

25 Best Tropical Islands

Aquamarine waters, chalk-white beaches, nodding palm trees and fragrant jungle; who doesn't lust after the balmy beauty of tropical islands?

It feels like anything is possible in the tropics. With all kinds of adventure activities to keep you busy - you can easily spend days diving, sailing, trekking and practising yoga. But, it's fine to just plant your tushy on the sand and breathe in those tropical vibes.

But of all the beautiful tropical places that grace the planet, how to choose?

Everyone deserves their fair share of vitamin sea, which is why we've scoured the globe to collate the 25 best tropical islands. Whether you're after adventure or simply want to practice your supine pose in peace, one of these islands will float your boat.

First up, it's the island of the gods...

Bali

Bali is that rare jewel that hits the sweet spot between backpackers, honeymooners and family holidays. You've got the full spectrum of fancy beachfront resorts, cosy guest houses, chill dorms and party hostels. It's neither the cheapest destination in South East Asia, nor is it the priciest. Steeped in spirituality, there are over 20,000 Hindu temples dotted around the island - plus around the same number of yoga retreats.

In Bali, it's easy to cram your days with activities and excursions. Or, you can find a spot in the sun and kick back with a tropical juice or cold beer - there's no judgement on Bali. Take your pick between partying until sunrise or waking up at the crack of dawn to practice your warriors on the peace. Choose to eat beside locals at warungs or order the floating breakfast buffet to your private pool.

What to do in Bali

- Hire a scooter and explore the hundreds of temples, paddy fields, beaches and jungles of Bali.
- Strengthen your body and soothe your mind with a cocktail of surf and yoga classes.
- Nurture your Instagram feed with delicious smoothie bowls.
- Hop on the boat to Nusa Penida: a small tropical island featuring a t-rex shaped cliff and manta ray snorkelling.

Seychelles

With the softest sand and the warmest ocean, just the name alone makes us feel chill. This dreamy archipelago of 115 islands is sitting pretty in the middle of the Indian Ocean, far off the East African coast. Choose a base on Mahé, Praslin and La Digue and spend your days cruising around the smaller, uninhabited islands.

Given their location and just how utterly pristine the Seychelles are, they are very expensive - especially during December and January. Visit between May to September when temperatures are the most pleasant and it rains less. After all, you don't want to spend all those dollars to sit in the rain.

What to do in Seychelles

- Book an expensive resort with expensive views and expensive excursions.
- Dine on a diet of fancy cocktails and the finest imported food.
- Sit at the end of your private pier and contemplate the effects of climate change on small island nations.

Barbados

Barbados is a banging Caribbean island with zesty nightlife, awesome people, and a surprisingly number of botanical gardens. Young travellers relish the vibrant festivals that

take place throughout the year - ranging from music, to harvest and even a fish festival. At the same time, families have a hoot in Barbados. The island is swimming with family-friendly resorts and villas that make it a popular choice for those with a younger brood.

On the eastern side of the island, you'll find some rad surfing spots. Every beach on Barbados is open to the public which means you can take your pick from the 80 tropical beaches the island has on offer. The food is delicious and you can pick between pricey restaurants and cheaper hang outs favoured by locals.

If you have the cash, you'll have no shortage of activities to throw it at. But, Barbados is also one of the more affordable islands in the Caribbean. You'll find mid-range hotels and hostels to suit a variety of budgets.

What to do in Barbados

- Swim alongside turtles in the warm, azure water.
- Gorge on fish fry washed down with plenty of locally distilled Mount Gay.
- Visit Scotland. That's right - the region known as Saint Andrews bears a striking resemblance to the rugged British country.

Phuket

Thailand's largest island is a top tropical vacation for a wide mix of traveller styles and budgets. With its idyllic white beaches fringed with palms, glittering seas and a myriad of peaceful temples, what's not to like? Although, be sure to do your research when choosing where to stay in Phuket.

As a rule of thumb - central Phuket is popular with backpackers and party animals looking for some of Thailand's best nightlife. Meanwhile, couples seeking a romantic escape and families will prefer north or south of the island. You'll find no shortage of digs, ranging from budget hostel beds and homestays to whopping resorts and luxury retreats.

As a general tip for the Thai islands - don't write off the monsoon season (May-October). This means sharing Phuket with fewer tourists, cheaper accommodation. Just don't forget to pack your rain jacket.

