

4TH ANNUAL  
PLACES  
RATED



# 111 islands

The world's most appealing destinations—**islands**—are the ones most prone to experts vote on which ones avoid the danger, which are succumbing to it, and

tourism overkill. Our 522 which hang in the balance.

By Jonathan B. Tourtellot

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ourism is a phenomenon that can cook your food or burn your house down. In other words, we all risk destroying the very places that we love the most.

Nowhere more so than on islands. Islands symbolize vacation. Escape! Their very insularity makes them more attractive than a comparable piece of real estate on the mainland. They are worlds unto themselves—their own traditions, ecosystems, cultures, landscapes. That's what attracts us. But as microworlds, islands are also more vulnerable to population pressure, climate change, storm damage, invasive species, and now, tourism overkill.

To see how the integrity of islands around the world is holding up, TRAVELER and our National Geographic Center for Sustainable

Destinations conducted this fourth annual Destination Scorecard survey, aided by George Washington University. A panel of 522 experts in sustainable tourism and destination stewardship donated time to review conditions in these 111 selected islands and archipelagos (see survey details on page 120). The scores that follow, listed by rank, reflect the experts' opinions. Quoted phrases from their remarks suggest the thinking behind the scores.

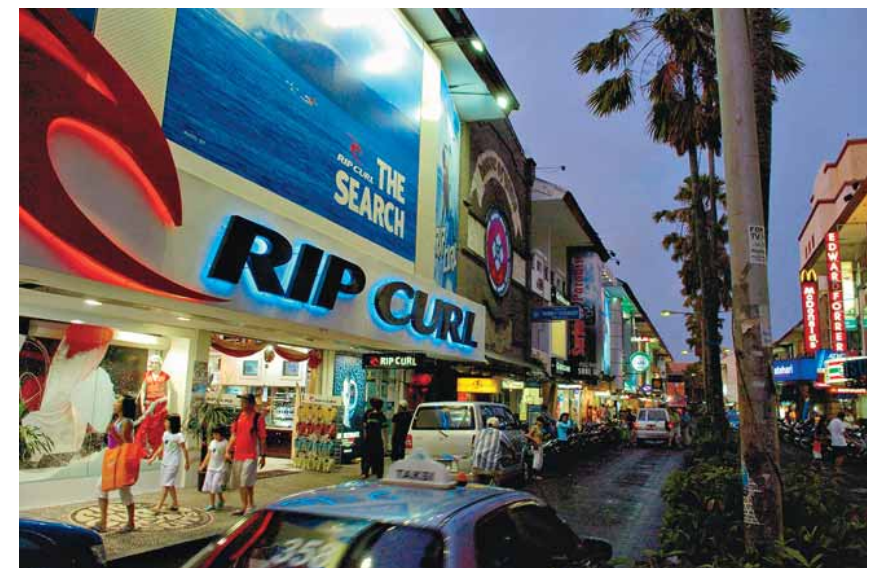
The results show that beach-blessed islands draw sun-and-sand resort tourism development that can get out of hand quickly. There are instructive exceptions: Molokai, Samoa, Block Island. Multiple cruise-ship crowds can also overwhelm an island, transforming it.

No surprise, then, that cloudy, beach-poor

islands score well. As I write this at a B&B on one of them—Salt Spring, British Columbia—I can see why the cost of an average house here begins at half a million dollars. Many islands are losing traditional families to such prices.

All the islands that follow, even the lowest scoring, have great experiences to discover. To protect them, to restore them, we must value them as much as resort developers and cruise companies do. Even more.

**Generic vs. authentic:** The two faces of Bali mirror pressures on islands around the world. From the surf shop to McDonald's, a street in Kuta (right) could be in a resort town anywhere. Rice paddies near Ubud (above) evoke the true Bali. The half-and-half mix earned Bali a score of 57.





# A report card for the world's islands

## BEST-RATED ISLANDS

In excellent shape, relatively unspoiled, and likely to remain so.

**Rank: 1. Faroe Islands (Denmark)** (SCORE: 87) “Lovely unspoiled islands—a delight to the traveler.” Remote and cool, and thus safe from overcrowding, the autonomous archipelago northwest of the Shetlands earns high marks from panelists for preservation of nature, historic architecture, and local pride. “Spectacular waterfalls and harbors.”

**2. Azores, Portugal** (SCORE: 84) This temperate mid-North Atlantic archipelago’s “green volcanic mountains and picturesque black-and-white towns” offer “driving tours, handicrafts, and cuisine,” plus an ecosystem “in great shape” and a “strong and vibrant” Portuguese culture. “Locals are very sophisticated,” but inappropriate development is beginning to appear.

**3. Lofoten, Norway** (SCORE: 82) Chilly, high-latitude islands form a “masterpiece” of spectacular outcrops steeped in cherished tradition. “Many of the villages rent out cozy *rorbu*, the historic fishermen’s cabins.” “There are several excellent museums and art galleries.”

**3. Shetland Islands, Scotland** (SCORE: 82) More Norse than Scottish, “Shelties” keep up Viking traditions and show “extremely high integrity in all aspects of heritage and ecology despite North Sea oil development. Great planning controls and attitude.”

**3. Chiloé, Chile** (SCORE: 82) Gateway to Chile’s fjord country, “rural and unspoiled” Chiloé possesses a “pristine seascape, enhanced by protected forests and dozens of historic towns and wooden churches, 16 of which are on the UNESCO World Heritage list.”

