

THE 30 BEST

Undiscovered Beaches

The motu and white-sand beach of One Foot Island is in the outer reaches of Aitutaki's breathtaking lagoon.



» IT'S BEEN SAID THAT THE WORLD IS A SMALL PLACE, BUT WE FOUND, while compiling our favorite beaches for ISLANDS' first annual Best Undiscovered Beaches of the World list, that there are plenty of powdery, soft and glistening white nooks and crannies to escape to. On these stretches of sand, time stands still. We took into account the quality of the beach — its beauty, its swimability; we also sought out beaches with a low awareness index, even in the more visited destinations, like the Caribbean, Hawaii and Greece. Right now, these 30 beaches lay empty, awaiting your footprints. »

CHAD EHLERS/ALAMY

OCEANIA

EIGHT MONTH BEACH, Yasawa Island, Yasawa Group, Fiji Yasawa Island has plenty of undiscovered beaches and ... ocean: some of these waters remain uncharted on nautical maps. Eight Month Beach is located on the northeastern tip, facing Fiji's Barrier Reef, a World Wildlife Fund ecoregion. Many locals have never even heard of this beach. One of the easiest ways to get there is on select Blue Lagoon Cruises — unless you charter your own boat, seaplane or helicopter.

OFU BEACH, Ofu, Manua Islands, American Samoa As if American Samoa isn't remote enough — midway between Hawaii and New Zealand — the Manua Islands of this chain are even less traveled. Within this group is the volcanic Ofu Island, part of the National Park of American Samoa. On the west coast is Ofu Beach, about two miles of fine coral sand backed by jagged, green slopes. Is the journey worth it? Take a look at this



Ofu Island

month's cover and decide for yourself.

ORO BAY, Île des Pins, New Caledonia Palm trees mix with araucaria pines on the Isle of Pines, about 50 miles from mainland New Caledonia. On the east coast is Oro Bay, reachable by foot path. Another nice day-jaunt is to hire a traditional outrigger canoe to take you to Upi Bay, around the corner. The Melanesian people call the island Kunie; it is the French who call it Île des Pins.

ONE FOOT ISLAND, Aitutaki, Cook Islands

Take a trip to this deserted *motu*, or islet, at the southern edge of Aitutaki's lagoon, and you'll be swept away by the endless turquoise. Small excursion boats make the trip to Tapuaetai, or One Foot, and host a fresh fish barbecue on the beach. One reader alerted us that Lester the cat was still living on the island — which makes it not so deserted after all.

MOTU TAPARE, Tikehau, Tuamotu Archipelago, Tahiti The 78 islands in Tahiti's Tuamotu group are full of mirage-like beaches and motu. Perhaps the most stunning, however, is the pink-sanded Motu Tapare, belonging to the atoll of Tikehau. Hire a boat at Tikehau's Pearl Beach Resort — the only resort on the atoll — to motor you over.

HONEYMOON BEACH, Rock Islands, Palau Hidden away in the Rock Islands of Palau, this little gem is not just a beach, it's an entire romantic island escape — your own private Eden — complete with a perfect patch of palm trees.

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LEEKES BEACH, Great Keppel Island, Australia Off of the Queensland coast is Great Keppel Island, a tropical slice of Australia with over 18 miles of sandy beaches, secluded coves and turquoise waters. Leekes Beach is one of the more secluded choices on the island.

HAWAII

KAIHALULU BEACH, Maui Tucked away on the far side of Hana Bay on the east coast of Maui, Kaihalulu Beach is a trek worth the trip — for the scenery along the way and for the color of its sand. The red-black color comes from the crumbling cinder-cone hill that surrounds the bay. The path to the beach is slippery, and swimming is only advisable when the water is calm — usually during the summer.

MAHAULEPU BEACH, Kauai Mahaulepu Beach is carved into Kauai's rocky southern coastline. Walk its shores, and we're sure you'll feel its mana: Mahaulepu is



Kaihalulu Beach

sacred to many Hawaiians. Take Poipu Road east, just past the Grand Hyatt Kauai, where the road ends to the right. Park and hike down. This beach is home to endangered marine life, so journey there with conscience and respect.

ASIA

BAI KEM, Phu Quoc, Vietnam The Phu Quoc archipelago, with 105 islands in the Gulf of Thailand, is still flying slight-

ly below the radar. But the word is out, and it won't be long before its beaches are discovered by the cognoscenti. Bai Kem (Ice Cream Beach) is a delicious-sounding choice near the southern tip.