What to do in Phuket

- Embrace the full breadth of Thai culture. Experience an acrobatic massage, the vigour of a Muay Thai match and find zen in a Buddhist temple all in the same day.
- Eat, eat, and eat some more. Surf on local delicacies at the various night markets dotted around the island or enrol in a Thai cooking class.
- Find out why you should never ride an elephant at the Phuket Elephant Jungle Sanctuary. At this ethical retreat, you can instead walk alongside the gentle giants.

Maldives

Luminous sapphire seas, blinding white sand flowing all-you-can eat buffets are trademark of the Maldives. Of the 1,200 islands that form this tropical paradise, around 100 are used for tourism. The most luxurious resorts straddle an atoll in its entirety, providing a more private (read: luxurious) experience for its guests.

A top tropical vacation for affluent explorers, the Maldives is synonymous with honeymooners and loved-up couples with deep pockets. However, a number of the Maldivian resorts are set up to attract families - with kids' clubs and water slides and the like. So make sure you check out the target market of any resort so you end up in the right place for your holiday.

You're more likely to find a Maldivian bargain between June and October - the monsoon season. And when we say bargain, take that with a pinch of salt.

What to do in the Maldives

- Blow a year's salary and rent a bungalow over the water and spend your days gazing at the rich marine life beneath your feet.

- When you're not bronzing yourself on powdery white beaches, you will find terrific diving, snorkelling and kayaking.
- Utilise the ferry system to escape from the easy life of your all-inclusive and explore neighbouring islands with a more local vibe.

The Perhentians

A short boat ride from the Malaysian coast sits two of the most beautiful tropical islands in South East Asia. People come to the Perhentians for two reasons; dive or snorkel in the crystal clear water, or to lounge on the beach and do nada.

Head to Perhentian Besar for a peaceful escape in a world class resort with all your creature comforts. This island is popular with families and honeymooners and comprises mid-range to top-tier hotels.

Those of you counting the pennies, follow the rest of the barebones backpackers off the boat at the more rustic and slightly rowdier Perhentian Kecil. This is actually one of the most affordable places to get your open water certificate in the whole of Asia. The diving conditions are mint too so it's worth it!

What to do on the Perhentians

- Accidentally-on-purpose miss your boat back to the mainland and extend your stay (indefinitely).
- Don't even bother asking for Wi-Fi codes on Perhentian Kecil. It won't work, and you've got better things to do.

Palawan

Many say that Palawan is the most beautiful tropical island in the Philippines. Although, it's hard not to see why - the beauty of this tropical island paradise slaps you right in the face.

Palawan in fact boasts two UNESCO World Heritage sites. Wiggle into your diving gear and explore Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park or hop aboard a canoe for the Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park.

In keeping with the rest of the Philippines, Palawan is a top island destination for backpackers. With plenty of hostels and cheap food, you can stretch your money far here. Travellers flock to Palawan so if you're travelling solo, you're guaranteed to make some new travel buddies.

What to do in Palawan

- Island-hop around the lagoons and islands of El Nido in the north stretch of the island.
- Tickle your tastebuds with Filipino cuisine. Bulls testicle soup (mysteriously branded Soup Number 5) and boiled duck embryo (balut) are two such delicacies. In fact, the termite of the sea - tamilok - is a Palawan speciality.

Fiji

Another of those islands formerly seen as a honeymoon destination, Fiji's appeal has soared over recent decades. It now attracts a mixed bag of solo backpackers and younger explorers. As the most developed Pacific Island, it's also the most popular for family holidays. Made up of over 300 islands, you'll find most of the tourism across the western islands, particularly Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

Fiji has something for everyone on offer. There's diving and snorkelling, sailing and surfing, hiking and whale watching. And of course, there's embracing the tropical island lifestyle by swaying in a hammock for days at a time. The temperature remains mostly constant throughout the year, with cyclones occurring between November and January.

What to do in Fiji

- Take a break from the beach to slather yourself in the therapeutic mud baths of Viti Levu.

- Befriend the friendly locals at a Fijian village. Rather than taking a tour, you can do this independently - as long as you brush up on the customs. Don't forget to cover up and take a *sevusevu* (gift) for the *turanga ni koro* (village chief).

