

The 30 most idyllic islands on Earth

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Hamilton Island, Australia Credit: GETTY

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It is completely possible that, as well as penning what is now considered one of the first great English novels, Daniel Defoe also invented the brochure for the epic beach holiday. It is all there in the early pages of his keynote literary statement published in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe*.

Freshly shipwrecked, the titular hero is weary, broken, shocked to be the sole survivor of a maritime disaster – yet he cannot help but describe his surroundings in positive terms.

“I found a little plain on the side of a rising hill,” *Crusoe* says – in an autobiographical style that led many 18th-century readers to see the book as document rather than fiction. “On the flat of the green... I resolved to pitch my tent. The plain was not above a hundred yards broad, and about twice as long. It lay like a green before my door – and at the end of it, descended irregularly, every way down into the low ground by the seaside.” All this

description would need is a bright sunset, and it could be the prototype for a booklet touting eco-escapes to palm-fringed idylls. Except that, yes, Crusoe's rudimentary new des-res has this, too. "It was sheltered from the heat every day," he continues, "till it came to a west-and-by-south sun, or thereabouts, which, in those countries, is near the setting."

Which countries? Here, also, Defoe was ahead of his time. The outcrop where Crusoe is marooned for 28 years is imaginary, but its location is not. The author put his protagonist on an uninhabited islet somewhere between Trinidad and the shoulder of Venezuela, roughly where the southernmost waves of the Caribbean Sea mesh with the open Atlantic.

Three centuries on, what would have been a dreadful extremity for stranded navigators is now a coveted possibility for holidays. In the story, Crusoe rails against his isolation, howling that "I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world, to be miserable". But for the 21st-century traveller, assailed by information overload, the solitude he decries can sound like heaven. And a tropical island is the perfect environment in which to find it (assuming you include a few accoutrements of the type Crusoe obviously lacks – cocktails, fluffy towels, air-conditioned suites) – waves tiptoeing up amber beaches, trees rustling overhead, birdsong high in the branches.



Brazil's "hidden secret", Fernando de Noronha Credit: BELO HORIZONTE/Fabricio Silva

Of course, the joy of tropical islands is that they are not found solely in the Caribbean. The rarefied mental picture they conjure – lazy afternoons in fine conditions, the sun inching across the sky – is not rare at all. Earth's "tropical zone" takes up 40 per cent of its surface and 36 per cent of its land mass. It acts as a cummerbund around the planet,

its north edge supplied by the Tropic of Cancer, which circumnavigates the globe at 23.4 degrees N; its southern limit by the mirror image of the Tropic of Capricorn at 23.4 degrees S.

Together, these lines of latitude embrace vast swathes of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, as well as the Caribbean Sea – each of these expanses of water sprinkled with islands of varying size. There are surprising exclusions from the club – Bermuda, for example, lies too far north, at 32 degrees N, to be part of the fraternity – but there are also numerous fêted inclusions. From those stalwarts of Caribbean breaks – Barbados, St Lucia, Antigua et al – to the glorious islets of the Seychelles and the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, and the far-flung fantasies of Tahiti, Hawaii and the Cook Islands that decorate areas of the colossal Pacific, the tropical corridor has almost endless options for escape.

So which island is right for you? It is not as strange a question as it sounds. For while there are certain similarities that define the tropical experience – whatever the month and wherever you are in the zone, you can expect temperatures that never drop below a baseline of 77F (25C), nor soar far above 90F (32C) owing to moderating sea breezes; that mix of soft sands and swaying palms, which does not really alter appearance from the South Pacific to the Lesser Antilles – there are variables.



Oahu, Hawaii Credit: ©lorcel - stock.adobe.com

A behemoth of an island such as Phuket, Thailand’s resort hotspot, will always offer a taste of the tropics unrelated to the Caribbean teardrop Bequia – just as Brazil’s “hidden secret”, Fernando de Noronha, has a vibe much removed from the sparkle of a five-star private island in the Maldives. This feature details 30 tropical options across the globe, each offering something a little different to the other 29.

Weather is also a factor. The temperature gauge may not twitch too much, but the meteorological gods do not mind bringing trouble to paradise – as Hurricanes Irma and Maria have lately demonstrated. And while you are unlikely to feel anything more than the occasional angry gust if you visit the Caribbean in Atlantic hurricane season (June to November), it is worth considering the possibility of a furious firmament when you plan your trip. The same applies to the Indian Ocean, whose cyclone season runs May to November – and the South Pacific, where storms can hit between November and April.



