

ACTIVE TRAVELLER

FROM LEFT: PALM TREES ON AITUTAKI; A JUNGLE WALK AT RAROTONGA; CASTING A LINE



AITUTAKI COOK ISLANDS 18°52'S AND 159°44'W

Seen from the air, Aitutaki – one of 15 main islands in the Cook archipelago – is amoeba-shaped, surrounded by a ruffle of surf enclosing a blue-striped lagoon. When you touch down on land, you find yourself surrounded by fine sand, coconut palms and translucent waters populated with sea cucumbers and waving corals.

Aitutaki itself is surrounded by 15 *motu* (islets). One of the best ways to see them is to join a boat tour and sail out to one of the miniature coral outcrops. You can set up camp for a day, snorkelling the shallow waters, sunbathing and picnicking on the white sand.

Your captain will prepare lunch featuring coconut-marinated tuna, avocado, *kumara* (a staple similar to sweet potato) salad, and lots and lots of papaya. This fruit is so abundant that you'll find yourself eating it for breakfast, lunch and dinner – as well as discussing its endless culinary possibilities with others. The captain will also present you with a fresh coconut, slicing off the top with a machete.

Shampoo plants, breadfruit and numerous medicinal herbs grace the interior of the island – and at breakfast at Aitutaki's most luxurious hotel, the Pacific Resort, you'll find plenty of fresh fruit juices. The resort is beautifully set right on the lagoon; all its private villas have steps leading onto a deserted white-sand beach. Take advantage of the infinity pool in the afternoons when the lagoon shoreline becomes a little too hot for comfort, and end your day at the local *tumunu* (drinking den) where bush brew is the drop of choice. A coconut-shell cup is passed around a circle of people and everyone is obliged to drink once. Be warned; after that, it goes round again, and again...

THE DETAIL A premium beachfront bungalow at Pacific Resort costs from £650 per day, maximum three people sharing (00 682 31720, pacificresort.com). Air New Zealand (airnewzealand.co.uk) flies from London to Rarotonga, where you can travel with Air Rarotonga (airraro.com) to Aitutaki. JL

SONG SAA CAMBODIA 10°42'N AND 103°15'E

Koh Ouen and Koh Bong sit side by side in the shimmering Cambodian waters of the Koh Rong Archipelago. The two islands, adopted by Rory and Melita Hunter, make up Song Saa (Khmer for 'sweethearts'), a sustainable resort paradise with 27 villas.

The islands are connected by a footbridge arching over a marine reserve. It covers more than one million square metres of protected reefs where dugongs and seahorses come out to play. The shallow turquoise water harbours red and pink corals, yellow lichen and schools of parrotfish, which makes it ideal for snorkelling. If hedonism is more your thing, retreat up the icing-sugar-soft sand to Koh Bong for spa treatments. Come nightfall, a personal guide will rush you and your newly balanced chakra out to sea to spy on the antics of ultraviolet jellyfish and violently luminous tropical fish that dazzle in the dark.

The nearest village, Prek Svay on the mainland, has orchards that supply the bulk of fruit served at Song Saa's main restaurant, Vista. Each dish on the menu contains at least one local ingredient, be it kempot pepper or palm sugar. Both Vista and the Driftwood tapas bar offer sustainable seafood. Sea urchin and baby squid feature heavily, as do black grouper baked in home-made sea salt, and *prahok* (fermented fish fried with pork belly, puréed, then topped with green mango ice cubes and cucumber jelly). Whiskey sours infused with lemongrass and kaffir lime ensure even the drinks menu reflects Khmer cuisine, with its balance of sweet, sour, salty and bitter flavours. The early months of the year are the perfect time to sample jasmine rice and spiced frog's legs, a by-product of the rice harvest.

THE DETAIL A villa at Song Saa costs from £501 per person per night (00 855 236 860 360, songsaa.com). British Airways (ba.com) flies from London to Bangkok, where you can travel with Bangkok Airways (bangkokair.com) to Siem Reap. Song Saa is a one-hour private plane ride from Siem Reap, or a 30-minute speed boat ride from Sihanoukville. JB

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SONG SAA'S CONJOINED ISLANDS; A VILLA AT SONG SAA; AL FRESCO DINING AT THE RESORT



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A LOCAL FEAST AT SONG SAA; DINNER AT THE COOK ISLANDS; AITUTAKI; NIGHTFALL AT SONG SAA; HAMMOCK TIME ON THE COOK ISLANDS; A BOAT TOUR AROUND THE COOK ISLANDS



FROM LEFT: A BAY IN MOOREA; THE DAILY CATCH; THE UNDULATING COAST OF ANEGADA



ANEGADA **BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS** 18°44'N AND 64°19'W

As you moor up on the 'drowned island' of Anegada in your pirate ship flotilla, you are instantly struck by the peculiar flatness of your temporary home. Anegada, made up of 39 square km of coral and limestone rock, resembles a giant surfboard floating on Caribbean waters. This breezy approach to life is reflected in the free-and-easy attitude of the island's permanent residents.

