

25 BEST ISLANDS TO LIVE ON

I S L A N D S

Islands

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THIS IS YOUR POOL

WHY ST. THOMAS IS AN EASY MOVE

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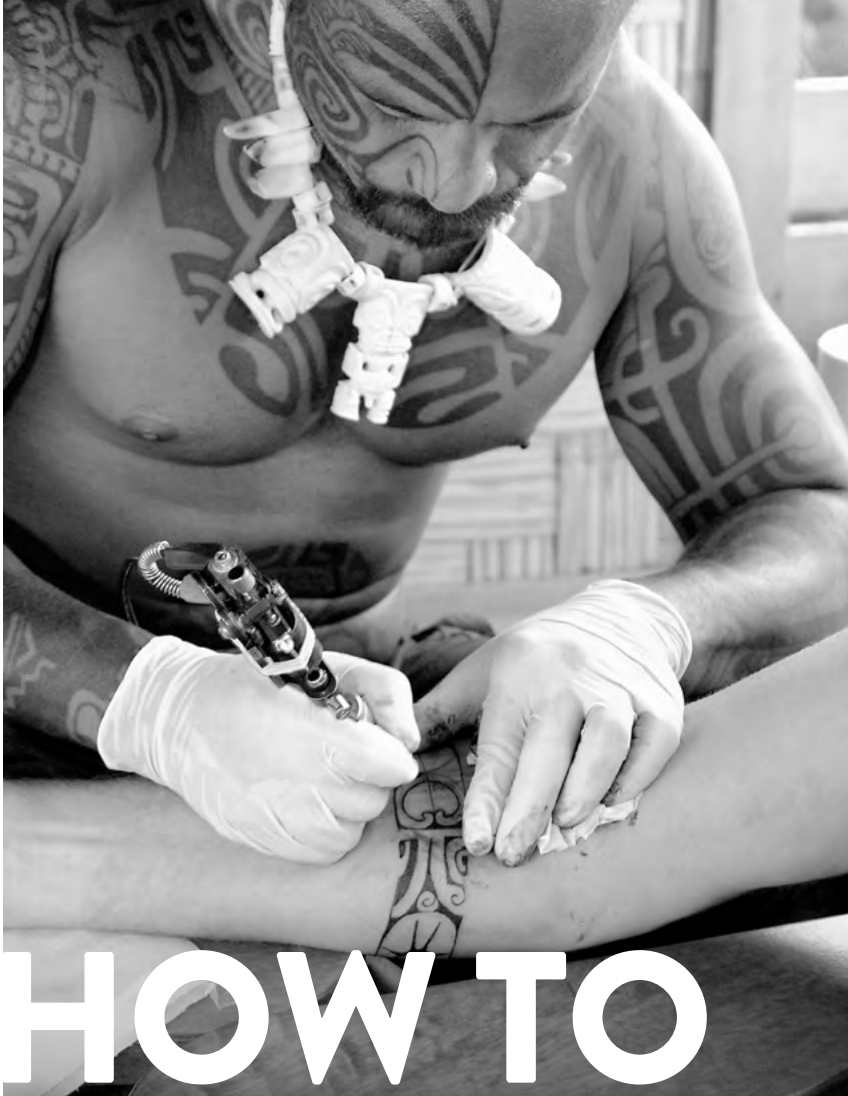
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HOW TO

EARN CRED WITH LOCALS

A LONGTIME PRO TOURIST SHARES HIS SECRETS ON GOING LOCAL.

BY JAD DAVENPORT

1 GET INKED

Flash a traditional tattoo in Polynesia and locals will grab your arm (or leg) for a closer look, and to read “your story.” A reputable tattoo master like Akitini on Nuku Hiva (above) will ask about your life and customize your design. Shark-tooth tools are still used, but most artists opt for the simpler and more hygienic tattoo needles.

2 KISS THEM

In the French West Indies from Guadeloupe to St. Barth, lean in for a double air kiss (and make the appropriate noise), once on each cheek. Ditto in the Dutch West Indies. On Spanish-speaking islands like Puerto Rico, it’s traditional to give just one *beso* on the cheek. No one will turn down a handshake, but a kiss gets you extra points.

3 KNOW HOME

From Gwada (Guadeloupe) to Statia (Sint Eustatius), nothing says you’re local — or working hard at it — like learning the island nicknames. Don’t listen to the tourism boards — there are dozens of “emerald” isles — ask your taxi driver. And learn the pronunciation. Australia’s gateway to the Barrier Reef, Cairns, rhymes with “cans” not “yarns.”