The turquoise waters of the Seychelles Credit: TASSAPHON VONGKITTIPONG

While several dots on the Caribbean map – including the British and US Virgin Islands, Barbuda and Dominica – have been hurt in recent weeks, the region is largely functioning as a destination (you can find updates on places affected through the Caribbean Tourism Organisation – onecaribbean.org/cto-storm-watch-centre).

The point, perhaps, is that in 99 per cent of cases, a tropical holiday will be warm, woozy and relaxing. As even Robinson Crusoe puts it, momentarily finding his glass half full, “I am in a hot climate where, if I had clothes, I could hardly wear them.” Let’s hit the beach.

The Caribbean

1. St Lucia

Totally tropical? Reach for a mind's-eye image of the Caribbean at its lushest, and you will surely land on St Lucia (saintluciauk.org) – with its incomparably famous twin volcanic peaks, Gros Piton and Petit Piton, rearing on its west coast near Soufriere; the iconic beach of Anse Chastanet just around the corner. There are other places on the island, but here is the fantasy.

Who you'll meet: Gwyneth Paltrow has stayed at Sugar Beach resort.

The holiday: A seven-night sojourn at Sugar Beach, flying from Gatwick on March 17, costs from £2,847 per person, including breakfast, through British Airways Holidays (0344 493 0787; ba.com/holidays).

Crusoe rating: ****



The twin volcanic peaks of Gros Piton and Petit Piton loom over St Lucia

2. Barbados

Totally tropical? Paradise with a jauntily British accent. Barbados may be the Caribbean island most connected to the UK – a wealth of direct flights, red phone boxes in the capital Bridgetown, a retired Concorde on show at the airport (barbadosconcorde.com). The west coast is pure Lesser Antilles, romantic resorts gazing into the sunset around the clapboard outposts of Holetown and Speightstown (visitbarbados.org).

Who you'll meet: Big-money Britons. Simon Cowell and Sir Cliff Richard are known fans. But then, this is also Rihanna's home country.

The holiday: A seven-night stay at five-star boutique hideaway The House costs from £1,699 per person, including air travel and breakfast, with Dial A Flight (0330 100 2212; dialaflight.com).

Crusoe rating: **

3. Antigua

Totally tropical? Indisputable. Flatter and less swarthy than some of its Caribbean colleagues, Antigua (visitantiguabarbuda.com) reputedly has 365 beaches, one for each day of the year. Darkwood Beach and Runaway Beach are especially lovely.

Who you'll meet: Jet-setters flocking in from New York, Paris, London...

The holiday: A seven-night, all-inclusive break at the four-star Verandah Resort & Spa, on Dian Bay, flying from Manchester on March 7 (with transfers), starts at £1,928 per person through Thomas Cook (01733 224808; thomascook.com).

Crusoe rating: **

4. Nevis

Totally tropical? The junior partner in the combination of St Kitts and Nevis is one of the Caribbean's most volcanic outcrops (nevisland.com). Indeed, there is little to it beyond the central Nevis Peak, lost in foliage, arcing into the clouds at 3,232ft. There are alluring holiday hideaways dotted on its hemline, where the sea slips in.

Who you'll meet: Bronzed yacht types sipping cocktails at Pinney's Beach.

The holiday: A seven-night stay in May at Montpelier Plantation and Beach – the property where Nelson's nuptials were held – costs from £1,445 per person, including flights, through Cox & Kings (020 3642 0861; coxandkings.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: ****



A beach on Nevis

5. Tobago

Totally tropical? Trinidad's little brother (visittobago.gov.tt) has some of the Caribbean's finest beaches. Englishman's Bay and Bloody Bay, on the north coast, are as beautiful as they are free of people – while even south-westerly Store Bay, a hotel hotspot, has a laid-back atmosphere. Tobago Main Ridge Forest Reserve – established in 1776 – was the world's first protected tranche of rainforest.

Who you'll meet: Savvy travellers in on the secret – enjoying their third or fourth dash to the island.

The holiday: A seven-night, all-inclusive stay at the five-star Coco Reef Resort on Store Bay, flying from Manchester on March 5, costs from £1,459 per person via Tropical Sky (01342 886513; tropicalsky.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: ****

6. Dominican Republic

Totally tropical? Hispaniola – the island it shares with Haiti – is the second largest in the Caribbean. There is still a sense that – vast, jungle-clad and underrated – the Dominican Republic (godominicanrepublic.com) is barely better known now than it was when Christopher Columbus “discovered” it in 1492. But a raft of large beach hotels on its south-east edge means holidaymakers are increasingly finding it.

