

Best Villas

► **SAMPLE ISLAND LIVING IN HIGH STYLE.** A room with a view? How about a suite of rooms with an infinity pool and multiple breathtaking views? The best island villas offer a temporary yet headlong plunge into the life we all dream about. Each of the homes we found embodies the spirit of its island (cosmopolitan, secluded, scenic, relaxed) while enhancing the land it occupies — but none better than the one pictured here. The villa of Samudra, “meeting of the waters,” sits on a rocky point on the southern tip of the Thai island of Ko Samui, one of our “Best Islands to Live

.....
SAMUDRA
THAILAND

On.” The villa’s 12 structures — *all for you* — comprise an eclectic atlas of well-considered design: doorways, windows, chairs and tables from China, India and Thailand; a temple carried whole from Bali; rich textiles and artworks; and pools and pathways lined with quarried stone. And the effort to harmonize doesn’t cease with the physical here. With your bare feet on the mandala-shaped golden teak floor of the Octagon yoga studio and your eyes sweeping the ocean, you’ll feel lifted to a higher plane. Want even more harmony? Stroll to Kamalaya wellness sanctuary down the beach. Want a break from harmony? A short ride takes you into the almost-anything-goes nightlife of Ko Samui. If you’re going to rent the island life, get the whole faraway, exotic thing *and* a sense of community. Stay a month! In the words of one guest and lifelong ISLANDS reader: “Samudra embodies Thailand — smiling faces, wonderful food, spiritual sunsets. This is it.” Sleeps 10; rates from \$800. samudra-samui.com

► **ISLANDS** ranked villa destinations based on recommendations from our editors and contributors as well as local experts and readers with firsthand insight. We sought relaxing villas in scenic locations within easy reach of authentic restaurants and cultural attractions. Given rates are figured per day in U.S. dollars, for comparison only; some properties have longer minimum stays.

A Thai estate dedicated to peace, nature and health, Samudra feels like a miniature continent — all for you.

COURTESY SAMUDRA



The key feature, of course, is the island itself. The best villas let you join the scene and also retreat. Engage, indulge, repeat.

2 **VILLA SKINOS, ITHACA, GREECE**
 > “Keep Ithaca always in your mind. Arriving there is what you are destined for.” So wrote the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy in 1911. He went on to say you should go in old age when you’re rich with experience. Fair enough. Or you could go now — mid-odyssey — and bring your whole crew! Very Greek and truly welcoming, Villa Skinos feels like a home you’re returning to. It sits on its own bay and features a captained yacht and speedboats for exploring the sparkling and myth-rich Ionian Sea. Dive in. A full staff prepares authentic Greek meals and makes you feel like family, while you take jaunts to the village taverna and enjoy what some call the most beautiful of the Greek islands. Sleeps 14; rates on application. www.fivestargreece.com

The Istana villa on Bali (top) feels like a temple where you eat, sleep and celebrate. Villa Skinos on Ithaca sits on its own bay (left).

3 **THE ISTANA, BALI**
 > Villas all over the world promise Bali-inspired architecture, furniture, pavilions and landscapes. On Bali (also in our “Best Islands to Live On” list), they just call that “home.” This elegant villa on the island’s southern tip has westward views over white-sand beach and colorful reef, plus some of the best surf and sunsets on earth. Turn around to see the main pool, infinity-edged and lined with green granite, plus groomed lawns, five suites (the master suite with its own pool), spa, theater, extra rooms and fun for kids, plus dining and entertaining spaces for grown-ups. A staff of 30 pampers you. The key feature, of course, is the island itself. Istana, like all the best villas, lets you join the scene and also retreat. Engage, indulge, repeat. Uluwatu Beach is a short walk, Uluwatu temple a short ride in the chauffeur-driven minivans. Sleeps 10; rates from \$1,750. theistana.com

FROM TOP: COURTESY THE ISTANA; COURTESY VILLA SKINOS

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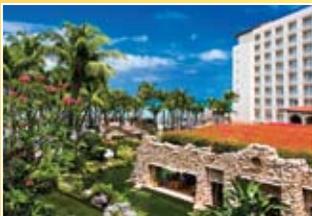
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4 VILLA NORTH ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

> For a couple seeking privacy — but with pampering — this place could top the list. The outlying islands of the Seychelles are less about cultural immersion and more about azure immersion. Tucked in Takamaka Forest away from the other 10 villas on private North Island, this signature spot offers pure seclusion. To get more privacy than this, you'd have to sail solo around the world, and then who would bring you cocktails? Hand-built by local craftsmen of wood and local stone, the house has wraparound views out to Anse d'est (east beach). That's it for entertainment. Share it with someone you really like. Sleeps 2; rates from \$3,700. www.north-island.com

Garden sits across the street, preserving Kauai's amazing flora along with endangered tropical-plant species from around the world. Nearby in the other direction there's the famous Spouting Horn where the waves meet the lava shore. For longer-term provisioning, Lihue is 30 minutes away. Location isn't everything — the house's sunset-facing bedrooms, kitchen and decks are pretty cool too — but if it were, this one would be hard to beat. Sleeps 6; rates from \$1,050. parrishkauai.com

Beautiful house, perfect location, breathtaking views — Sandy Beach House seems like too much good fortune. Get over it.