**4. Isle of Skye, Scotland** (SCORE: 81) “Wild landscape and a place of cultural res-



onance for Scots.” With a “renaissance of the Gaelic language,” the largest of the Inner Hebrides “still retains its romanticism.”

**5. Kangaroo Island, South Australia** (SCORE: 80) “Agriculture, tourism, and wilderness” meld with “high environmental quality and local involvement.” Feral pigs and goats, and introduced koalas do disrupt habitats.

**5. Mackinac Island, Michigan** (SCORE: 80) “No cars [banned since 1898], no high-rises, and little development pressure” earn praise for the iconic isle in Lake Huron. “Overall the island is a gem. Downtown is a bit too touristy.”

**5. Iceland** (SCORE: 80) Dramatic landscapes, unique culture, and high environmental awareness, but “new smelters and hydro-

electric projects may affect attractiveness.” Ecotour operators at odds with whalers.

**6. Molokai, Hawaii** (SCORE: 79) Tops in the tropics, Molokai “is 1950s in accommodation,” its rugged coast and minimal beachfront preventing big-resort development and protecting Hawaiian cultural ways. “Seems like old Hawaii.”

**7. Aran Islands, Ireland** (SCORE: 78) The three off the Irish west coast exude Gaelic tradition. Islanders “maintain a strong sense of cultural heritage and identity.” Tourism management gets good reviews.

**7. Texel, Netherlands** (SCORE: 78) Well-cared-for Dutch holiday island on the Waddenzee. “Nice low-key destination for cyclists.”

**Faroe Islands, Denmark:** Borgarin peak overshadows a lighthouse in the Faroes (above), an archipelago of steep slopes, grass roofs, and a preservation-minded people who welcome a growing number of visitors. **Lofoten, Norway:** In these chilly but popular islands with dramatic scenery, you can stay in *rorbu*, traditional fishermen cottages (right).

**8. Dominica, Caribbean** (SCORE: 77) Rugged, green, friendly, with few beaches, the “Nature Island” offers an “authentic, unspoiled experience, with natural and cultural amenities.” Downside issues: support for Japan on whaling and a proposed oil refinery.

**8. Grenadines, Caribbean** (SCORE: 77) “Unspoiled beauty,” not too developed, and great yachting, although yacht discharge pollutes local waters. Authentic—“one of the last, best hopes of the Caribbean.”

## Our Survey Grading System

**1. Best Rated**  
Score of 77 or above. These islands are in excellent shape, are still relatively pristine, and are likely to remain so at least for the immediate future.

**2. Doing Well**  
Score of 66 to 76. These islands are in good shape with only minor problems.

**3. In the Balance**  
Score of 50 to 65. A mix of strong attributes with potentially serious problems that need immediate attention.

**4. In Trouble**  
Score below 50. These islands are facing severe problems, usually with excessive tourism among them.



### ISLANDS SCORED IN 2006

This survey omits a few islands that appeared only last year in our World Heritage destination survey. These were their 2006 scores:

Rapa Nui (Easter Island)	69
Rhodes, Greece	63
Belize reef islands	47
Galápagos, Ecuador	44



SEE MANY MORE COMMENTS on each of these destinations at [www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler)



## ISLE OF SKYE: "A mixture of activities and stunning scenery combine to leave a long pleasant aftertaste—just like a dram of local malt whisky."

—HUGH GOVAN, MARINE BIOLOGIST



### ISLANDS DOING WELL

Retaining sense of place, with a few surmountable problems.

**9. Tasmania, Australia** (SCORE: 76) "Great, but needs to reduce logging" sums up panelist opinion. "Proposed pulp mill threatens Tasmania's image as clean, green, and pristine."

**9. Bora-Bora, French Polynesia** (SCORE: 76) "Outstanding natural and cultural beauty." The island gets praise for balancing beach tourism with "emphasis on local culture, archaeological sites, and native species." Risk of becoming "very *touristique*."

**9. Fraser Island, Australia** (SCORE: 76) Forested sandy island off Queensland, a World Heritage site, gets good marks for park preservation, but "busloads of tourists detract."

**9. Bornholm, Denmark** (SCORE: 76) "'Homey' rather than spectacular" characterizes the "charming townscapes" of this Danish outpost in the Baltic Sea. Crowded in summer.

**9. Hydra (Ídra), Greece** (SCORE: 76) Small island with no cars allowed and "beautiful local architecture, authentic Greek food." Good preservation, but can be "swamped by day-trippers."

**Aran Islands, Ireland:** Stone walls define the landscape on Inishmore (above), where heavy but well-managed tourism keeps the economy going and the islands populated.

**Molokai, Hawaii:** A cliff-lined coast (below) discourages overdevelopment but favors kayaking on the survey's best-scoring warm-weather island. **Corsica, France:** Culture, history, and nature combine in places like **Pointe de la Parata**, with its medieval watch-towers (opposite), helping to make Corsica a Mediterranean standout.



**9. Falkland Islands (U.K.)** (SCORE: 76) Wild, bleak, and culturally British; a stopover for Antarctic cruises. Notable problem: Leftover landmines from the 1982 war inhibit hiking.

**10. Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia** (SCORE: 75) Vibrant Acadian and Celtic heritage mix with coastal panoramas on the "top notch" Cabot Trail. Tourism helps combat "high unemployment and out-migration."