Who you'll meet: Sun-worshippers who aren't overly fussed about where they worship.

The holiday: A 10-night, all-inclusive stay at the five-star TUI Sensatori Resort Azul Punta Cana, flying from Birmingham on April 14, costs from £1,438 per person through TUI (020 3451 2688; tui.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: *

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7. Cuba

Totally tropical? The Caribbean's biggest island (travel2cuba.co.uk) – where one of the 20th century's most seismic revolutions has been romanticised down to a vague tale of cigars, derring-do and Che Guevara looking cool in a beret. There are ghosts of colonial Spain in the cobbled streets of Havana, busy beach resorts at Varadero, and less-known slivers of sand further east along the north coast at Santa Lucia.

Who you'll meet: Families enjoying package-deal reliability on Varadero's water slides.

The holiday: Explore (01252 883612; explore.co.uk) sells a 15-day "Family Viva Cuba" group tour, which spends time in Havana, and on the beach. From £2,535 per adult, from £2,289 per child (minimum age seven), including flights. Five departures in 2018.

Crusoe rating: *

8. Guadeloupe

Totally tropical? Impeccable in terms of location – one of the Lesser Antilles, Guadeloupe (visitguadeloupe.co.uk) lies north of Dominica. Depending on your perspective, it might lose or gain points for the fact that, not only is it French-speaking, but it is also part of France with the euro as its currency.

Who you'll meet: Parisians looking chic whatever the temperature.

The holiday: Expressions Holidays (01392 441245; expressionsholidays.co.uk) has seven nights at La Toubana Hôtel & Spa – whose 32 bungalows decorate a cliff-top near Sainte Anne on the south coast – from £1,760 per person, with flights and breakfast.

Crusoe rating: ***



Guadeloupe Credit: alex_bendea - Fotolia

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9. Aruba

Totally tropical? Few words scream “tropical” like “Aruba” (aruba.com), five letters redolent of the best things about the Caribbean – generous curves of sand, genteel sophistication. The fact that few people remember it is Dutch, or know quite where it is – then are surprised to hear that it lurks 18 miles north of mainland Venezuela – somehow only increases its appeal.

Who you’ll meet: Tourists who know Aruba sits south of the hurricane belt.

The holiday: A seven-night break at the five-star Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort flying from Heathrow on March 18, starts at £1,946 per person, with breakfast, via Destinology (01204 823820; destinology.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: ***



Flamingos in Aruba Credit: bert van wijk/VanWyckExpress

10. Bequia

Totally tropical? The Caribbean at its most refined. Much like a pop star who only needs one name, Bequia (bequiatourism.com) largely disguises the fact that is part of the wider country of St Vincent and the Grenadines, distilling its essence into high-end resorts and a Caribbean take on the Côte d’Azur. Princess Margaret visited often.

Who you’ll meet: Supermodels slumbering behind sunglasses.

The holiday: Carrier (0161 492 1354; carrier.co.uk) offers seven nights at Bequia Beach Hotel on the south coast – from £1,820 per person, with flights, breakfast and transfers.

Crusoe rating: *****

Indian Ocean

11. Praslin

Totally tropical? The Seychelles (seychelles.travel) might be the definition of tropical valhalla – 115 islands strewn across the Indian Ocean. Praslin, the second-largest, is special. As well as glorious beaches – Anse Georgette and Anse Possession – it boasts the Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve, one of only two spots on Earth where the coco de mer “nut” grows (sif.sc).

Who you’ll meet: Beach bunnies who like a hike as well as a tan.

The holiday: A seven-night half-board January stay at Constance Lemuria resort costs from £2,791 per person, with flights, through Kenwood Travel (020 7749 9241; kenwoodtravel.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: ***



Hatchling turtles on Praslin Credit: EUAN CHERRY

12. North Island

Totally tropical? The Seychelles has long been allied to romance, its whispering palm trees mimic soft conversations of lovers entwined. And while there are lots of exclusive beach retreats, there are few like North Island, an islet that's home to 11 villas.

Who you'll meet: George and Amal. William and Kate. Or celebrities of their ilk, anyway. The Clooneys spent their honeymoon here in 2014, the Cambridges in 2011.