5 SANDY BEACH HOUSE, KAUAI

> Life on Kauai (No. 2 in our "Best Islands to Live On" list) is slow, lush and easy — for and by the water. That's better experienced in a house than a hotel room, and this may be the best. Sitting on its own slice of beach, Sandy Beach House offers water sports and ocean swimming right outside — with mellower Lawai Beach blocks away, plus surfing at Prince Kuhio Beach and family-friendly Poipu Beach within short drives. The National Tropical Botanical

6 ALATA CHANNEL HOUSE, TURKS AND CAICOS

> If you're hiring a house in the Turks and Caicos, you probably want relaxation, views of blue water and a rollicking rum party you can reach quickly but can't hear from the veranda. Built of Jamaican hardwoods on an all-but-private stretch of white-sand beach, this house admits the breeze and ocean sounds but prohibits worries. And the urban hub of Providenciales is a short drive or sail if you get bored. This is pirate luxury, plush and hidden from view but not too far from the action. Sleeps 8; rates from \$700. globalartichoke.com

COURTESY SANDY BEACH HOUSE

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SHANE PAQUETTE

enjoyed the family-friendly island Ilha Grande near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Fishing, body surfing and sand castles kept the little ones busy!



JAY D'AMATO

believes Bora Bora is the ideal place to lose yourself in sapphire-blue water and amazing rainbows. The unique experience of a luxurious overwater bungalow is the ultimate in romance.



AMY MCMURREY

traveled via vintage aircraft for a sightseeing excursion between Lanai and the Big Island in Hawaii. A rollicking whale-watching expedition provided an up-close-and-personal experience.



LORI BRUNS

rejuvenated at her seaside villa rental in the Turks & Caicos Islands. Snorkeling, "liming" on the beach and beautiful sunsets were the order of the day.



KELLY SHEA

strolled down the picturesque harbor of Hydra, a tiny island about 40 miles southwest of Athens, Greece. No motorized vehicles allowed — only donkeys or your feet to take you to lively tavernas and scenic harbor views!



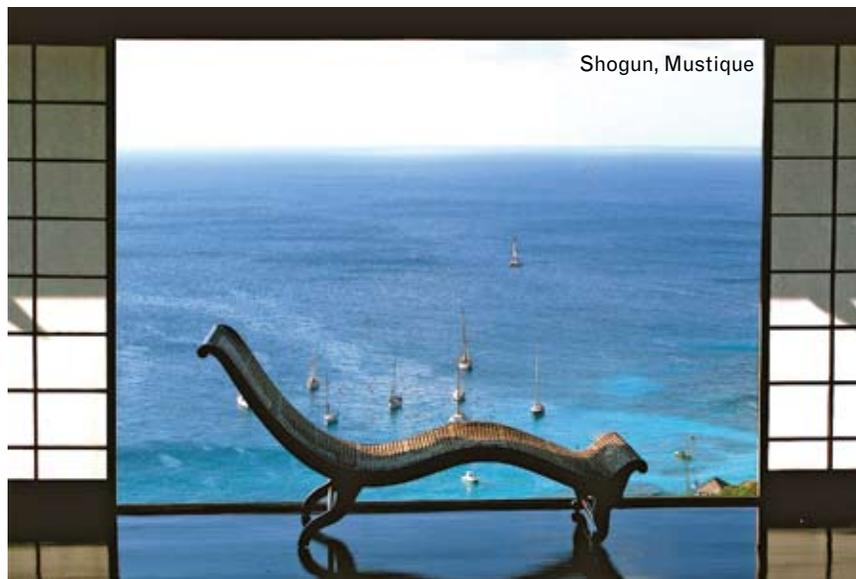
MINDY ROZENBERG

found heaven on earth while visiting the Qualia Resort on Hamilton Island, Australia. Stunning water views and a private plunge pool were welcome respites to active days, including a helicopter ride over the Great Barrier Reef.

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TopTen



7 **SHOGUN, MUSTIQUE**
> Proportion, position, precision. These attributes of refined design cannot be rushed or quibbled over. Shogun Villa stands as testament — voiced through its choice of woods and placement of walls and windows — that perfection is worth the time and expense. Built into a five-acre Japanese-style garden on a bluff 300 feet above the Caribbean, the compound feels almost painted in, foliage along the path and koi in the pond like brush strokes, the light suspended. The main house commands views of Britannia Bay from its salon and sun decks. Little Shogun, a two-bedroom cottage separated from the other buildings, adds yet another layer of privacy. Traveller's Tree Cottages, ideal for kids or your personal staff, perches above the complex. And speaking of layers, the whole place — stone flagstones, fine linens, rooftops, sea below and sky above — enfolds your moments here. It may be an extended vacation, but it feels like reverence. Go ahead, try not to wonder what your time

at Shogun means. Here's a hint: It means you did something right. Sleeps 18; rates from \$30,000. www.shogunmustique.com