**10. Corsica, France** (SCORE: 75) "Fantastic mix of mountains, beaches, and strong cultural identity." The independent-minded Corsicans maintain one of the Mediterranean's last isles sheltered from mass tourism. Well, almost: "Still a gem, but not in August."

**11. Vanuatu, Melanesia** (SCORE: 74) "Traditional villages, active volcanism, the world's best kava." Multicultural archipelago's "hospitable people" don't benefit enough from tourism. "Outer islands are of untold beauty."

**11. Santa Catalina Island, California** (SCORE: 74) "Lots of visitors," but most stay in Avalon. Catalina Conservancy protects nature, although area must recover from the May 2007 fire. "Catalina works, for what it is."

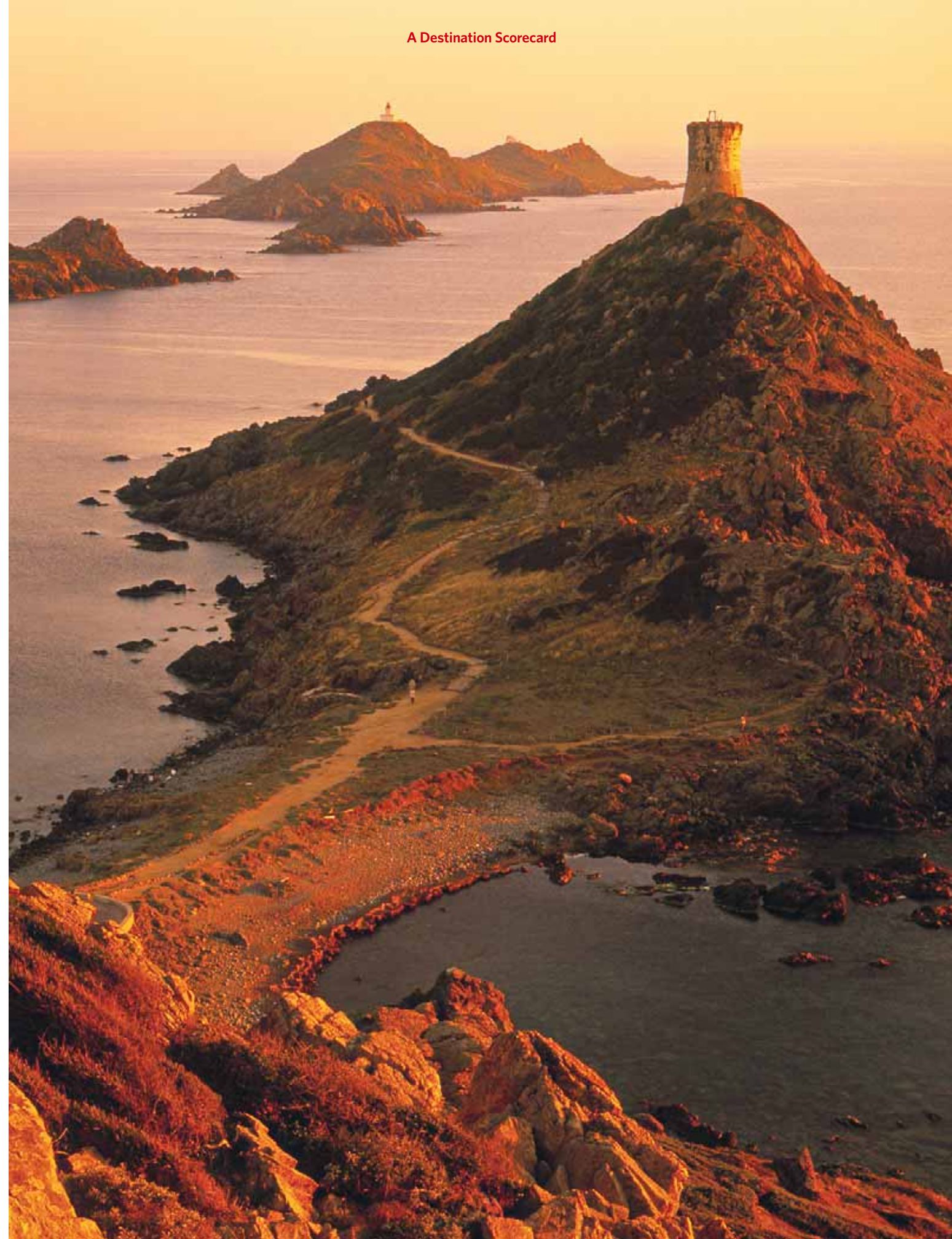
**12. Upolu and Savai'i, Samoa, Polynesia** (SCORE: 73) Praised for cultural integrity, or *fa'a Samoa*, the "Samoan way." "Family tourism businesses give a taste of Samoan life to the traveler." Issues with pollution and trash.

**12. Isle of Man (U.K.)** (SCORE: 73) Semi-independent island with unique Nordic-Celtic "character reasonably preserved." Past-prime resort hotels need rejuvenation. "Manx traditions retained, but shot through with immigration from England."

**13. Palawan, Philippines** (SCORE: 72) "Blessed with incredibly beautiful seascapes and landscapes." Richly diverse marine life threatened by pollution, but conservation improving. Recommended: El Nido and the Calamianes Group.

**13. Moorea, French Polynesia** (SCORE: 72) "Stunningly beautiful. Lush flora, extensive reef systems, diverse sea life, and archaeological sites." "The experience lingers long after your tan." Downer: "Style of tourist development very intrusive."

