



BEST PRIVATE ISLAND

ARIARA

Palm trees and privacy

It's difficult to get enthused about a destination that takes 24 hours to get to. But then Ariara Island isn't any old destination. It's a private Philippine island of such prettiness that you almost expect Johnny Depp to pop out of the foliage, a parrot on his shoulder. From its mountainous crest you can see 125 acres of tropical jungle steam below, fringed by six little white beaches. On one side, waves from the Sulu Sea smash up against cliffs. And on the other, beyond a forest of coconut palms, ridiculously blue water stretches out to a Technicolor reef, where pink, fluffy, Barbara Cartland-esque corals and rainbow-hued creatures waft in the tropical current.

Because Ariara is hired out only to private groups, you have it all to yourself (and up to 16 friends). For exploring neighbouring islands there is a handful of boats (including a yacht that sleeps ten for overnight trips). A watersports centre is stocked with diving and snorkelling equipment, kayaks and jet skis. And if that sounds too action-packed, there's an infinity pool in which to float and sip iced caipirinhas; candlelit decks on which to eat such exotic Asian dinners as ginger barbecued prawns and *kinilaw na tanigue* (Philippine-style ceviche); and glass-walled rooms floored with

marble, perfect for dancing on. At the end of each day, if you can tear yourself away from stargazing or a moonlight snorkel, there are four-posters in little private villas in which to fall (via a frangipani-strewn bath).

Oddly, after all this pleasure, the 24-hour trip home doesn't seem quite as tedious. Plane dreams are peppered with stars, Nemo-bright fish and tropical scenery, and your whole being feels heavy with the contentment that comes from a week of being ridiculously spoilt on a little blob of land of your own.

Ariara (ariara.island.com) costs from £195pp a night, all-inclusive, based on 15-17 sharing. *Audley Travel* (audleytravel.com) can arrange a seven-night stay at Ariara Island from £2,250pp, including all flights and transfers, meals, watersports equipment and two dives per person.

Mid-range *Seabird Key*, a simple wooden lodge on a ten-acre island in the Florida Keys, from about £4,550 a week, accommodation only, for up to four, plus about £258 per extra guest up to eight (seabirdkey.com).

Budget *Tioram Cottage*, on the private island of Eilean Shona, between Mull and Skye, sleeping eight, from £1,055 a week (unique-cottages.co.uk).