8 **CLYTHA CASTLE, WALES**
> Once upon a time, in a castle in the heart of Wales, a fairy tale waited only for its heroes. That's where you come in. Built in 1790, the castle was renovated in 1974 to bring 18th-century romance into the modern age. Or almost — there's still no TV. And the kitchen in the south tower has no microwave, but from its windows, you may see deer frolicking in the forest — a fair trade. Run by the Landmark Trust, which maintains historic properties all over the British Isles, the castle fits snugly into the Welsh countryside. If a knight in armor happened by, you wouldn't be surprised. The local pub lies within walking distance, the town of Abergavenny a short drive away and cosmopolitan Cardiff not much farther. Or you could lay in a leg of lamb and a jug of mead to let your fairy tale continue. Sleeps 6; rates from \$188. landmarktrust.org.uk

COURTESY SHOGUN

It may be an extended vacation, but it feels like reverence. What does your time here mean? Here's a hint: It means you did something right.



At Shangri-La, swing in a big hammock slung between palm trees next to a naturally heated bathing lagoon.

runs and to share life with the locals — until you become one. Sleeps 6; rates from \$375. bigislandvacationrentals.com

10 **IL GABBIANO, SICILY** > Certain cultures lend themselves perfectly to villa living, namely those where daily life — invigorating walks, healthful meals, deep rest — takes on import greater than the sum of its parts. Such a place is the Italian island of Sicily, equal parts long tradition and living for today. Rambling to the market for olives and fresh goat cheese, sniffing the steam from baking bread, drinking Marsala wine bottled down the road as you look over the water, it all adds up to an experience that feels less like a vacation and more like a life well spent. Set that in the villa called Il Gabbiano, built into the cliffs with private stairways down to the Tyrrhenian Sea, and the island life becomes a celebration. Sleeps 5; rates from \$2,600. thinksicily.com

COURTESY SHANGRI-LA

9 **SHANGRI-LA, BIG ISLAND** > On the Big Island (No. 1 in our “Best Islands to Live On” ranking), you feel that energy — a combination of sun, surf and seismic activity — from the moment you get off the plane till the moment you leave, swearing you’ll come back to stay and soon. And living here brings the energy home, even if it’s only for a few weeks

this time. Nestled among the coconut trees, Shangri-La captures that almost indescribable, easygoing Big Island feel. The villa’s several structures sit right on a thermally heated natural lagoon filled with native tropical fish — and you snorkeling among them. Beyond the rock walls, sea turtles swim in the open Pacific Ocean. The funky town of Pahoa lies a few miles west for resupply

More Top Villas

In this special issue, we offer choices beyond the top 10. The world’s villas are as varied as the islands they occupy.

11 **BIRD OF PARADISE, ANGUILLA** Lagoon-style pools wind through four buildings set above a crescent beach. Chef and spa services can be arranged. Sleeps 8; rates from \$1,795. anguillabird.com

12 **RAHIMOANA, EAGLES NEST, NEW ZEALAND** Looking for uninterrupted luxury? Try this presidential villa at exclusive Eagles Nest, featuring 360-degree views of the Bay of Islands. Zoom around New Zealand in the included Porsche. Sleeps 8; rates from \$8,600. eaglesnest.co.nz

13 **LAGOON HOUSE, BIG ISLAND** This beautiful spot captures the down-to-earth spirit of Hawaii. Swim in the warm, natural lagoon. Sleeps 8; rates from \$285. lagoonhouse.com

14 **VILLAGGETTO, PANTELLERIA** Part of Monastero Private Villa Resort, this spacious villa integrates perfectly with the landscape. Sleeps 12; rates from \$4,100. monasteropantelleria.com

15 **APHRODITE, PANAREA** Can’t get enough of Italy’s islands? Stay on chic Panarea in style and luxury tuned to the local vibe. Sleeps 8; rates from \$7,230. thinksicily.com

16 **VILLA ATHÉNÉE, MAURITIUS** Private saltwater pool, peaceful beach, dining gazebo, thatched roofs, blue sea. This is Mauritius. Sleeps 10; rates from \$840. villasdemaitre.com

17 **GARUDA ESTATE, MAUI** Surfing, downhill biking, dining, volcano climbing — Maui has options. Here’s a sweet place to rest. Sleeps 10; rates from \$1,695. luxuryretreats.com

18 **VILLA ROSEN, MALLORCA** Floor-to-ceiling windows provide cliff’s-edge views over the rocky Formentor

Peninsula and across to the beaches on the far shore. Sleeps 12; rates from \$1,550. globalartichoke.com

19 **FORTLANDS POINT, JAMAICA** Feel like you own the island at this manicured paradise on its own beachy peninsula in Discovery Bay. Sleeps 14; rates from \$2,000. jamaicavillas.com

20 **ANINI VISTA HOME, KAUAI** The far side of Hawaii’s far island — it’s good here. Staying in this custom-built Asian-style house makes it even better. Separate spaces offer large groups privacy. The pool, koi ponds and luxury appointments bring everybody back together. Sleeps 10; rates from \$1,750. purekauai.com ■ ISLANDS.COM/best

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