The holiday: Won't be cheap. The 10 "Presidential" villas will be priced at €6,127 (£5,473) per night in 2018 – an all-inclusive figure that includes watersports. The showpiece Villa North Island is €9,644 per night (0027 610 89 0462; north-island.com).

Crusoe rating: *****

13. La Digue

Totally tropical? You can sample the castaway ambience in the Seychelles without spending six grand a night. South-east of Praslin, and only accessible by ferry from its neighbour, La Digue clings doggedly to some tropical yesteryear. There are few cars, and

accommodation is cosy – but it does proffer Anse Source d’Argent, whose giant granite boulders look like sentinels from a lost world.

Who you’ll meet: Tourists doing the Seychelles on the (relatively) cheap.

The holiday: Just Seychelles (01342 547001; justseychelles.com) offers seven-night sojourns at the four-star Le Domaine de L’Orangerie from £1,879 per person, including flights, transfers and breakfast.

Crusoe rating: *****

14. Kihavah Huravalhi

Totally tropical? Is it grossly inaccurate to say that most islands in the Maldives (visitmaldives.com) look the same? Probably not. But it isn’t a huge slur when the effect is so spectacular. In the case of Kihavah Huravalhi, in the north of Baa Atoll, the icing to the cake is the five-star Anantara Kihavah – 79 villas with pools, plus four restaurants, including Sea, which is set up underwater (kihavah-maldives.anantara.com).

Who you’ll meet: The occasional celebrity. John Legend proposed to Chrissy Teigen here in 2011.

The holiday: A seven-night full-board stay in April costs from £2,979 per person, including flights, through Travelbag (020 3139 7074; travelbag.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: *****

15. Mauritius

Totally tropical? A happy cluster of influences amid Indian Ocean swells – African in location, British, French and Dutch in formative history (but mainly British), Hindu in religion, volcanic in geography, rugged in landscape) and a year-round prospect for escape in terms of weather, eternally pinned between 77-86F (25-30C). (tourism-mauritius.mu).

Who you’ll meet: British tourists who like the colonial familiarities.

The holiday: A seven-night stay at Shangri-La’s Le Touessrok – a gilded retreat on the east coast – flying from Manchester on December 6, costs from £2,158 per person, with flights and breakfast, through Hayes & Jarvis (01293 832296; hayesandjarvis.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: ***

16. Réunion

Totally tropical? Réunion (en.reunion.fr) is built of the same frond-draped stuff as Mauritius, with the exception that it is part of France and the EU. It underscores its tropical essence by hosting one of the planet’s most cantankerous volcanoes, Piton de la Fournaise.

Who you'll meet: Active travellers with a taste for sunshine.

The holiday: A seven-night break at the five-star Lux Saint Gilles, on the west coast at L'Hermitage Beach, costs from £1,855 per person, with flights and breakfast, through Turquoise Holidays (01494 678400; turquoiseholidays.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: ****

South-east Asia

17. Phuket

Totally tropical? An island? Yes, and a big one – Thailand's (tourismthailand.org) largest, fanning out to 222 square miles. But its size equates to endless opportunities for tropical unwinding along the west coast, with wondrous sunsets waiting at southerly Promthep Cape – and notorious Full Moon Parties illuminating the night.

Who you'll meet: Backpackers, winter-sun-seekers, families.

The holiday: A seven-night holiday at the five-star Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket, flying from Gatwick on January 24, costs from £1,371 per person, with transfers and breakfast, via the Holiday Place (020 7644 1789; holidayplace.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: *



The backpacker favourite, Thailand Credit: RODRIGO M NUNES

18. Ko Sukorn

Totally tropical? It may be part of the same country, but Ko Sukorn is everything Phuket is not – an Andaman Sea acorn of just 4.7 square miles. Its heart pulses to a slower beat: fishing villages huddle on damp shores, beach cottages under rain-dripping fronds.

Who you'll meet: Dreamers chasing that vision of the hidden Thai island.

The holiday: Bamboo Travel (020 7720 9285; bambootravel.co.uk) sells a 14-night “Island Hopping in Trang Province” break which spends seven nights at Sukorn Beach Bungalows. From £2,385 per person, with flights.

Crusoe rating: *****

19. Langkawi

Totally tropical? Malaysia (malaysia.travel) may own part of the planet's third largest island, Borneo, but it can also claim a tinier tropical sliver in Langkawi – an Andaman Sea jewel located north of the country. Tucked on to this coastline, the Datai (thedatai.com) flirts with a Robinson Crusoe feeling through deluxe villas set amid dense vegetation.