The Galapagos

Some 1,000 km from the South American continent, the 19 islands that form the Galapagos are a melting pot of marine life. With its undisturbed ecosystem and isolated location, wildlife is able to flourish in the Galapagos. Rather than lying supine on the beach, a trip to the Galapagos is all about early starts and days trawling the coast for nature sightings.

Whilst the Galapagos used to be exclusively for the wild-loving wealthy, there is more scope for a budget trip these days. If you have the cash to splash, sure - go ahead and book that liveaboard cruise. If not, you will find dorms, guesthouses and affordable local food. Once you've got your feet on the ground, you can shop around for tours and excursions.

What to do in The Galapagos

- Ponder what the world would look like if we left nature in peace beyond this cluster of tropical islands.
- Put down your camera and binge on the extraordinary wildlife you'll encounter through your eyes.

Niue

Not so much a tropical island, the minuscule island nation of Niue is technically a coral atoll. In fact it's one of the largest raised coral atolls on earth (as well as being one of the most beautiful tropical places, obv's). You've got rock pools in the north, rainforest in the southwest, with secret tropical beaches connecting the two. Oh, and you hike across the length of the island in around 5 hours.

At present, Niue is only accessible from New Zealand which does make it trickier to access. So it's most popular with vacationing Kiwis (not the fluffy or edible kind), New Zealand backpackers and other South Pacific islanders. But, it's way more chill than its neighbouring South Pacific islands making it one of the top tropical islands in the vicinity for some R&R.

What to do on Niue

- Swing by the Police Station to pick up your Niue driver's licence - mandatory before you hire a car. Best souvenir ever, right?
- Experience the underwater world - diving off Niue comes with a visibility of up to 100 metres.

Koh Rong

Koh Rong is Cambodia's answer to Malaysia's Perhentian islands. Again, you get to take your pick between two islands to visit.

Ko Rong is the more happening of the two, with regular raves and parties at Police Beach. It's not quite on par with Thailand full moon parties, but it's getting there. For a quieter tropical escape, head to the sleepier Koh Rong Samloem and nap on untouched tropical beaches in humble bamboo huts.

Whilst Koh Rong works out at a lower cost overall, both islands are ideal for budget travellers. They're mainly frequented by travellers on a circular lap of Cambodia, and long-term wanderers who still haven't left.

What to do in Koh Rong

- Fill your tummy on the catch of the day at the nightly beach barbecues whilst local kids dressed in British football shirts run riot.

- Switch your phone off and embrace the castaway vibe of Koh Rong Sanloem - Wi-Fi is in short supply

Raja Ampat

The Raja Ampat archipelago bobs around in Indonesia's distant West Papua province. It's hardly one of the easiest tropical places to vacation due to its remoteness. That being said, if you want to get as off-grid as possible then Raja Ampat is your dream destination.

Once you reach this faraway cluster of jungle coated islands, you can choose to immerse you in snorkelling, scuba diving, kayaking and much more.

A number of protected areas have been established in Raja Ampat to maintain the marine environment. That means on the one hand, unspoiled nature and thriving wildlife. On the other, it does result in Raja Ampat being a costlier choice of Indonesian island.

What to do in Raja Ampat

- See for yourself what a difference it makes when we protect the natural environment.
- Get the full Robinson Crusoe experience with a cruise out to some of the deserted islands in the archipelago.

Vanuatu

Of all the tropical places to visit in the South Pacific, Vanuatu ticks a lot of the boxes for your island escape. Vanuatu has managed to steer clear of mass tourism and accommodation options are more along the lines of independent boutique bungalows and hideaway retreats.

This fiery island has an ample scattering of simmering volcanoes, including a number beneath the water. There's some of the best wreck diving in the South Pacific off the islands, making Vanuatu a top tropical vacation for adventure junkies.

What to do in Vanuatu

- Set yourself the challenge of seeing how many words you can pick up from the 100+ indigenous languages spoken throughout Vanuatu.
- Duck beneath the palm trees with a platter of brie and a bottle of red wine. A hangover of the time the nation was a French colony.
- Sip on kava – a natural narcotic drink made from the root of the malok plant.

