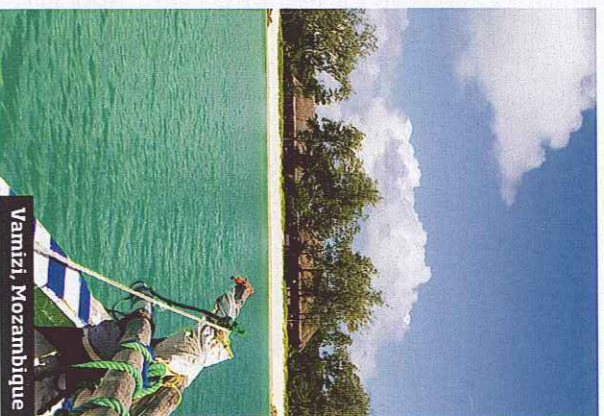


Travel with the wow factor

SIX PERFECT ISLANDS

Whether it's barefoot luxury and seclusion you're after or eating lobster alongside Uma Thurman and Matt Damon, there's the right island out there for you

REPORT Laura Lovett



Vamizi, Mozambique



Mustique, West Indies

THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Island life The last word in barefoot luxury, Vamizi is a castaway nirvana off Mozambique, in the Indian Ocean. The island lodge, with its 13 villas, is giving the Maldives and Mauritius a real run for their money.

The vibe Beguiling. Here, at least 70 metres of jungle greenery separate your pad from the next villa, so the powder-white sands and iridescent blue sea feel all your own. Weaver birds fly in and out of swaying palms, monkeys roam and, if you're lucky, as the sea breeze whispers through the latticed windows of your villa, your partner is catching dinner from your private beach.

Best for... This could be the world's most amazing honeymoon destination: no petals strewn cheesily across your bed, no baths drawn for the lucky couple; instead absolute privacy and a sense of discovering something magical together. Vamizi has a healthy dollop of luxury – enormous beds and dinner on the beach – but it's *not* for someone who wants air con and a remote control.

Where it happens Said to be the world's most spectacular coral island and “one of the top 10 dive sites on the planet”, Vamizi has swirling masses of reef fish swimming amid visiting whales.

When to go It's a genuine year-round destination: if you turn up out of season, between January and March, you can expect a bit of bluster around the edges but still plenty of sun. The rest of the year is perfection.

Details Dive in Style, part of Original Travel, offers seven nights all-inclusive to Vamizi (vamizi.com), with international and connecting flights to the island, transfers and a complimentary dive, from £3,450pp, based on two sharing (divestyle.com).

THE SIXTIES REVIVAL

Island life Nestling among the Grenadines, Mustique was made famous by naughty Princess Margaret's set in the Sixties and is still a discreet tropical hideaway with a touch of decadence. Residents (mostly pop stars from back in the day and billionaire CEOs) build their own palatial homes here, most of which you can rent. Do so, and you are past the velvet rope and into the island's private members' party.

The vibe Reachable by private plane from Nassau, Mustique is completely secure and pap-free thanks to 24-hour security. It's an adults' playground, where visitors can go a bit wild. With only two hotels (the 17-room Cotton House and the five-room Firefly), the strong community feel instils a sense of intimacy and a laid-back “whatever happens in Mustique stays in Mustique” spirit.

Best for... Those escaping the public eye. No one blinks at even the highest rollers here, and celebs have even been known to pull the “Do you know who I am?” line, just to get attention. But despite all the parties, Mustique is great for kids and family-friendly.

Where it happens At home – your place or mine. Living in architectural flights of fancy on a remote island, what the hell else are you going to do but live it up? Dinner parties, champagne brunches, intimate soirées and pool parties are going on day and night, and just being “on island” means you are in.

When to go The island is busiest from December to April, but still feels deliciously quiet and the azure sea and talcum-powder sand of Macaroni Beach never get crowded.

Details Virgin Atlantic (virginatlantic.com) flies to Barbados from £477.90 return. The Mustique Company will arrange transport from Barbados to Mustique with Grenadine Airways. Of the island's 100 villas, 75 are for rental (mustique-island.com).



Mallorca, Spain

THE FAMILY CHILLOUT ZONE

Island life If Ibiza is about clubbing, a luxury villa in Mallorca is about a family break that makes the most of qualified nannies, a housekeeper and your own chef, all on hand to take the hassle out of holidaying.

The vibe Up in the remote, verdant Sierra de Tramuntana mountain range sits Josefa, a four-bedroom slice of paradise for exhausted parents. Champagne on arrival sets the tone, but you'll feel the benefit of this pampered, fully serviced holiday even before you leave home, as the villa is already stocked with essentials – from toys and nappies to sun block and bathroom goodies.

Best for... Exhausted parents seeking a bit of "me time", but who can't face the guilt of leaving the nippers at home. **Where it happens** With staff on hand from first thing in the morning to late at night, the most taxing thing you're likely to do is the walk from sun lounger to pool. But if you'd like to rediscover the people you once were, the nanny will babysit while you head to one of the many good, local, rustic restaurants. Puerto Pollensa, ten minutes away, is a wealthy fishing village sheltered in a horseshoe bay and, blessedly, a world away from the cool crowd. Activities within striking distance include golf (there are several beautiful 9- and 18-hole courses and a fun pitch-and-put nearby), tennis and horse-riding, kayaking, windsurfing and sailing around the coves.