Who you'll meet: Nature lovers keen to spot exotic birds like the great hornbill.

The holiday: A seven-night stay at the Datai costs from £1,495 per person, including flights, breakfast, transfers, and a trek with Irshad Mobarak – via Cleveland Collection (020 7843 3531; clevelandcollection.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: ****

20. Bali

Totally tropical? The only true travel superstar of Indonesia's (indonesia.travel) 17,504 islands, Bali knows how to dispense unpretentious beach breaks – and does so with alacrity in the southerly coastal zones of Kuta and Seminyak. But it also clothes itself in a cloak of tropical mystique in (relatively) central Ubud, where sleek spa retreats and hideaways focused on meditation and switching off provide respite from everything.

Who you'll meet: Australian surfers looking for a beer or seven in Kuta; new-age wanderers searching for inner peace in Ubud.

The holiday: Elegant Resorts (01244 897551; elegantresorts.co.uk) offers seven-night stays at the secluded Four Seasons Resort in Ubud – from £1,856 per person, including breakfast and transfers (flights extra).

Crusoe rating: **



Bali clothes itself in a cloak of tropical mystique Credit: Guitar_Tawatchai/Guitar_Tawatchai

21. Song Saa

Totally tropical? Unexpected – at least in terms of whereabouts. Cambodia (tourismcambodia.com) may now be visible on the holiday map after a desperate 20th century wracked by bloodshed, but it is still better known for the tumbled temples of Angkor than for high-end luxury. Hurrah then for Song Saa (songsaa.com), a private island off the south coast, at Sihanoukville – where 27 gorgeous villas and silken beaches bring an unfettered Maldives-style opulence to a destination that is still seen as intrepid.

Who you'll meet: Honeymooners and money-no-object travellers.

The holiday: Scott Dunn (020 3553 1439; scottdunn.com) offers seven-night all-inclusive breaks at Song Saa from £5,600 per person, with flights.

Crusoe rating: *****

22. Havelock Island

Totally tropical? Irrefutable – but utterly beyond the beaten path. The Andaman Islands (andamans.gov.in) are a tantalisingly tropical archipelago lost between Burma and India (largely belonging to the latter) in the Bay of Bengal. Havelock is one of the tiniest members of the group, known for its coral reefs and scuba-dive sites. And its exquisite coastline.

Who you'll meet: Quite possibly no one. This is travel at its most niche.

The holiday: Original Travel (020 7978 7333; originaltravel.co.uk) offers seven nights at Jalakara and one night in Chennai on a bed and breakfast basis from £4,050 for two people. per person, with flights.

Crusoe rating: *****



Havelock Island Credit: Credit: Schita / Alamy Stock Photo/Schita / Alamy Stock Photo

The Atlantic

23. Sal

Totally tropical? Under-appreciated. It is not that Cape Verde (caboverde.com) is an unknown proposition, but the promise it makes – year-round temperatures of 77-86F (25-30C) in exchange for six hours' flying and a plane change in Lisbon – is yet to lift it wholly from the Canaries' shadow. There are 10 islands, some 350 miles west of Senegal – of which Sal, with its reliable hotels on its sandy south coast at Santa Maria, has most embraced package tourism.

Who you'll meet: Bargain-breakers who have tired of Tenerife.

The holiday: Cape Verde Experience (01489 866969; capeverde.co.uk) offers breaks at the new five-star Hilton Cabo Verde Sal Resort. A seven-night stay, flying from Manchester on March 16, is £1,104 per person, with transfers and breakfast.

Crusoe rating: ***

24. Principe

Totally tropical? Undeniable – and yet easily missed. Look carefully at the map of Africa and you may notice Sao Tome and Principe (saotome.st) – twin outcrops in the Gulf of Guinea. Together they are the continent's second smallest country. By itself, Principe is a tropical miracle, rising to volcanic peaks like the 2,231ft Pico Papagaio.

Who you'll meet: Explorer types – if anyone. The islands were discovered by Portuguese navigator Joao de Santarem in 1471 and 1472.

The holiday: Rainbow Tours (020 3131 2831; rainbowtours.co.uk) offers an 11-day "Sao Tome and Principe Island Retreat", which includes six nights at the Bom Bom Island Resort on the latter. From £2,745 per person, with flights and transfers.