SECRET BEACH, Matinloc Island, Palawan, Philippines As the second-largest archipelago in the world, the Philippines offers many islands to choose from — 7,100 or so. One of the prettiest provinces is Palawan, with Puerto Princ-



heaven in paradise, the perfect combination


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GRENADA

DISCOVERED BY PETER WASHINGTON

The Spice of the Caribbean




Matinloc Island

esa, Honda Bay, and on its northern tip El Nido (Nido soup is made from the birds' nests collected here). On Matinloc Island (not to be confused with nearby Miniloc), you must snorkel through a hole in a limestone wall to reach Secret Beach and its hidden lagoon.

PASIR BESAR, Lang Tengah Island, Malaysia On the east coast of Malaysia in the South China Sea are smatterings of islands. Lang Tengah Island is a hidden paradise not far from its more popular sister island of Redang, but Lang Tengah's beaches see fewer crowds. Pasir Besar means long beach, literally, so you'll have a great sandy stretch to yourself. There's also hilly, tropical rainforest to hike.

NATUNA BESAR, Natuna Islands, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia As the largest archipelago in the world, Indonesia has plenty of beaches to choose from. But only the intrepid traveler should undertake a trip to Natuna Besar, in the far north of the Riau chain. The South China Sea beaches that ring this largest island of the Natunas, off the coast of Malaysia, are untouched. Natuna has irregular ferry service from Jakarta, but there is an airport.

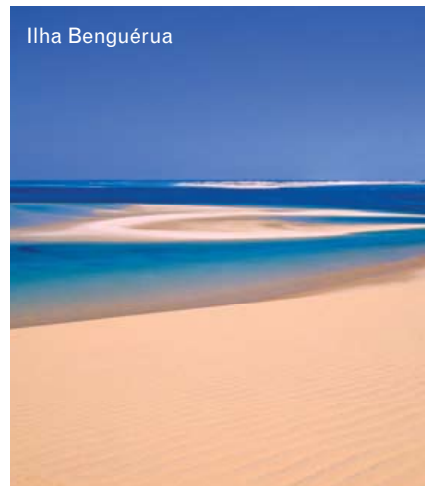
BAAN MAI BEACH, Ko Lon, Thailand Ko Lon may only be 15 minutes by boat from Phuket, but it's decades away in terms of development. It has a lonely fishing village, no paved roads and

empty blankets of white sand. Not peaceful enough for you? Take a day trip to nearby Golden Buddha Island.

INDIAN OCEAN

ANSE GEORGETTE, Praslin Island, Seychelles Anse Georgette is on the grounds of Lemuria Resort. It is so secluded that most patrons never realize it exists, and the rare hawksbill and green turtles who lay their eggs in its pure sand often have it all to themselves. Take a boat to this hidden pocket with clear, shallow waters. If you are staying at Lemuria, walk along the path next to the golf course or kayak there.

SOUTH POINT BEACH, Ilha Benguérua, Bazaruto Archipelago, Mozambique If you're looking for undiscovered Indian Ocean, the Bazaruto Archipelago off the coast of Mozambique is a tucked-away ecological gem. The beach of South Point on Benguérua cascades artfully into the sea, with sand spits emerging like spin art from the



Ilha Benguérua

turquoise ocean. Take a daytrip to Pansy Island, where the endemic Pansy shell is found. There is also a dugong population as well as five species of marine turtle and 2,000 species of fish.

MEDJUMBE ISLAND, Quirimbas Archipelago, Mozambique Choosing just one beach in the Quirimbas Archipelago was a nearly impossible feat. But tiny Medjumbe Island — just 875 by 380 yards — impressed us. Plus, the 13 thatched chalets of the Medjumbe Island Resort are a fine place to hang your flip-flops. Medjumbe is 40 minutes by plane from Pemba Island. You'll need no directions to the beach.

BANGARAM ISLAND, Lakshadweep Islands, India Just north of the Maldives and off the southwest coast of India is an archipelago pretty much undiscovered by the entire world. One reason is that foreigners aren't allowed access to all of these islands. Bangaram is one island, however, where you can not only gain entry, but you stay overnight: the small, eco-friendly Bangaram Island Resort is the only thing here. It and the beaches.

