and even that is some 1,400km away. This cluster of nine volcanic islands, spread out into three clusters over 600km, feels like taking a trip back in time. Rural life goes on, even on the main island of San Miguel, and is largely directed by the seasons, with many lakes and craters to explore. Santa Maria is the home of the artisan populations of the isles, including a cooperative in Santo Esprito, and a four-day hiking trail.

Head to Terceira for trekking, cycling, diving and kayaking and a visit to the UNESCO World Heritage site Angro do Heroismo. ➤





Pico, Sao Jorge and Faial, the three central islands, are good for climbing, with Portugal's highest mountain on Pico. Whale watching and wine tasting are also must-dos on these little islands, though if anyone wants more of a nature experience, the island of Flores would be the place to visit.

### ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

In the southern Caribbean lies the tiny archipelago of St Vincent and the Grenadines, the Lesser Antilles arc of the Windward Islands. The main island, St Vincent itself, has incredible black sand beaches, bird watching and a more bearable form of tourism than a lot of other places in the Caribbean. The islands of the Grenadines, around 30 or so, are where the most fun can be had here though. On Bequia, tourists can learn the maritime history of perhaps the most famous sea in the world, while Canouan is perfect for snorkelling.

On Union Island, there are options for hiking and rock climbing around the jagged peaks, diving, kitesurfing and sailing, as

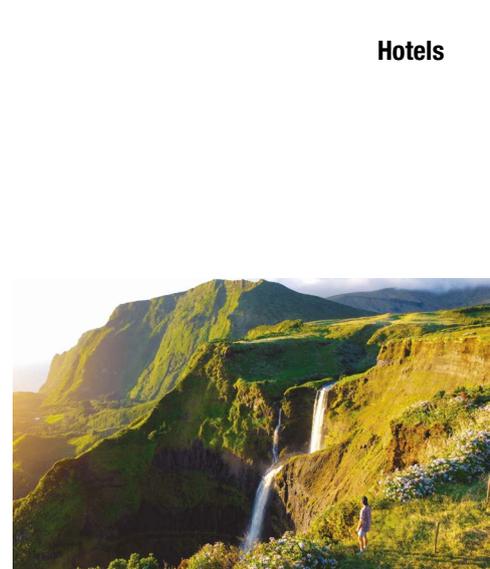
well as lounging on the beach with a cocktail or two. Close by is the uninhabited island of Tobago Cays Marine Park, and explorers can walk from one end of Mayreau to the other.

### BOHUSIÄN ISLANDS

Just off the coast of western Sweden, these 8,000 islands spread through the Kattegat and Skagerrak seas, all the way to

Norway. The Nordic atmosphere of these islands may be one of the most charming things about them, as fishing villages line

**Above: Caribbean town Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and a cascading waterfall on Flores Island in Portugal's Azores Below: Fishing cottages on Sweden's west coast island of Smögen**



the coasts and restaurants with fresh, locally-sourced ingredients feed the locals and tourists alike. Marstrand, the island closest to Sweden, is popular with yachties and those looking for quiet spots for natural bathing.

Tjörn is the place in this island grouping to find the artsy stuff, with museums and sculptures, whereas Astol and Dyrön nearby are completely car-free islands, where wellbeing, massages and saunas are top of a very tranquil agenda.

The floating hotel of Kliidesholmen is a fascinating visit, and Orust has many fishing villages and a large nature reserve. There are so many islands here, it seems the activities may be endless. ■

