

Hidden beaches

After time spent immersing yourself in the temples, cities and nature of a country, many people opt to spend some time relaxing on or near a beach. Here, our specialists pick out some of the less-known beaches from around the world, places that remain unspoilt and away from the tourist crowds.



Okinawa

Okinawa, Japan

Okinawa's beaches are amongst the most beautiful in Asia and just a short flight away from Tokyo. Temperatures are mild to hot year round (20-35C) with rain and typhoons during the summer months and into September. The smaller and lesser visited islands of Ishigaki and Miyako are particularly attractive, with white sand beaches, coral reefs, rugged coastlines and plenty of snorkelling and water sport opportunities. Relax on the beach or hire a car and explore the islands by road, driving along the coast and inland through forests and small villages. Accommodation generally consists of resort style hotels with little English spoken, but most have open air pools, access to private beaches and rooms overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The neighbouring Iriomote Island, just 40 minutes away by ferry, hosts rainforest vegetation and rare wildlife such as the elusive wildcat. Kayaking here amongst the mangroves and inlets gives you a truly unique experience of "the other Japan".

For more information on Okinawa and mainland Japan, please call Marc Dolman on 01993 838 218.

Tayrona National Park, Colombia

Located approximately four and a half hours' drive from the colonial city of Cartagena in Colombia, the beaches of Tayrona National Park are wild and untouched. The park itself sits at the edge of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range, the highest coastal mountain range in the world, stretching over 35 miles from Santa Marta in the west to the River Piedras in the east. This tropical beach paradise has a backdrop of lush green rainforest and was once home to the indigenous Tayrona Indians. Covering an area of 37,000 acres of which 7,000 correspond to coastal waters, Tayrona Park has miles of unspoilt coastline. Close to the beach, or on it if you are lucky, are over 100 species of mammals, 200 species of birds and 50 species of reptiles, and is a place where nature and visitor must co-exist. Accommodation on this coast is sparse, so you can walk for miles without seeing a soul. Of the few places to stay, Ecohabs are our favourite. The individual thatched cabins perch on a hillside overlooking the beach offering stunning views of the coastline and an utterly tranquil stay.

For more information on adding Tayrona National Park to a tour of Colombia or other countries in the region, please call Phil Chanel on 01993 838 611.

Quirimbas National Park, Mozambique

Guludo Beach Lodge is situated in the Quirimbas National Park in Northern Mozambique. Located on 12 kilometres of white sandy beach, Guludo encompasses the true meaning of an eco-friendly lodge, run on sustainable principles. There is no electricity or running water, but this does not mean Guludo is basic – far from it. Accommodation is in spacious, airy adobe bandas just footsteps from the beach and the large outdoor bathrooms have an ingenious shower system. There is incredible attention to detail in every aspect of the lodge design and all building has used local techniques and, as far as possible, locally sourced materials. The essence here is relaxation and the natural surroundings are spectacular. The magnificent pristine coral reefs provide fantastic snorkelling and diving opportunities and there is an excellent PADI dive centre. Other activities include excursions to Ibo and Rolas Islands, sunset dhow sails, or at certain times of year – whale watching. A trip to the local village, where you can see the work of the lodge's charitable foundation in action, is a must.

For further information on Quirimbas National Park and how to incorporate it into a tour of Mozambique, please contact James Down on 01993 838 526.



Bangaram Island Resort, Lakshadweep Islands



Sailing on a traditional dhow, Quirimba Archipelago



Local women on the Quirimba Archipelago



Underwater scene, Okinawa

Trang, Thailand

If you are willing to travel slightly further afield than Thailand can still reward you with some beautiful and less visited beaches. One of our favourite coastal regions is the province of Trang, home to the stunning limestone outcrops which erupt from the ocean but with the added bonus of receiving less visitors than the more high profile Phang-Nga Bay. The Anantara Si Kao makes a relaxing base with all the facilities and comfort you could ask for coupled with some of the best views in Southeast Asia. The food is also outstanding, which is quite an achievement in a country renowned for its fine cuisine. The resort also offers a complimentary speed boat to the neighbouring island of Ko Kradan which has stunning white sand beaches and some of the best snorkelling in Thailand.

For more information on visiting Trang and other parts of Thailand, please contact James Pook on 01993 838 124.

Lakshadweep Islands, India

Situated in the Arabian Sea off the southwest coast of India the Lakshadweep Islands, meaning 100,000 islands, are a haven of palm trees and turquoise blue waters. There are actually just 36 islands and the local people make their living from fishing and coconuts. The jewel of the Lakshadweep Islands is Bangaram. Reached by taking a one and a half hour flight from Cochin, followed by a one hour boat transfer, the effort required to reach Bangaram is part of its attraction – only those seeking a place to really get away from it all bother making their way here. The thatched accommodation is simple but clean, the buffet restaurant unpretentious but offering some of the best south Indian dishes and fresh fish imaginable. The island feels like it was designed specifically for languid souls but kayaking and deep sea fishing can be arranged and the clear warm waters with their submerged banks and virgin reefs make for a fascinating underwater world perfect for snorkelling and scuba diving.

For further information on the Lakshadweep Islands and combining them with a tour of the mainland India, please contact Daniel Smith on 01993 838 311.

Haggerstone Island, Queensland, Australia

Cast away on the northern tip of the Great Barrier Reef, Haggerstone Island turns the fictional notion of beach paradise into reality. Two clear water lagoons just off the beach put beautiful coral gardens right on your doorstep and the utter remoteness of the location ensures that the marine life is prolific. Adjacent to the island on the Outer Barrier Reef is one of the largest green turtle rookeries in the world. A unique and special place, this private island caters for a small number of guests willing to explore and experience the surrounding wilderness. Roy and Anna, the owners and hosts, have extended the beauty of the island by placing their handcrafted freeform buildings of varying styles in the island's interior jungle: rustic yet incredibly comfortable. Haggerstone Island has it all, miles of pristine white beaches, the perfect tropical climate, adventurous exploration, remoteness and isolation.

For more information on Haggerstone Island and Australia, please contact Jenny Bouquet on 01993 838 809.