CARIBBEAN

PLAYA RINCÓN, Samaná, Dominican Republic Puerto Plata is the destination of the package crowd, but if you want to enjoy DR's beaches without all the bustle, head 100 rugged miles to the east to the less-developed north coast's Samaná peninsula, which is thick with palm forests and curvy with mountain roads. The best way to get to this secluded beach is to hire a boat from the village of Las Galeras. This is authentic Caribbean.

SAVANNAH BAY, Virgin Gorda, British Virgin Islands Of course, visiting The

Playa Rincón



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: FERGUS MACKAY/ALAMY; DAVID SANGER/ALAMY; GARY COOK/ALAMY

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THE BEST

The beaches on these facing pages are worlds apart.

Yet, Sarkiniko means “pirates” and Jamesby is near where *Pirates of the Caribbean* was filmed.



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Baths on Virgin Gorda is a must, but when you're ready for your own blinding white beach and turquoise tub, head to Savannah Bay. This one-mile-long, waning-crescent-moon-shaped beach, located north of “the valley” on the Beach Coast, is best for solitude.

BACK BAY, Tobago It's wild Caribbean — Crusoe style — and Tobago, especially Back Bay, is an untouched gem. You must carefully tread down a cliffside trail to get to this secluded beach that is on the western tip of the island, near Buccoo. It's best to go with a group.

DROPSEY BAY, Anguilla The sand in Anguilla is so powdery fine, the Caribbean so warm, that it is difficult to choose just one beach. But we went with Dropsey Bay, a hidden stretch that is a playground for adults with caves for swimming into and out of and an offshore reef to reduce any swells. Dropsey Bay is south of Long Pond Bay, midway on the Caribbean side.

GREENWOOD BEACH, Cat Island, Bahamas The Bahamas, although not technically the Caribbean, often get overlooked by real travelers because they hear of the crowds. But move to the Out Islands, specifically Cat Island, and said crowds die down. Greenwood on the eastern coast stretches for eight miles. Cat Island claims the country's highest point, Mount Alvernia, at 206 feet, and locals ship cascarilla bark to Italy, where it is used to make Campari.

JAMESBY ISLAND, Tobago Cays, St. Vincent & the Grenadines The southernmost cay in the Tobago Cays, Jamesby is a castaway winner. Although it didn't get the *Pirates of the Caribbean* publicity of Tobago Cay's Petit Tabac, this entire area is a wildlife reserve, and the beach on the eastern side of Jamesby is one of the prettiest of the group. Plus, the nearby coral reefs are excellent for snorkeling.

EUROPE

KARPAS BEACHES, Karpas Peninsula, North Cyprus If you look at a map of Cyprus, the long finger pointing toward the Turkey-Syria border is the Karpas Peninsula, which has some of the quietest Mediterranean beaches in all of Europe.



Sarakiniko Beach

CALADESI ISLAND, Florida An uninhabited barrier island off the coast of Clearwater, Caladesi is a protected state park offering visions of how Florida's west coast may have looked before rapid development. There are pine and palmetto forests and three miles of pristine Gulf of Mexico shoreline. Catch the ferry here from Honeymoon Island. ✨

In fact, you may find yourself sharing the sand with wild donkeys or the Caretta caretta turtle rather than people.

PORAT BEACH, Bisevo Island, Croatia Croatia is on every travel junkie's To Do list. To find a stretch of sand to yourself, go to Bisevo Island, known to some for its intriguing Blue Cave that glows with a luminescent bluish hue around noon, if the sun is shining. You'll also find calm, sheltered Porat Beach on the west coast, free from the rows of beach chairs that clutter so many other European beauties.

RABBIT BEACH, Lampedusa, Italy Italians know Lampedusa island, off the coast of Licata, Sicily, and they do a good job keeping it a secret. The island is full of hidden coves and islets, one of which is Isola dei Conigli, or Rabbit Island, a small spit of sand flanked by white cliffs.

SARAKINIKO BEACH, Milos, Greece Volcanic Milos is a shapely island with some otherworldly landscapes, such as the white peaks of rocks that jut out of the ocean and the island. One beach worth searching out is Sarakiniko Beach, meaning pirates' beach. The island is a nice respite from its popular sisters, Mikonos and Santorini. The Venus of Milos statue was found here in the 1800s.

USA

OCRACOCKE BEACH, Ocracoke Island, Outer Banks, North Carolina Legend has it that Ocracoke Island is where the pirate Blackbeard was captured and killed. But it came to our attention because of its dunes and 16 miles of protected beach, part of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Herds of Spanish mustangs can still be seen on the island at the Pony Pens, and there's a nice beach near the pens.

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