Koh Lipe

If you like the sound of the Maldives but are less enthused by the prices, then Thailand has the perfect alternative. Dubbed the Maldives of Thailand for its turquoise bays and alabaster-white sand, you could almost convince yourself otherwise. With no jetty to speak of, arriving on Koh Lipe is an adventure in itself.

With its romantic beachfront resorts, Koh Lipe is one of Thailand's best tropical islands for couples. But, it also caters well for budget explorers on the South East Asia trail. There's a scattering of hostels and budget bungalows that whilst pricier than other Thai islands won't break your budget. From Koh Lipe you can take the ferry to Langkawi, one of Malaysia's top tropical vacation spots.

What to do in Koh Lipe

- Set up camp in one of Koh Lipe's awesome beach bars and chat the afternoon away with friendly locals.
- Watch the sun come up at Sunrise Beach and dip back below the horizon at Sunset Beach.

Lombok & the Gili Islands

Lombok suffered greatly in the wake of the 2018 earthquake, which destroyed homes and paused the island's tourism. But, the island is getting back on its feet and tourists are a welcome sight. Plus - Lombok is awesome - it's even more laid-back than Bali and less commercialised.

Besides Bali, Lombok is a springboard to the Gili Islands: three of the most tropical places in South East Asia. These are essentially broken down into:

- Gili Air - for meditation, yoga and wellness as well as stellar diving.
- Gili Trawangan - for hedonistic backpackers hungry for nightlife.
- Gili Meno - for a romantic tropical island paradise or family holiday.

What to do in Lombok & the Gili Islands

- Support as many local businesses as you can and tip generously - it'll help the locals regenerate their lost earnings.
- If you're short on time, stick to one Gili rather than hopping around all three.

Bohol

Selecting the most beautiful tropical islands in the Philippines is no easy feat. But, the chocolate hills of Bohol make it an easy favourite of ours alongside Palawan.

Bohol is the epicentre of outdoor nature fun in the Philippines. Once you've roamed the chocolate hills you can take your pick from ziplining above the dense canopy, waterfall climbing, exploring caves, and cruising along jungle rivers. Perfect for wanderers on a budget who want to see some otherworldly natural sights.

What to do in Bohol

- Let yourself get gooey-eyed over the googly-eyed Tarsiers

- Take a day trip to neighbouring Panglao Island - accessible via a bridge.

Mauritius

Don't be fooled into thinking Mauritius is solely for honeymooners. Mauritius is still one of the best tropical vacation spots even if you haven't recently declared your undying love. There's not much of a backpacker scene on the island, but there are some cute accommodations on AirBnB for less financially buoyant travellers.

Mauritius is a real playground for those who like their idyllic tropical destinations to come with a side of adventure. Hiking, watersports, skydiving. It's an island where all your scary dreams can come true.

What to do in Mauritius

- Take a helicopter tour to see the 'underwater' waterfall off the coast of Morne.
- Find a secluded spot in the less developed south end of the island and embrace the beach bum lifestyle.

Kauai (Hawaii)

You can't go wrong with Hawaii, whichever of the state's eight islands you choose as your destination. But - if you're not sure where to start - check out Kauai. Kauai is perhaps the prettiest of the islands, with drop-dead gorgeous natural sights.

Besides that, Kauai is also the most backpacker-friendly Hawaiian island. It's cheaper than the ultra swanky Maui, quieter than Big Island. It's also the wettest of the islands, seeing short bursts of rain more or less every day of the year. However it's for that very reason the 'garden isle' is so vividly green and gushing with waterfalls, such as the jaw-dropping Wall of Tears.

That being said, if you'd rather see a backdrop of spewing lava - stick with Big Island.

What to do in Kauai

- Scout out the shoot locations used in such films as the Pirates of the Caribbean, Raiders of the Lost Ark and Jurassic Park.
- Explore the 'other' Grand Canyon: Waimea Canyon State Park.

Bermuda

With its pink tropical beaches, swathes of British phone booths, and the biggest monopoly on shipwrecks in the world, Bermuda isn't your standard tropical paradise.

Bermuda is pricey, but it's a top island destination if you're a big spender with travel money to burn. It's so expensive that even cooking in your AirBnB kitchen won't make the slightest difference - even groceries come with x-rated price tags. That being said, it's a beautiful island and easily one of the coolest places to say you've visited.

Another popular option is to join a cruise that stops over at Bermuda.