**13. Block Island, Rhode Island** (SCORE: 72) Low-key. Good nature reserves, "charming,



JIM RICHARDSON (UPPER LEFT), DOUGLAS PERLES/DORR NET (LOWER LEFT), DOUGLAS PERLES/DORR NET (LOWER RIGHT)

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**SAMOA:** "Savai'i is the best kept secret in the Pacific. A cultural gem with beautiful lonely beaches against a background of magnificent volcanoes and rain forest. Long may it remain so." —LELEI LELAULU, PRESIDENT, COUNTERPART INTERNATIONAL

old New England culture of the sea," but poor zoning turns second-home influx into landscape-altering "large-lot subdivisions."

**14. Ilha Grande, Brazil** (SCORE: 71) "Richly forested, marvelous beaches, charming communities" near Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. "No big international hotels." Real-estate development is a threat.

**14. Sardinia, Italy** (SCORE: 71) "Coves, caves, and long sandy beaches; mountainous interior preserves a rich cultural heritage." Some coastal enclave resorts. Outlook on tourism development is uneven.

**14. Hvar, Croatia** (SCORE: 71) Authentic, attractive gem of the Dalmatian coast "under control except for the build-up of holiday homes." Jammed in summer.

**14. Jersey and Guernsey, Channel Islands (U.K.)** (SCORE: 71) Scenic. "Strong identity, rich cultural heritage, high environmental quali-



ty." Tax haven status has attracted the affluent, inflating real estate. Recommended: "the network of green lanes and cycle routes."

**15. San Juan Islands, Washington State** (SCORE: 70) Ferry-linked archipelago is slow-paced counterpoint to Seattle; "becoming gentrified." Good conservation; no jet skis. Boat-borne whale-watching can get "out of hand"—i.e., too many boats behaving badly.

**15. St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, Caribbean** (SCORE: 70) "Thank God for the national park that covers half of this island." Appropriate

**Palawan, Philippines:** Graceful El Nido bay (below) epitomizes the beauty of Palawan, where conservation scores more hits than misses. **Hvar, Croatia:** AI fresco diners pack the medieval streets of Hvar town (left). Like many Dalmatian-coast islands, Hvar retains much of its character in the face of growing summertime tourist crowds.





resorts, great natural feel. Development pressure affects remaining portion; some beaches can get crowded with cruise-ship day-trippers from St. Thomas.

**15. Anguilla (U.K.), Caribbean** (SCORE: 70) The eel-shaped colony “appeals to those seeking a slower, quiet place. Beaches of legendary beauty, friendly people, fine dining, and art.” Reefs, culture, and villages said to be in good shape. Worries include “overdone new developments” and tendency to “become a place only the ultra-rich can enjoy.”

**15. Seychelles, Indian Ocean** (SCORE: 70) Beautiful—“like paradise on Earth”—and priced that way. “High ecological quality.” Risks: “high-class, exclusive tourism, with large chains entering the market.”

**15. Nevis, Caribbean** (SCORE: 70) “Nevisians preserve cultural heritage and share it via well-informed tours.” “Great natural and historic beauty, but under threat” from exotic species and a proposed oversize resort.

**16. Palau, Micronesia** (SCORE: 69) “Good conservation of the Rock Islands. The tradi-

**Seychelles: Clean waters (above), environmental awareness, and cautious tourism development earn good marks for this Indian Ocean country. Panelists called it “paradise” twice—and “expensive” four times.**

tional villages of Babeldaob Island are an under-recognized asset.” Next issue: Asian developers seeking to build large resorts.

**16. Cook Islands, Polynesia** (SCORE: 69) “Relatively unspoiled” except for Rarotonga, home to sun-and-sand resorts. A national geotourism plan calls for more emphasis on coral reefs and Polynesian culture.

**16. Prince Edward Island, Canada** (SCORE: 69) “From the fiddles to the oysters, PEI seems wholly authentic.” Except: “ugly, if not unsustainable” tourist development around Cavendish; “ecological quality low, cultural integrity high.” New bridge not a problem.

**16. Salt Spring Island, British Columbia** (SCORE: 69) Rural, tree-clad gulf island with “fine arts, music, creative organic cuisine.” Well-protected, but “the population is

growing too fast,” putting funky character at risk. “Increasing wealthy-retired second homes. Skyrocketing housing prices.”

**16. Mount Desert Island, Maine** (SCORE: 69) “Every tawdry ice-cream shop on the outskirts of Bar Harbor disturbs, but then you take a hike up Cadillac Mountain, or a bike ride in the woods, and all is forgiven.” Praise for rural stewardship offsets the development demerits: “Town overrun with trinket shops.” “High-end tourism and cruise ships are not in keeping with the natural aesthetic.”

**16. Réunion (Fr.), Indian Ocean** (SCORE: 69) “Volcanic landscapes steal the show.” Multi-ethnic island with mainly French tourism that is “not that intrusive.” Reefs degraded.

