

ISLANDS LESS ORDINARY

For a less inhabited water-locked getaway, take romantic refuge at one of these remote escapes *By Bekah Wright*



Malasian oasis

Escape to Pangkor Laut to enjoy luxurious lodging, a remote coastline dotted with twinkling lights, and a rainforest setting rife with peacocks and lily ponds.

Not all islands come with palm trees, white sand beaches, and endless sunshine. Some, in fact, don't even come with scads of tourists. Bid civilization adieu and escape to a less ordinary island where you can stargaze from a canoe built for two, share a candlelight dinner on the ocean, smell the scent of vanilla wafting on sea breezes, and swim beside a bevy of penguins.



PANGKOR LAUT

Aptly named Pangkor Laut, or "beautiful island," this Malaysian oasis is located 150 miles outside the bustling city of Kuala Lumpur in the Straits of Malacca. The 300-acre private island is best accessed via Pangkor Laut Resort's yacht or ferry. A stippling of villas that appear to be wading in the surf marks your arrival. The resort's staff waits with welcoming smiles and glasses of cool Roselle juice as flirty peacocks wander about the grounds.

Stay in sea, beach, garden, or hill villas, or, for ultimate privacy, in the Estates of Marina Bay. Nine estates meld into a two-million-year-old rainforest. Though you're removed from the resort, you'll be well tended to here by your own cook and majordomo. Separate domiciles for sleeping, bathing, lounging, dining, and sitting, all beautifully appointed with Balinese furnishings and luscious linens, are linked by stone pathways. Nature takes center stage in these indoor/outdoor spaces that inspire lingering kisses on a footbridge, waxing poetic over a lily pond, chasing butterflies in a rock garden, or floating in an infinity pool while watching sea otters frolic in the bay. Choose a residence on a cove for a private beach.

The best reason to leave this personal paradise is Pangkor Laut's Spa Village. The same meld of Thai, Indian, and Chinese cultures you'll find in Malaysia's architecture and cuisine appears in this spa's treatments. Start with a bathing experience that combines rituals from around the world. Get head-to-toe pampering with Malay Coconut Crème Hair Treatment, an Indonesian-spiced Lulur body scrub/massage, and a traditional Japanese foot pounding.

Primed to take on the world, explore the jungle (prepare to be heckled by macaque monkeys), snorkel in Emerald Bay, or water-ski on Pangkor Strait. Fish, sail, scuba dive, and

kayak around nine neighboring Sembilan Islands. Enjoy the resort's three pools, fitness center, and tennis/squash courts.

Lured by twinkling lights lining the shores of Pangkor Laut, give your chef the night off and dine or lounge at Fisherman's Cove Restaurant, Sri Lagenda Lounge, Royal Bay Beach Club, Palm Grove Café, The Oasis Bar, Samudra, or Uncle Lim's Kitchen. Uncle Lim will make an appearance to see if you liked his famous orange chicken. For pure romance, indulge in a four-course "Dinner on the Rock," served on a rocky outcropping in Emerald Bay, or a sunset cruise via Tongkong teak boat. As stars light up the sky, head back to your estate, where cicadas play a concert for two. For details, call 877-851-3144 (toll-free) or visit www.pangkorlautresort.com. Villa rates: \$222 to \$635 per night. Marina Estate rates: \$8,000 to \$14,000 for a minimum three-night stay.



Galapagos penguins on Fernandina Island. Anchor on Isabela Island, as pirates and whalers once did, to walk on land that

Galapagos grandeur

Best seen by boat, each island has its own treasures: Head to Gardner Beach on Española Island and introduce yourself to the sea lions.

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Darwin's visit to the Galapagos in 1835 made him look at the world differently, and the theory of evolution was born. Travel to this archipelago on the equator off the coast of Ecuador and you'll discover a world largely unchanged since his day.

Ecological wonders formed by underwater volcanoes millions of years ago, the islands are national parkland and home to creatures found nowhere else on earth, such as the waved albatross and flightless cormorant. The 13 large islands and more than 100 small ones are best seen by boat.

Abercrombie & Kent's "Wonders of the Galapagos" expedition explores seven of them in depth. The 11-day itinerary starts with a tour of the city of Quito. You'll stand at the Equatorial Monument, with a foot in each hemisphere, and stroll

through Old Town's baroque architecture before a Mediterranean lunch at Theatrum Restaurante and Wine Bar, on the second floor of the Sucre National Theatre.

Leave society behind for the 210-foot luxury yacht, *Eclipse*, your home for the next seven days. Onboard is a staff of 29 to serve you, including four naturalists who lead island excursions. Make a suite with an ocean view, a double bed, and a bathtub your romantic haven. Dine on gourmet fare. Toast your union on the Observation Deck. Lounge in the library, the entertainment center, or the pool.

