

# ALL ALONE IN PARADISE

Ever dreamt of having an entire island to yourself? Make it happen with our selection of private island stays that don't cost an arm and a leg

BY CHAITALI PATEL

Virgin Group founder Richard Branson owns an island, so does actor Johnny Depp. But you don't have to be a superstar or business tycoon to enjoy the perks of a private island vacation. Whether it is through Airbnb or a handful of other rental websites, travellers may well be able to afford a magical private island holiday.

This is no ordinary holiday we are talking about, where you go in search of a secluded beach and find a crowd already present at the "secret" bay. With an entire island just to yourself, privacy and seclusion can be easily enjoyed. To make it easier on the pocket, add close friends and family to the mix.

If you've been flirting with this seemingly outlandish idea, here's a list of islands around the world that can be rented.

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## Bird Island, ↑ Seychelles

Those visiting this little island in the Indian Ocean have to share its 5km beach with enormous Aldabran tortoises and millions of sooty terns; and the waters with pods of resident dolphins and giant manta rays. While the island ticks all the boxes of a "straight out of a magazine" holiday, its rich animal life is what makes it stand out. Bird Island's calendar is marked not by events but by breeding times, nesting seasons and migratory patterns. The resort, Bird Island Lodge, has 24 simple, elegant and comfortable chalets spread across what was once a coconut plantation.

**Book through:** Birdislandseychelles.com (€358, or around Rs27,000, per night for a chalet which can house two guests)

**Getting there:** Take a charter flight to the island from Mahe International Airport.



## Brother Island, El Nido, ← Philippines

If beaches and jungles are your thing, then this little jewel that's part of the El Nido cluster of islands in the Sulu Sea would be a good pick. Alternate between lazing on the white powdery beach and exploring the virgin forests that surround it. With a caretaker, house-keeper, cook, boatman and helper, the hosts ensure that their guests' every whim is catered to. Good food is a highlight and the on-site chef, a specialist in Filipino cuisine, whips up a feast with fresh seafood sourced from local fishermen. The two-storey cheery yellow house sleeps 12 guests but the island is big enough to host a wedding party of up to 40 people.

**Book through:** Airbnb (from Rs19,527 per night)

**Getting there:** From Manila, fly to Puerto Princesa International Airport in central Palawan. Then drive to El Nido (four-and-a-half hours to 6 hours), and take a boat transfer (2 hours) to the island.



## Ilha Grande, ↑ Brazil

Italian jewellery designer Francesca's love for nature and beauty manifests in her stylishly decorated home on the island of Ilha Grande. Here you can enjoy not one but two islands—the six-bedroom property that can accommodate 14 guests is connected to a smaller island by a 12m bamboo bridge. While Ilha Grande is a popular vacation spot, guests at Francesca's home can cross over to the smaller island at will and explore its hidden waterfalls and isolated beaches. The clear and calm sea water is perfect for snorkelling. Spot rainbow fish, starfish and turtles. Back at the house, enjoy the hospitality of Francesca and her staff, who make fabulous caipirinhas with local fruits. Dine by the ocean under the shade of a gorgeous ipe tree while shy monkeys keep you company from afar.

**Book through:** Airbnb (from Rs1,00,366 per night for the house)

**Getting there:** Fly to Rio de Janeiro, drive down to Angra dos Reis (2 hours) and take a boat transfer to the island.



## Vini's Farm, ↓ Kerala

For a change from the sea, book a stay at this island situated at the meeting point of the Ashtamudi Lake and Kallada River. The 2-acre island offers the ultimate backwater experience Kerala is known for. A wooden house built on stilts, with two bedrooms, is big enough for four guests. The resident chef will cook a sumptuous meal of Kerala dishes made with fresh catch from the local fishermen and vegetables grown on the farm. Work off the calories by trying your hand at climbing a tree or catching fish for your next meal. To unwind, go on a relaxing canoe ride down the backwaters and soak in the splendid scenery.

**Book through:** Airbnb (from Rs26,010 per night)

**Getting there:** Fly in to Thiruvananthapuram and take a taxi to Kollam (2 hours). From there, a short 10-minute boat ride will take you to the island.



## Porer Island, ↑ Croatia

There are no sandy beaches or swaying palms here, all you have is a lighthouse sitting atop a rocky outcrop in the middle of the sea. The island of Porer is so small that you can walk across it in under a minute. Built in 1833, the lighthouse is located 2.5km from the mainland and the small town of Premantura. Stays here come with guaranteed spectacular sunsets, sunrises and starry skies. The apartment in the keeper's quarters has four bedrooms where eight people can stay.

**Book through:** Airbnb (Rs11,600 per night for the lighthouse)

**Getting there:** Drive (25 minutes) or take a bus from Pula to Premantura and a boat transfer to Porer Island (25-35 minutes, depending on the weather).

\*Airbnb prices do not include service fee.

## Vesterøy, Hvaler, ↑ Norway

Vesterøy in the Hvaler archipelago enjoys the maximum number of sunny days in Norway. A small cottage built on 10,000 sq. m can accommodate up to five people. With no running water and electricity, complete isolation and adventure are always at hand. The cottage is stocked with books, board games and candles, ensuring there's plenty to do after sundown, including getting a barbecue started in the fire pit in the garden. End the day by lying under a canopy of stars on the balcony bed. There's a boat guests can use to go island-hopping or for buying groceries. But you will have to row it yourself!

**Book through:** Airbnb (from Rs15,132 per night)

**Getting there:** Take a bus from Oslo to Hvaler or go by train from Oslo to Fredrikstad and then take a bus to Hvaler. The hosts will arrange for a pickup from Hvaler and transfer to the island.