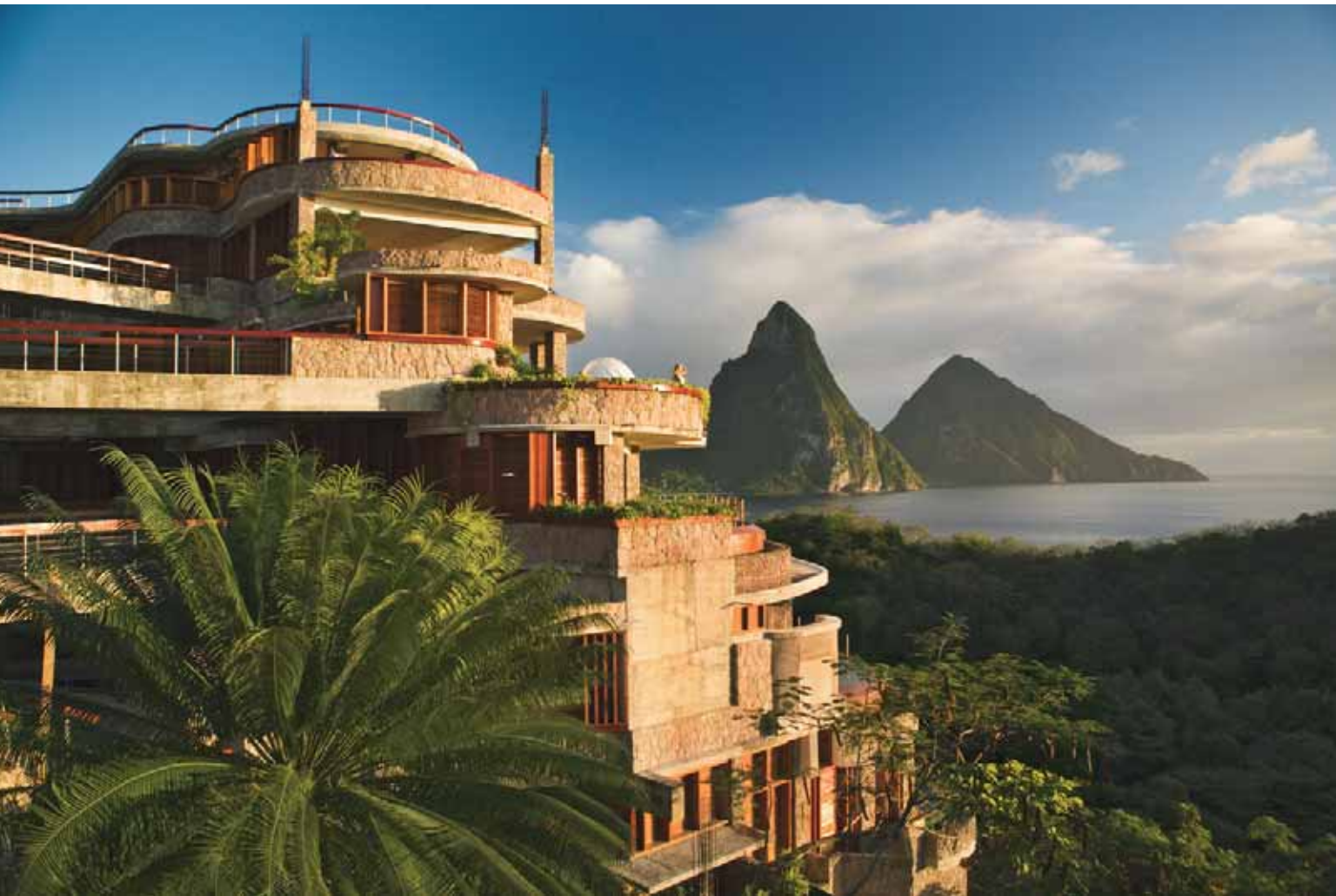
**17. Bonaire (Neth.), Caribbean** (SCORE: 68) Earns praise for its encircling coral-reef marine park and worries that the “island is poised to become overdeveloped.”

**17. St. Vincent, Caribbean** (SCORE: 68) Lush, relatively undeveloped. “Natural beauty; loss of the banana sector may mean fewer

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**ST. LUCIA:** “Most noteworthy scenery is the Pitons, but dependence on all-inclusive resorts has limited creation of a restaurant scene. It also limits interaction with locals, creating an us-and-them atmosphere.” —DAVID SWANSON, JOURNALIST



pesticides but more poverty.” A jocular criticism: “Kingstown ain’t no garden spot.”

**17. Sicily, Italy** (SCORE: 68) Complex island. “You can find a petrochemical plant next to an ancient amphitheater.” Assets: Archaeology, culture, food and wine, volcanic Mount Etna. Downside: intrusive industry and motorways. “Constantly contending with crime.”

**17. Yasawa Group, Fiji** (SCORE: 68) Archipelago of small islands “making good attempts to maintain ecological quality and cultural integrity.” Growing popularity means “developers need watching. Otherwise, idyllic.”

**18. Hawaii (Big Island)** (SCORE: 67) A Hawaiian favorite for many panelists. “Live volcanoes,

**St. Lucia: Striking architecture of ritzy Jade Mountain, a self-contained resort, echoes the island’s emblematic twin Pitons (above).**

rare birds, forest and waterfall hikes,” plus diverse hotels. “Vast areas retain integrity. Kailua-Kona is crowded, tacky.” Concerns: trend toward larger-scale resorts, cruise ships. Invasive species also a problem.

**18. Pemba, Tanzania** (SCORE: 67) “Beautiful island, limited beaches.” Fishing with dynamite threatens fine reefs. “Tourism is in its infancy”; could grow to help save reefs and Swahili Muslim culture—or degrade them.

