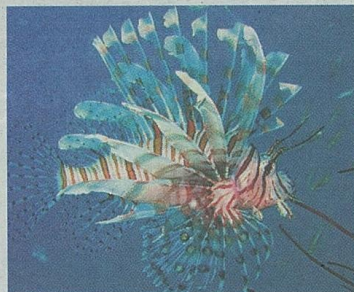


Visit Castle Tioram en route to Eilean Shona, Scotland. Right, dive into weird waters; and a nice bed on Ariara, in the Philippines

Getty, Neil Dangerfield/Alamy



MOZAMBIQUE Quilalea

The resort on this dot of coral in the Quirimbas archipelago reopened earlier this month after a two-year closure for a style injection from the people behind Azura, the award-winning address on busy (for Mozambique at least) Bengueria island. The Azura at Quilalea Private Island has a more intimate appeal: nine villas spaced over 84 acres, each with a marine colour scheme, billowing muslin and butler service. Candlelit tables can be set up for dinner on the sand, the spa perches on the cliff edge and there's snorkelling a flipper's flick off the main beach. The

time-warp island of Ibo, a grand but abandoned 15th-century trading post, makes for a splendid day trip.

For stays before June (except between December 19 and January 15, when normal rates apply), an all-inclusive week starts at £2,890pp — a saving of £1,344 — including flights and transfers, with Expert Africa (020 8232 9777, expertafrica.com)

INDIA Philipkutty's Farm

The lush backwaters of Kerala are slow-paced at the best of times, but here they come to a delightful and definitive full stop. The island was

reclaimed from Vembanad Lake in the 1950s by the grandfather of the current owner, Anu Mathew. Life has changed little since: you arrive by poled boat, and the family farm still grows coconuts, nutmeg, bananas, cocoa and peppers. The Philipkutty style is more homestay than hotel, with Mathew personally welcoming guests to the five waterfront cottages, and her mother cooking roasted duck, local prawns and red-hot fish curry, eaten around a table with the family. The cottages, filled with heirlooms, have no air conditioning, but with 18 windows and eight doors in each, who needs it? A word of warning: the

farm-brewed toddy, made from coconut sap, will make your brain forget what your feet are for. Ampersand Travel (020 7289 6100, ampersandtravel.com) has a week from £1,690pp, full-board, including flights and transfers

SRI LANKA Taprobane

In the 1920s, Sri Lanka's only private island was home to the self-styled Count de Mauny-Talvande. He hit on the idea of building himself a grand neo-Palladian folly, Weligama, and everything about it is decadent, even how you reach it — you can wade through the shallow waters from Weligama town or ride there astride an elephant. The sprawling octagonal mansion has spacious cool-white living areas and the rambling tropical gardens are full of frangipani, flame trees, orchids and bougainvillea. The five bedrooms have colonial-style furniture and private terraces that look out to the Indian Ocean. It's a short drive to Galle, home of the famous fort, where there's excellent mooching to be had in the antiques stores and fashionable boutiques. You can sample the cool beach scene at Wijaya en route.

A week starts at £1,570pp, including flights, transfers and a staff of five, with Bailey Robinson (01488 689700, baileyrobinson.com)

BORNEO Lankayan

Fast gaining a reputation with the scuba squad, Lankayan is a tiny island in the Sulu Sea that has amazing diving just minutes from its 23 simple wooden beachfront chalets. Keep your goggles peeled for giant jawfish, stingrays, anemone fish, blue ribbon eels and peacock mantis shrimp, as well as wrecks and every diver's dream date,

the gigantic (but harmless) whale sharks, which congregate here between March and May. If that hasn't satisfied your inner David Attenborough, hit the beach — Lankayan is a nesting place for green and hawksbill turtles. Nightlife involves heading to the bar to swap tales of close underwater encounters, or retiring to your room to watch them all again on video.

A week starts at £1,655pp, full-board, including flights, with Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, wildfrontiers.co.uk)

PHILIPPINES

Ariara

There are about 100 unexplored islands in the Calamian chain, but you'll be glad that the British couple Charles and Carrie McCulloch have spent six years well and truly discovering this one. They have turned it into a stylish retreat for people who don't "do" hotels. Book it for a week, and you and up to 16 chums get the run of 125 tropical acres and eight airy villas full of furniture handcrafted by Filipino artisans, vast day beds and equally outside baths hewn from single blocks of Romblon marble. Toys to play with include a 33ft speedboat, a 100ft trimaran, kayaks and webikes — and each guest gets two complimentary dives in waters where it's a novelty to see another boat. Chef rustles up your favourite meals, which can be served under a moonlit mango tree. The south wing has a cinema, and there's an infinity pool in case you don't fancy the 600yd white-sand beach. Dive in Style (020 7978 0505, diveinstyle.com) has a week from £2,100pp, full-board, based on 15-17 guests and including flights

✦ In the packages above, flights are from London; most involve one or two plane changes en route. For details of regional departures, contact the tour operator