Crusoe rating: *****

25. Fernando de Noronha

Totally tropical? Brazil's (visitbrasil.com) image as a nest of tropical beaches needs no explanation – but Fernando de Noronha is far removed, both physically and in spirit, from Copacabana. An archipelago of 21 Atlantic shards, 220 miles off the coast of Rio Grande do Norte, here is an end of the world where sea turtles lay eggs on lonely bays and humpback whales breach offshore.

Who you'll meet: Plenty of adventurous urbanites.

The holiday: Kuoni (01306 747008; kuoni.co.uk) offers a seven-night break (one night in Rio) that includes six nights at the Pousada Maravilha eco-resort on the main island. From £3,815 per person, with transfers and breakfast, flying in May.

Crusoe rating: *****

The Pacific

26. Oahu

Totally tropical? Indubitably. The third largest island in Hawaii (gohawaii.com) is a Pacific oasis with an American swagger. It merges just about everything notable about the archipelago into a single package – the state capital Honolulu shining on its south coast; the warm sands of Waikiki Beach providing an urban playground; the sombre history of Pearl Harbor; the majestic Diamond Head volcano, and the hiking trails that hit its top.

Who you'll meet: Americans fleeing the winter of Arizona, Utah and Colorado.

The holiday: A 10-night (room-only) break, staying at Royal Hawaiian hotel, flying from Heathrow via Seattle on January 14, costs from £2,709 per person through Virgin Holidays (020 3739 7143; virginholidays.co.uk).

Crusoe rating: **

27. Kauai

Totally tropical? Contrary to perception, the Hawaiian islands are only just tropical – Kauai, the most northerly member of group, lies just below the Tropic of Cancer. Not that it looks anything less than the part. Waimea Canyon resembles a mini Grand Canyon in sunnier climes, while the Na Pali Coast is a great American secret, sheer cliffs plunging into the Pacific.

Who you'll meet: Surfers tackling the sport on Hanalei Bay.

The holiday: America As You Like It (020 8742 8299; americaasyoulikeit.com) sells a 16-night “Hawaii Island Hopper” trip which spends five days on Kauai. From £2,634 per person, with flights, hire car and hotels.

Crusoe rating: ****



Spectacular Kauai Credit: Copyright: RH

28. Hamilton Island

Totally tropical? The Whitsunday Islands are a persuasively pertinent reminder that Australia (australia.com) juts all the way up into the tropics in the sun-swathed northernmost portions of Queensland (queensland.com). Seventy-four outcrops are dotted 550 miles above Brisbane – including Hamilton Island, the biggest component of the archipelago, where deluxe resorts gleam within day-trip range of the Great Barrier Reef.

Who you'll meet: Nature lovers who want to see the reef, but fancy a massage as well.

The holiday: Wexas (020 7590 0634; wexas.com) sells “Sydney, the Whitsundays and Brisbane” – a 15-day journey which spends five days snorkelling and snoozing on Hamilton Island. From £2,195 per person, including all flights.

Crusoe rating: ****

29. Tahiti

Totally tropical? Ignore the fact that Tahiti (tahiti-tourisme.co.uk), technically, is as Gallic as Calais. Comprising two joined chunks of congealed lava, Tahiti Nui and Tahiti Iti, this is an unashamedly volcanic wonderland.

Who you’ll meet: Travellers with uncontrollable wanderlust.

The holiday: Audley Travel (01993 838250; audleytravel.co.uk) sells a 14-day package which spends three nights on Tahiti and a further seven at the Manava Beach Resort on neighbouring Moorea. From £2,878 per person, including flights, transfers and breakfast.

Crusoe rating: *****



Tahiti Credit: Martin Valigursky - Fotolia

30. Rarotonga

Totally tropical? The Cook Islands (cookislands.travel) are New Zealand wearing a sunhat – 15 outcrops sprinkled across 849,425 square miles of the South Pacific, some 2,542 miles north-east of Auckland. The contrast with the country’s big city is compelling on the largest island Rarotonga – 26 square miles of Polynesian paradise, framed by a blue-green lagoon, where the volcanic cone Te Manga scratches the heavens at 2,139ft.

Who you'll meet: Itinerant Kiwis fleeing the South Island winter.

The holiday: Trailfinders (020 7368 1200; trailfinders.com) offers an 11-day "Cook Islands Castaway" tour which splits its attention between Rarotonga and remote Aitutaki. From £1,677 per person – international flights extra.

Crusoe rating: *****