**19. Bermuda (U.K.)** (SCORE: 66) Tidy, rich, and well-tended, the Anglo-Caribbean outpost

is also “aloof,” crowded, and stressed—“a high-end market beginning to fray.”

**19. Out Islands, Bahamas** (SCORE: 66) The status of these islands varies. Some are “charming, visually appealing, and relaxed,” but too often preservation efforts vie with foreign investment that promotes “big development, second homes, and loss of everything Bahamian.” Affluent foreigners moving in: “Chickens crossing the road mix with celebrity sightings” on Eleuthera.

**19. Tobago, Caribbean** (SCORE: 66) “Charming laid-back rural ambience” on this slow-paced island, but Trinidadian investors push “coastal tourism development that is too rapid, unregulated,” threatening environment.

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**19. São Tomé and Príncipe** (SCORE: 66) Tiny, undeveloped, “very beautiful” two-island African country offers nature, beaches, culture, unique colonial farms, but “very weak” environmental policing, threats of mass tourism, and “disregard for sustainability.”

## ISLANDS IN THE BALANCE

A mixed bag of successes and worries, with the future at risk.

**20. Cyprus, Turkish side** (SCORE: 65) Scoring higher than the overdeveloped Greek side of the island, Turkish Cyprus has a “political situation that stifles development,” leaving time to lay out a strategy, but historic buildings are neglected, and “many second homes are being built all over with little planning.”

**20. Bazaruto Archipelago, Mozambique** (SCORE: 65) Native flora and “stunning” marine ecology in these “not yet spoiled” offshore islands now draw “increasingly inappropriate” tourism development.

**20. Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts** (SCORE: 65) “Has lost some of its authenticity in steamroller of East Coast money,” which “has helped fund preservation efforts. Not too overdeveloped.” But: “outrageous cost of living.”

**Sanibel:** Famous for shell-strewn beaches (below), the Gulf Coast island, “an undervalued historical and cultural destination,” earns high praise for conservation but not for losing its “old Florida” feel to second homes and real estate inflation. **Cape Verde:** São Vicente musicians (above) cook up the world-renowned rhythms that flavor the “appealing landscape and culture” of the cash-strapped archipelago off West Africa. “Its great strength lies in its folklore.”

**21. Solomon Islands, Melanesia** (SCORE: 64) Fascinating archipelago: atolls, mountains, lagoons, fjords, reefs, mountain forest, 70 languages. “Spectacular place, great people, but turbulent.” Other negatives: “overfishing, overlogging, Chinese casinos.”

**21. Jeju (Cheju), South Korea** (SCORE: 64) A favorite with Koreans for its nature, caves, farms, and fishing, crowded Jeju shows an “astonishing contradiction” between its artificial resort areas and protected nature reserves. Management is improving.

**21. Ocracoke, Outer Banks, North Carolina** (SCORE: 64) “Like the Outer Banks used to be,” its charm shielded by ferry-only access. But other panelists rate it already overdeveloped.

**21. Kauai, Hawaii** (SCORE: 64) “Still beautiful but increasingly overbuilt.” Numerous complaints cite an overall poor presentation of Hawaiian culture as well as sightseeing-helicopter noise that spoils the Na Pali coast experience. “Disappointing.”



## How the Island Survey Works

**T**his survey rates the qualities that make a destination unique—“integrity of place.” It’s not about consumer service, so a poor but unspoiled island like Palawan can rate higher than a Hilton Head, called “the best golf-course-and-gated-community island anywhere.”

We selected mainly **small and medium-size islands** and groups, allowing a few larger exceptions with relatively unified character, such as Iceland and Tasmania. Since evaluating an entire destination involves such unquantifiables as aesthetics and cultural integrity, we decided the best measure is informed human judgment: a panel of 522 well-traveled **experts in a variety of fields**—ecology, sustainable tourism, geography, travel writing and photography, site management, historic preservation, indigenous cultures, archaeology.

We asked panelists to evaluate just the islands with which they were familiar, using **six criteria** weighted according to importance: environmental and ecological quality; social and cultural integrity; condition of historic buildings and archaeological sites; aesthetic appeal; quality of tourism management; and outlook for the future.

Experts first posted **points of view** on each destination—anonously, to ensure objectivity. After reading each others’ remarks—a variation of a research tool called the Delphi technique—panelists filed their final stewardship scores. For a list of panelists, see [www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler).

The resulting **Stewardship Index** rating is an average of informed judgments about each place as a whole—all its many faces. Like the scores posted by Olympic judges, our experts’ ratings reflect both measurable factors and the intangibles of style, aesthetics, and culture. And like an athlete, each island has a chance to improve.



**MALTA:** “There remains a mismatch between the islands’ cultural assets and the majority of visitors who continue to look for cheap sun, sea, and sand. (None of the latter exists.)” —RORY MACLELLAN, TOURISM PROFESSOR

**21. St. Lucia, Caribbean** (SCORE: 64) Striking island with iconic twin Pitons. “Highest percentage of all-inclusives of any Caribbean island” minimizes visitor interaction with local culture.

**22. Nantucket, Massachusetts** (SCORE: 63) “Great except for crowds in summer and too many tasteless mega-mansions.” “Intellectual land use policies” and “rugged sea folk” tradition now tainted by high costs.

**23. Martinique, French West Indies** (SCORE: 62) “Still has a magnificent historic city center.” Well-to-do. Mainly beach tourism; “cute but bland resorts.”