Each island has its own treasures. Meet Sally Lightfoot crab at Bartolomé Island's Pinnacle Rock, then follow a staircase of cedrela wood past old lava flows to a summit overlooking a caldera lake. On Genovesa Island, inspect Prince Philip's Steps, crater walls where wildlife make their home. Visit colonies of marine iguanas and

WHILE CRUISING AMONG THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS YOU CAN SEE CREATURES FOUND NOWHERE ELSE ON EARTH.

was once ocean floor. Visit "Boobievilla" on Española Island, home to blue-footed boobies. On Santa Cruz Island, find the "Tunnel of Love," a lava tunnel with a heart-shaped entrance, and meet Lonesome George, the last of the Pinta Island tortoise subspecies, who waits for a mate at Charles Darwin Research Station's tortoise-breeding center. As you drift out to sea, make a wish that George will find a love like yours and be lonely no more.

For details, visit www.galapagos-islands.net or www.galapagos.org/travel.html. Abercrombie & Kent: 630-954-4775, 800-554-7094 (toll-free), www.abercrombiekent.com. Rates start at \$4,350 per person, double occupancy.

PRINCESS ROYAL ISLAND

On Princess Royal Island you'll see white sand beaches as well as snowcapped mountains and glaciers. You may also see humpback whales and orcas circling this largely uninhabited island on Canada's forgotten coast in the Great Bear Rainforest. Its most famous resident, the white Kermode (or spirit) bear, is found only in this part of the

world. It is also home to the indigenous Gitga'at First Nation, inhabitants of the area for more than 10,000 years.

Immerse yourself in surroundings ranging from temperate rainforest and alpine tundra to fjords and estuaries. Rosewood Resort's floating King Pacific Lodge is the perfect base camp. This 17-room luxury lodge, built atop a barge and anchored in Barnard Harbour, is open May through September and can be accessed only by floatplane. Settle into the Princess Royal Suite for rainforest, waterfall, and ocean views. A large rock fireplace and deep Osaka bathtub beg for a tête-à-tête.

Visit Hartley Bay, a remote Gitga'at First Nation village on marshland that's interconnected by boardwalks. Learn more about the culture at a traditional longhouse in a remote fjord, which serves as a seasonal fishing camp and a cultural center.



HONEYMOON TRAVEL

Kayak amid ancient shipwrecks on Cameron Cove; spot whales, sea lions, and bald eagles from one of the lodge's 10 boats; and catch sight of a Kermode bear on a wildlife expedition. Try saltwater trolling and fly-fishing for Pacific salmon, then have the lodge's chef prepare your catch for dinner. Head for the clouds via helicopter for fly-out fly-fishing on remote streams, heli-kayaking on an alpine lake, or heli-hiking to a glacial waterfall. A must for your itinerary: a picnic on a glacier.

After a gourmet dinner of sake-and-soy-marinated sablefish, partake in a spa adventure. Take a canoe for two with a thermos of mint hot chocolate and a map of the constellations for stargazing under a moonlit sky. Waiting for you back at the lodge will be an in-room candlelight massage. An indulgent way to say goodnight.

For details, visit www.britishcolumbia.com. The King Pacific Lodge: 604-987-5452, 888-592-5464 (toll-free), www.kingpacificlodge.com. Rates range from \$3,700 (three nights) to \$21,000 (seven nights).

DENIS ISLAND

A mystique surrounds the Seychelles Islands. Rumor has it they were once considered the spy capital of the world. The 115 archipelagos in the Indian Ocean just south of the equator between Africa and Asia enjoy a melting-pot culture, which is manifested in their architecture and monuments.

You'll touch down on the main island of Mahé. Explore the capital, Victoria, taking in the historic clock tower, works of local artisans at Codevar Craft Centre, and the National Botanical Gardens. Venture beyond downtown to jungles, lakes, forests, small stretches of desert, and the awe-inspiring views of Morne Seychelles National Park.

From Mahé, fly to your private paradise on Denis Island, a 375-acre coralline island and former pirate lair chock full of Creole flavor. Its sole resort, Taj Denis Island, is one of the Taj Hotels, Resorts and Palaces collection. Stay in the beachfront "Bois D'Argent" suite, with a private courtyard,

alfresco shower, and mini garden.

Spend your days waterside with activities ranging from scuba diving to bottom and big game fishing via chartered boat. Participate in the island's turtle monitoring program by sighting and tagging green sea turtles. Hit the trails for sightings of giant land tortoises and birds such as noddies and whimbrels. Tour the island's quaint village, 70-foot lighthouse, farm, and vanilla plantation.

As night falls, arrange for a candlelit dinner on the beach from a menu featuring the catch of the day paired with a South African Pinotage Reserva. Dance cheek to cheek to the strains of the island band. Then, retire to your suite to slip between the sheets of a four-poster bed and be lulled to sleep by the ocean tide.

For details, visit www.denisland.com and www.seychelles.com.

Taj Denis Island: 866-969-1825 (toll-free), www.tajhotels.com.

Rates are \$871 to \$2,303 per night (through October 31). ■

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