TALK PRETTY

LINGUA FRANCA

French and English are the official languages of Vanuatu, the South Pacific archipelago where my wife and I honeymooned. So I brushed up on my high school French to impress the locals — and my new wife. Preparing to snorkel off the beach our first day, I held up my dive fins to a crowd of local kids and asked them what they were called *en Français*. “Leg b’long duk-duk, mistah!” Did I hear that right? A leg that belongs to a duck? It turns out that few people in Vanuatu speak French or English; the lingua franca in

“The language has been cleverly adapted to describe anything through descriptive phrases. The more we spoke, the more we learned, and the more we learned, the more we laughed.”

Vanuatu is Bislama, a Pidgin English. It turned out to be very easy (and fun) to learn. “Hamas pikininnies you gat, Mistah Jad?” someone asked. “Me gat no pikininnies,” was the correct response for my child-free wife and me. The more we spoke, the more we learned, and the more we learned, the more we laughed. The language has been cleverly adapted to describe just about anything through descriptive phrases. A piano? “Big’fala bokis, wan blakfala, wan waterfall, yu kilim em singaot.” A “big-fellow box with white and black teeth, you hit him, him sings out.” My favorite Bislama word? “Mixmaster b’long Jesus Kraes-in-da-sky.” A helicopter. — *JD*

Read the guidebook. Name-dropping local heroes, historical events and geographic landmarks is flattering and shows you’re in the know.

LESSONS LEARNED NO HUGS FOR GREETINGS IN THE ISLANDS; HUGS ARE FOR ROMANTIC PARTNERS ONLY.

HOW TO



DO'S & DON'TS

■ Don't bring much.

All you need is your passport and swimsuit. Storage space is limited on catamarans; everything from beach towels to water bottles is included in your cabin.



■ Don't worry about sharing the boat.

The other guests on your journey are bound to be just as friendly and interesting as you. It's rare to find a cranky cruiser.

■ **Do bring a sense of adventure.** You're on a sailboat; the captain plans an itinerary, but where you actually end up depends on the wind and waves.

■ **Do learn a few words in French.** But don't worry — St. Barts is one of the most Anglophone-friendly islands in the Caribbean.

■ **Do bring some Dramamine** if you get queasy in the waves. The Caribbean has some of the calmest waters around, but better safe than sorry.

■ **Do learn the nautical lingo.** You don't have to help out, but guests find that it's fun to learn about sailing; some even take a turn at the helm.



SAVE

ST. BARTS ON THE CHEAP(ER)

BY JAD DAVENPORT

Want a secret way to beat back the hefty prices on St. Barts, one of the most exclusive and expensive islands in the Caribbean? On an island where a simple tomato salad with a cold Carib might run you north of \$40 and a night at a luxury resort creeps into quadruple digits, one of the smartest budget options also means doing what the Hollywood celebs do — not staying on the island at all, but settling in on your own private yacht.

TradeWinds, an international sailing club with fleets from the Seychelles to Greece, offers one-week voyages from the gateway island of St. Maarten (where flights to St. Barts also originate) and rents out individual cabins aboard its luxury five-cabin catamarans. The itinerary wraps around both St. Barts and Anguilla, offering a taste of indulgence for a fraction of the cost (off-season rates start around \$330 a night per person including all meals — cooked by a private chef — drinks and most activities). The en suite cabins are small

but elegantly paneled for an authentic nautical feel, and you can snorkel and swim right off the stern steps. There are stand-up paddle boards, sea kayaks and a complete line of scuba gear.

This is a true sailing experience — though you're not required to lift anything heavier than a gin and tonic, if you prefer — so the itinerary and stops on St. Barts vary with the wind and weather. One favorite visit, an afternoon snorkeling the marine park off uninhabited Ile Fourche, would normally cost over \$1,000 if you chartered a private boat in St. Barts. Spend the money you saved on an afternoon window-shopping along Quai de la Republique (Gustavia's toniest street). You can always splurge on the cheapest burgers in town at Le Select, supposedly the inspiration for Jimmy Buffett's anthem "Cheeseburger in Paradise."

At the end of the day, even your transportation is included in the fee (visitors normally fly in or catch a ferry), and nothing beats arriving to St. Barts aboard your own shiny boat.

GOOD TO KNOW MOST SHOPS CLOSE ON SUNDAYS, BUT SHELL BEACH IS WIDE OPEN, HOSTING SUNSET PARTIES EVERY WEEK.