**23. Corfu, Greece** (SCORE: 62) “Wonderfully preserved heritage” in the Ionian Islands. Vibrant and charming in places but “has lost much of its soul to mass tourism.”

**23. Crete, Greece** (SCORE: 62) “Sunshine, starkly blue seas, and rugged mountains are still

the same,” but north coast “has some truly awful developments.” Needs “much stricter growth control.” Mountain interiors retain authenticity. Minoan heritage “incredible but poorly protected and portrayed.”

**23. Lombok, Indonesia** (SCORE: 62) Less visited and developed than neighbor Bali, less culturally rich, but with better ecotourism, especially on soaring Rinjani. Coastal development and sewage a growing problem. One panelist pleads, “May it not become the next Bali!”

**23. Barbados, Caribbean** (SCORE: 62) Populous, clean, and rich in heritage. Seen as culturally and environmentally aware, yet tourism continues “submerging the real Barbados to bring in more seekers of beaches, golf, and winter homes.”

**24. Tonga, Polynesia** (SCORE: 61) “Some beautiful yet largely undeveloped locations” in a kingdom suffering “tensions over political

reforms.” Recommended: the Ha’apai and Vava’u island groups.

**24. Madeira Islands, Portugal** (SCORE: 61) Mixed bag. “Despite reputation for its gardens and high-quality walking in beautiful scenery, Madeira suffers from mass-market hotel development”—but mainly on the coast near Funchal.

**24. Tortola, British Virgin Islands, Caribbean** (SCORE: 61) “Threat of development looms over this beautiful island.” Unlike Virgin Gorda, Tortola is “rapidly losing its charm.” “Permitting up to 3,500 cruise visitors a day is diminishing quality of life.”

**Phuket, Thailand (score: 46): “Ugly” defines the Patong Beach area (below) on Phuket. Tied with Key West in 2004 at a score of 43, and tied again this year at 46, Phuket earns spotty panelist praise for rebounding from the 2004 tsunami and broader criticism for missing the chance to rebuild in better ways.**





**24. Islands of Lake Titicaca, Peru/Bolivia**

(SCORE: 61) Some isles are natural; others float, made of reeds. Authenticity varies from “real culture, enacting real traditions” to “trinket selling.” Lake suffers pollution.

**24. Sanibel, Florida** (SCORE: 61) Panelists judging by Florida comparisons like Sanibel; those recalling the “old Sanibel” score it lower. The award-winning 1976 “Sanibel Plan” for sustainability “has been sorely compromised, but Sanibel has more integrity than most developed islands” in Florida. “The Ding Darling Refuge is a treasure.”

**24. Santorini, Greece** (SCORE: 61) History, catastrophe, beauty, Atlantis theories, beaches, Minoans, wine—one expert calls Santorini “the greatest island site in the world.” With issues to match: “Social, cultural, and environmental character has been submerged in the tourism flood” with “rampant illegal construction” defacing rural areas and “a need to limit cruise ship tourism.” The spectacular caldera’s volcanic and archaeological story is not well told.

**24. Maldives (except Male), Indian Ocean** (SCORE: 61) Low-lying atolls “threatened by global warming.” Ultimate enclave tourism—resort-only islands—provides “stunning seascapes” and little contact with Muslim population. (Most live in the capital, Malé.)

**25. Grenada, Caribbean** (SCORE: 59) “Still recovering from devastation by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.” Dangerously tempted by “big box tourism,” but geotourism approach now gaining favor would focus on its good mix of culture, scenery, diving, birds, and sailing.

**25. Capri, Italy** (SCORE: 59) Scenic, with charming old houses and churches, but “huge crowds” earn pricey Capri “a reputation as a tourist trap.” “Overvisited and overhyped.”

**25. Tahiti, French Polynesia** (SCORE: 59) “Mountains, waterfalls, climate—Tahiti does not disappoint.” “Sometimes the French influence overrides the Polynesian too much.” Tourism “not benefiting locals enough.”

**25. St. Kitts, Caribbean** (SCORE: 59) Despite its unique assets—historic Basseterre, scenic landscapes, distinctive small resorts, a music festival—St. Kitts is opting “for large resorts, casinos, golf courses, and cruise ships.”

**26. Viti Levu, Fiji** (SCORE: 58) “Beautiful. The people are wonderful,” but political instability, dying coral, and “a tendency to overtake cultural and aesthetic integrity with larger-scale tourism development” lower the score.



**Key West, Florida (score: 46):** The cherished sunset performances at Mallory Square now drown in tourist hordes, who also fuel a “generic party-hearty attitude.”

**27. Maui, Hawaii** (SCORE: 57) “Still attractive,” say panelists, but “exploding development” means Maui could be “damaged by its own success.” “Getting too pricey for locals.” In places it seems “like a slice of Los Angeles invading Paradise Lost.”

**27. Bali, Indonesia** (SCORE: 57) Bombed, beautiful, and beleaguered, Bali draws heavy comment both pro and con: “Gorgeous scenery and endearing local traditions; awful coastal tourism ghettos—unplanned and reflecting the worst excesses of package tourism.” Despite the terrorist attacks of 2004 and 2006, “the Bali spirit remains.”

**27. Cape Verde, West Africa** (SCORE: 57) A music-rich, water-poor, beautiful multi-island country “rapidly developing, could easily exceed carrying capacity.”