When to go Mallorca has a great year-round climate, with a long, often sunny spring and autumn. Summer is less scorching than elsewhere in Spain. **Details** Villa Josefa is open in 2011 from May 25 to September 7. From £8,145, based on up to eight guests for seven nights, including full board courtesy of a Scott Dunn chef, housekeeper and nanny, but excluding flights and car hire (scottdunn.com).



Scilly Isles, Cornwall

THE SEASIDE FAVOURITE

Island life Arriving amid the cosy hamlets, tea rooms and cheerfully polite islanders of this archipelago, 28 miles off Cornwall, can feel like stepping back in time.

The vibe What vibe? Each island has its own character, but all are quietly laid-back. St Mary's is the most populous, Tresco's Abbey Gardens pull in (small) crowds, while Bryher is more windswept and deserted.

Best for... Families looking for an old-fashioned seaside holiday; all Thermos flasks and packed lunches; anyone looking for peace and quiet; migratory birds, who love it here – and the twitchers who love them.

Where it happens It doesn't, mostly, which is why fans of the islands keep coming back, including a few celebs drawn by the lack of paps. There's a jolly pub or two, plus delicious food at Bryher's Hell Bay hotel – not particularly chic, perhaps, but oh-so-comfy, with good, cheery service. The only "gigs" here are the rowing boats that the islanders use to get about.

When to go Summers are cooler here than on the mainland (which is saying something), but spring and autumn benefit from the warming Gulf Stream (hence those famous gardens and the flower-growing industry). October is the time to catch all those migratory birds, before the islands slip into hibernation for the winter.

Details Travel to the Isles of Scilly by air on the Skybus or by ferry (ios-travel.co.uk). The sleeper train from London Paddington to Penzance costs from £98 return (firstgreatwestern.co.uk), where you pick up the helicopter (islesofscillyhelicopter.com), for £175 return. Suites at Hell Bay cost from £135pp per night for dinner, bed and breakfast, based on two sharing (hellbay.co.uk).



Nantucket, USA

THE WASP RETREAT

Island life Just off Cape Cod, Nantucket is a picture-perfect New England destination, beloved of posh East Coast families for generations.

The vibe This is a living, breathing Ralph Lauren ad, with impossibly handsome, preppy boys and girls, and their twinset and chino-clad parents strolling through a backdrop of clapboard and shingle houses with a weather-worn and salty beauty.

Best for... Business brains seeking downtime with their families in a beautiful, old-fashioned setting (eight of America's leading CEOs own houses here), while Tommy Hilfinger, John Kerry, Uma Thurman and Matt Damon up the celeb quota.

Where it happens Days are spent knee-deep in cranberry bogs, hiking through russet and amber-gold scrubland, diving for scallops for a BBQ or lazing on the beach listening to the seals. Nantucketers also like golf, and spend lots on it. The joining fee at one course is \$500,000 – doubtless small change when compared to the kinds of deals brokered on the fairway.

When to go The weather is king and every season has its own appeal. In the blazing summer months, the yachting fraternity takes up residence and Ivy League sporting machismo abounds. But the island is not called the "grey lady" for nothing and, in winter, fogs and buffeting winds appeal to the hardest of visitors.

Details Stay at the remote Relais and Châteaux Wauwinet hotel from £140 per room per night, based on two sharing, including breakfast (wauwinet.com), or at the Cottages and Lofts at the harbour-side Boat Basin, also from £140 per room per night, without breakfast (thecottagesnantucket.com). British Airways (ba.com/boston) flies from Heathrow to Boston, from £348 return, including taxes. Cape Air flies from Boston to Nantucket, from £168 return (capeair.com).



Crete, Greece

THE FASCINATING MED IDYLL

Island life Some people imagine Crete to be a bit dated, "a bit Seventies" even; in fact it is magical. It has all the allure of an island, but it's big enough to get lost on; beaches *and* mountains *and* archaeological sites; plus luxurious boutique hotels. It's cool without meaning to be – and how cool is that?

The vibe The ancient harbour at Chania brings to mind Venice; the beaches in the far west are reminiscent of New Zealand; the mountainous interior is like the Pyrenees; and the archaeological sites can rival anything on the mainland. Elounda, in the north, is a beautiful, quiet stretch of rugged coastline and makes a great base.

Best for... Couples who want a romantic getaway, without it being so secluded that they feel they must whisper if they have an argument.

Where it happens There's plenty to do. Hire a boat for the day or drive up into the wilds of the little-explored interior. Spinalonga is an incredible island, which used to be a leper colony, and unperpetuous family beaches are easy to find.

When to go May is stunning – the island has spectacular wild flowers and you can work on your tan beside the pool while looking up at mountains topped with snow. October is when the beaches are quiet and the sea is still warm, and everyone back home who thinks Crete is "a bit Seventies" is putting the heating on.

Details Seasons (formerly Seasons in Style) offers five nights at Elounda Gulf Villas from £1,765pp (based on single occupancy), which includes flights, transfers and accommodation in a Luxury Senior Suite, with breakfast (seasons.co.uk). **✎**