

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

If you want a private pastime paradise and don't want to share with the masses, you don't need to compromise. Have a look at our selection of some of the best beach destinations for 2009.

San Blas Islands, Panama

There is still a relatively undiscovered idyll in the world, and it's a short hop from the construction mayhem of Panama City. Only 51 of the islands in this archipelago of 356 are inhabited, and you can easily take over an entire island by renting all seven spartan-but-smart cabins on stilts in the Caribbean Sea at Akwadup Lodge. Hop from beach to beach and discover an underwater fantasia around the coral reef. The local Kuna people are incredibly friendly and their cuisine, predictably strong on fresh seafood, is wonderful. When you're done with the romance of the deserted beach, explore Kuna Yala, the virgin rainforest. Fly from London to Panama City via Amsterdam with KLM and from Panama City to the San Blas Islands by Aeroperlas. ►

www.sanblaslodge.com, www.klm.com, www.aeroperlas.com



Trancoso, Bahia, Brazil

Hailed as 'the Bali of Brazil' this sleepy fishing village, has developed over the last few years into an A-list destination, which the likes of Giselle and Vogue cover girls seem to love. The beach is quiet, the ocean is calm and the scenery is exquisite. Stay in one of the white-on-white bedrooms in the small but chic and brightly coloured bungalows at Etnia Pousada (etnibrasil.com.br) for the most authentic experience. After a hard day of playing golf from the rainforest to the cliffs of Terravista, stroll around the cottage stores and restaurants of Quadrado and eat prawn stew in coconut milk out of a hollowed pumpkin at Capim Santo. Fly from London to Porto Seguro via Sao Paulo with TAM.

www.capimsanto.com.br, www.tam.com.br

Zighy Bay, Oman

Though the jury is still out on the credibility of Dubai as a standalone beach resort, Oman continues to be the biggest draw in the Middle East. Zighy is the latest coastal town to get the five-star makeover with the opening of the Six Senses Hideaway resort. Guests arrive by speedboat and each of its 79 villas has its own private infinity pool. The whole 'village' has been purpose built for guests and it's so out of the way that it took them two years to build the road. Zighy is flanked by rocky, white and toffee coloured mountains and dining in the restaurant, the appropriately named Edge, makes you feel like you're on top of a very ancient world. Fly from London to Dubai with Emirates.

www.emirates.com/uk

Jose Ignacio, Uruguay

Jose Ignacio is arguably this year's most fashionable beach resort. Argentine celebrities stay in their ultra-modernist beach private beach houses (neighbours include Shakira, Ralph Lauren and Naomi Campbell) while everyone else books months ahead for a room at the artisanal blanco Posada del Faro or at superstar chef Francis Mallman's Garzon (www.restaurantgarzon.com). Dine at night at Marismo, the 'secret' restaurant – turn right at the roundabout driving back from the beach, look for a wooden fish at the side of the road on the left and wander until you find the firepits. Fly from London to Buenos Aires via Paris with Air France and then to Punte del Este from Buenos Aires with Pluna.

www.posadadelfaro.com
www.airfrance.co.uk,
www.flypluna.com

Vieques, Puerto Rico

When the US Navy stopped using this emerald green desert island, many expected an explosion in tourism. But travel logistics (the airstrip is tiny) and a ban on further building work means Vieques is going to stay as lost-looking as it did when they filmed Lord of the Flies here. Stay at the tiny, fashion-conscious Bravo Beach Hotel, or the architecturally wild Hix Island House. Borrow a jeep and drive with a coolbox and a deck chair to Blue or Red Beaches; mile upon mile upon mile of ungroomed, ravishing Caribbean paradise. If you see another soul, the beach you're on is too crowded. Fly from New York to San Juan with Jet Blue and from San Juan to Vieques with Cape Air.

www.bravobeachhotel.com
www.hixislandhouse.com
www.jetblue.com, www.flycapeair.com

THE BEACH IS QUIET,
 THE OCEAN IS CALM
 AND THE SCENERY
 IS EXQUISITE.

San Blas: a relatively undiscovered idyll in Panama.