



## Heaven on earth

Private island properties offer exclusivity only the seriously rich can afford.

by Peta Tomlinson

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Property ownership on a private island is a privilege afforded to the very few, not only because of the price but also due to the exclusivity factor. But there are a number of such properties on the market.

Ariara Island, a 125-acre private island in the Philippines' Palawan archipelago, is on the market for US\$12 million. The island, with accommodation for 18, comes with a spa, jet skis, a 10-metre speedboat, dive equipment and all fittings and fixtures. Briton Charles McCulloch, who describes himself as "the brainchild behind the development", says his favourite activity is diving.

While too many dive sites globally have been depleted due to human intervention, the developers have leased the waters around Ariara Island to be preserved as a marine park. "The waters are unspoilt - absolutely pristine, and teeming with marine life," McCullough says.

There are no restrictions on foreign ownership, as the island is being sold on a leasehold basis. Access is via helicopter from Manila (about 45 minutes), or by private plane to Busuanga airport. When the resort is not occupied for personal use, it could be rented out.

With its untouched islands, crystal clear waters, pristine coral reefs and powder white sand, Palawan is one of Southeast Asia's best-kept secrets. Elsewhere on the archipelago, there are seven oversized and exquisitely designed villa residences for sale at Amanpulo, the only five-star private island resort in the Philippines. These residences have four bedrooms and come with private pools, chefs and butlers. They sit alongside 40 luxury casitas created for couples and honeymooners who come to bask in the magical beachfront, tree top and hillside locations.

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A stay in the luxury villas costs up to US\$4,300 per night, but they are for sale from US\$4 million with all the trimmings. One Hong Kong banker, who has staked his claim, says the investment was "worth every cent if you love privacy, luxury, fine yet discreet service and being on one of the world's most beautiful private islands".

Meanwhile, a property in Song Saa in Cambodia comprises two private islands linked by a footbridge and which feature a fine dining restaurant, Champagne bar, wine cellar and cigar lounge - even a "destination canopy spa", where you can have pampering treatments while suspended among the treetops.

"This is a serious luxe private paradise," says realtor Claire Brown, who is marketing six out of the 22 villas still for sale. Among them are an over-water villa and a stunning beachfront property with 13 metres of private beach - each selling for US\$600,000. "There are no restrictions for foreign ownership: villas are sold on a 99-year lease," Brown says.

Owners and guests access the island via a private plane from Phnom Penh to nearby Koh Rong Island, or a scheduled flight into Sihanoukville airport from either Phnom Penh or Siam Reap.

After Song Saa opens as a luxury resort in December, rental income is guaranteed at 8 per cent for the first five years. "We expect the prices of these properties to double as Cambodian tourism continues to increase," Brown says.