The Anegada Reef Hotel's 'honour bar' allows guests to pour drinks for themselves at will, and settle the bill according to their own best guess come closing. You'll find a healthy stash of Caribbean nutmeg behind the bar, used generously in the island's signature Bushwhacker cocktail – a mishmash of Irish cream, amaretto, Kahlua, Grand Marnier and vodka. Brother and sister Lawrence and Lorraine Wheatley run this palm-strewn resort with a pleasantly paradoxical mix of swift efficiency and chilled-out flair. Visitors have the unchecked run of the family library and can spend hours meandering along the 29km Horseshoe Reef with a decent book and a cane rum smoothie, as a Caribbean calm gradually sinks in.

Friend and fisherman Captain Clinton Vanterpool will take you bonefishing among the marooned ships at Cow Wreck Beach, so named after the skeletons of livestock from ill-fated cargo boats that can still be found buried below the sand. Those with snorkelling gear will inevitably find their way to Loblolly Bay, where yellowtail snappers and blue tang career about en masse. Sea lavender and elkhorn coral can also be found in the bay, while the scent of white-petalled frangipani trees drifts from the shore. Look out for the 2-metre-long iguanas wriggling freely through The Settlement – the only town in Anegada – and the flocks of salmon-pink native flamingos, which were successfully reintroduced back to their native habitat 20 years ago.

Setting Point to the west of the island is one of the best patches for conchs (a type of mollusc). At Potters by the Sea (00 284 495 9182), you'll be ushered from your dinner table into the shallows to pluck the meatiest-looking lobster from the water for cooking on an open grill, or you could indulge in a plate of crispy conch fritters.

THE DETAIL The Anegada Reef Hotel cost from £94 per person per night (00 284 495 8002, anegadareef.com). A villa at Lavenda Breeze costs from £2,197 per week (00 284 495 8045, lavendabreeze.com). Cow Wreck Villas costs from £173 per night (00 284 495 8047, cownreckbeach.com). British Airways (ba.com) flies from London and Manchester to Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. From here, you can board a boat or take a charter plane to Anegada. *JB*

BEST OF THE REST

MOOREA **FRENCH POLYNESIA** 17°31'S AND 149°52'W

Charles Darwin found inspiration for his scientific theories while gazing at Moorea from a peak on Tahiti. He said it was like looking at a 'picture in a frame', referring to the reefs encircling the island. Moorea is enticingly fragrant with the scent of hibiscus, frangipani, jasmine and *tiare* (gardenia). Tour the island's 37-mile circular road – it takes half a day to complete by bicycle – or hire a 4x4 and venture into the jungle interior where you'll discover *marae* (ancient stone constructions once used for prayer or sacrifice). By far the best place to stay is Dream Island. Cross by boat from the village of Haapiti and you'll come upon a beach of the purest white sand encircling a lagoon and a cluster of wooden huts.

THE DETAIL Villas from £1,050 per week (dream-island.com) *KM*

ILHA DE TINHARE **BRAZIL** 13°27'S AND 38°57'W

Most people have never heard of the quaint vehicle-free island of Ilha de Tinharé. Lying 40 minutes off the north-east coast of Brazil, it's a tiny, jungle-covered speck floating in the sea. The boat from Salvador will drop you at the jetty in Morro de São Paulo, where 'taxi' men load your luggage onto yellow wheelbarrows and, for a small fee, will push it up the steep hill to the village overlooking the ocean. Sit back, relax and watch the locals gather on the beaches to practice *capoeira* or play volleyball, then retire to your abode at Anima Hotel, a rustic lodge beneath the palms at Fourth Beach.

THE DETAIL Rooms from £138 per night (anima-hotel.com) *KM*

KOH PHAYAM **THAILAND** 9°44'N AND 98°25'E

This remote jungle island is home to a population of crab-eating *macaques*, white-bellied sea eagles and about 500 Buddhists. Koh Phayam is a rarity in Thailand because its golden beaches are empty and the bays are secluded. On the western side of the island, you'll find Bamboo Bungalows, a huddle of thatched villas surrounded by lush coconut and cashew plantations. The villas have big comfortable beds furnished with mosquito nets, and, best of all, there's freshly baked bread to look forward to at breakfast.

THE DETAIL Double rooms from £4 per person per night (bamboo-bungalows.com) *KM*

llo island photography by Mozambican Tourist Board. Aitutaki photography by Cook Islands Tourism. Words by Keya Modessa & Jessica Basi