What to do in Bermuda

- Swizzle a rum swizzle whilst watching the skies turn pink over the pink sands
- Take a glass-bottom boat and snorkelling combination tour out to the shipwrecks of the Bermuda Triangle.

Ilha Grande

Less of a holiday destination in its own right, the small tropical island of Ilha Grande is more a weekend getaway from Rio de Janeiro. Only an hour's boat ride away from the city, the island allures with its white sandy beaches, crystal clear waters and exciting forest trails.

As Ilha Grande has managed to avoid mass development, the island remains mostly unspoiled with an easy-going atmosphere.

What to do on Ilha Grande

- Take a boat tour out and visit the even tinier tropical islands around the main island. You'll find even wilder beaches with marine rich waters crying out for a snorkelling session.
- Have a wander around the abandoned maximum-security prison, Candido Mendes. You might bump into Julio de Almeida, a former inmate who decided to stay after the prison closed down.

San Andrés

Officially a part of Colombia, the seahorse-shaped island of San Andrés brings together a sparkling mix of Latino, English and Creole culture.

San Andrés is on the whole populated with Colombians who take advantage of budget flights from the mainland. They also waived the tourist tax fee on arrival. Whilst the exotic island doesn't generally appear on Latin American travel itineraries, it's pretty backpacker friendly.

What to do in San Andrés

- Island hop to the Johnny Cay Natural Regional Park, a protected coral islet inhabited by iguanas and reggae tunes.
- Hire a golf cart from your hotel or local rental company and tour the island in style.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Comprising a main island and a chain of smaller islands, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines lingers in the south-east of the Caribbean Sea. The topography is unusual - besides your sky-blue seas and emerald green jungle you'll find spiky cacti.

With yacht-filled harbours and chic private islands, this is a top island destination for sailors. Affordable self-catering apartments and guesthouses are available on the main

island. The further out you travel, the costlier and more exclusive your accommodation will become.

What to do in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

- Visit Wallilabou Bay where Captain Jack Sparrow escaped execution at the hands of the British Navy.
- Summit the smoldering La Soufriere. Once at the crater, you can take a rope-guided walk down into the caldera of the volcano and get a closer look at the lava dome.

The Whitsundays

Some of the world's most beautiful tropical islands are located in the heart of the Great Barrier Reef. Being Australia, the Whitsundays aren't the cheapest tropical islands to explore, but they can be explored on a backpacker budget. Use Airlie Beach as your base if you're looking to form a crew to split costs with.

What to do in the Whitsundays

- Book a boat trip to explore the uninhabited islands.
- Feast on some of Australia's best seafood.

The Canary Islands

Strictly speaking, the islands of Gran Canaria and its neighbours aren't tropical destinations, but rather subtropical. But who likes rules, ey? Also - these islands have some of the most unique landscapes on the planet encompassing mini deserts and volcanic black sand.

With guaranteed sun year-round, the Canary Islands are popular with Northern Europeans after winter sun. You can also score some very budget-friendly package deals or camping spots.

What to do in the Canary Islands

- Clamber around the volcanoes of the exotic island Gran Canaria.
- Visit the lesser known El Hierro for unspoilt beaches and rural solitude.

Bora Bora

Exclusive, expensive and dripping with luxury, Bora Bora is one of the tropical places to vacation if you've got the cash. It's expensive to get there, it's expensive to sleep there, it's expensive to eat there. But, it's painfully beautiful and the moment you plant your weary feet into the soft white sand of French Polynesia all those money-shaped worries will drift away.

What to do in Bora Bora

- Lie back and soak up those desktop wallpaper views.
- Hike up to the summit of Mount Pahia for a close-up of neighbouring volcano Mount Otemanu.

In conclusion

And that concludes our thoughts on the 25 best tropical places to visit! We hope that at least one of these tropical islands has sparked your wanderlust.

Whilst tropical islands used to be reserved for the rich and famous, fortunately that's changed. Whilst not always cheap, affordable accommodation is out there - even in places like the Caribbean and Indian Ocean. A growing emphasis on eco-tourism also means that it's not all about booking a deluxe resort anymore. That's always an option of course, but many islands have shifted to low-impact or independent accommodations and tours.

Before you know it, you'll be sipping on fresh coconut water whilst the salty sea air breezes through your hair.