**27. Curaçao (Neth.), Caribbean** (SCORE: 57) “Excellent protection of old town Willemstad,” a World Heritage site. Demerits for oil refinery pollution, coastal development.

**28. Isla Mujeres, Mexico** (SCORE: 55) Still “very Mexican,” this small island with good reef protection is “getting overcrowded with day-trippers from Cancún”; has “lost its quaint and charming appeal.” “To damn by faint praise: better than Cancún or Cozumel.”

**28. Malta, Mediterranean** (SCORE: 55) “The Maltese take great care to share their history and culture with visitors.” Dense array of archaeological and historic sites, “but overwhelmed by mass tourism.” Pollution, too.

**28. Guadeloupe, French West Indies** (SCORE: 55) “Heavily developed. Much looks modern and bland, still with pockets of French-Creole culture.” Mix of all-inclusives and smaller independent hotels. Good trail system on the Soufrière volcano.

**28. Mauritius, Indian Ocean** (SCORE: 55) Unusual cultural diversity appeals on this populous independent island. Ugly construction, environmental problems, enclave resorts detract. “Moving down-market.”

**29. Mykonos, Greece** (SCORE: 54) Picturesque Cycladic architecture, small-scale hotels, but “cultural integrity was rapidly lost in the 1960s.” Now heavily visited; “cruise ship passengers clog the narrow streets.” Its arguable contribution: “a fun spot that keeps pressure off more pristine islands.”

**29. Federated States of Micronesia** (SCORE: 54) Very mixed condition. Great cultural authenticity, diving, and archaeology—amid trash, collapsing reef systems, population pressure. Still, many pristine locales survive. Remote and expensive to get to.

**29. Mallorca, Balearic Islands, Spain** (SCORE: 54) “Despite rape of the coastline, Mallorca still remains beautiful.” Mass tourism at the beaches but “aesthetic appeal and local cuisine outstanding in less developed areas.”

**30. St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands** (SCORE: 53) “Real West Indian island where locals work and live—not a tourism-dedicated playground.” Historic buildings poorly

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maintained, “crime is a problem, as is water quality on many beaches,” but trends are improving, with plans to “focus more on cultural and natural heritage.”

**30. Zanzibar, Tanzania** (SCORE: 53) “Incredible place—culturally, historically, ecologically” but at risk from “mass tourism driven by government policy that favors large investments.” “Development threatens historic Stonetown” and sparks “cultural clashes with conservative Muslim residents.”

**31. Canary Islands, Spain** (SCORE: 52) “Intensively developed, mass tourism” has “severely compromised” coastal Las Palmas and Tenerife, but La Palma, Lanzarote, El Hierro, and La Gomera retain charm and their own flora and fauna. “Staggering biodiversity makes the Canaries unique.”

**32. Puerto Rico (U.S.), Caribbean** (SCORE: 51) “Beautiful and culturally significant places”

**St. Thomas: Guests relax at a resort near Charlotte Amalie. Per capita, such stay-over visitors typically put several times more into island economies than do day-trippers from cruise ships like those in the harbor.**

survive on this populous island, elsewhere “overbuilt with enclave resorts that do not favor cultural exchanges.” Assets include Old San Juan, some of the *paradores* (country inns), El Yunque rain forest, the Arecibo Observatory. A recent campaign urging travelers to “explore beyond the shore” is starting to address panelists’ concerns that tourism has been focused on the beach. “Visitors need to know what else Puerto Rico offers.” Environment improving.

**32. Cyprus, Greek side** (SCORE: 51) “Marvelous scenery and cultural history” under pressure from “overdeveloped mass tourism.” “Between Larnaca and the southwest, coun-

tryside is scarred or quarried or flattened with half-built developments everywhere.”

**33. Antigua, Caribbean** (SCORE: 50) “Beautiful beaches and wonderful people and culture,” but the government “is corrupt. They have lost touch with much of their heritage,” although well-managed Nelson’s Dockyard draws praise. The island suffers from pollution, erosion, and uninformed mass tourism with “profits in the hands of the few.”

## ISLANDS IN TROUBLE

Under severe pressure, excessive tourism; many working to recover.

**34. Hatteras Island, Outer Banks, North Carolina** (SCORE: 49) “Every lot a McMansion” on this barrier island, but the national

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seashore “is another world.” Hatteras “has resisted high-rises and prohibits billboards,” but suffers from “ugly strip malls and nondescript eating establishments.” Beyond the park, says one panelist, “I fear the worst for this lovely, once secluded, place.”

**35. Aruba (Neth.), Caribbean** (SCORE: 48) “A vacation factory with fabulous beaches,” Aruba is “overbuilt, gaudy, fast losing its culture.” “Cruise ships have resulted in a tacky downtown.” A minority, though, calls Aruba “dynamic, interesting,”—and a safety valve: “If thousands of tourists are going to be dumped on a Caribbean island with little more than beach, shopping, and a casino in mind, I’d rather they stay on Aruba than on other more fragile islands.”

**36. Grand Cayman (U.K.), Caribbean** (SCORE: 47) “Exceptional diving and snorkeling,” but “banking defines the island. Tourism is heavily weighted to cruise ships.” Damage still lingers from Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

**36. Roatán, Bay Islands, Honduras** (SCORE: 47) “Quickly disappearing jewel” invaded by cruise-ship crowds and mainland “ladino” laborers, with “rapid uncontrolled development” and stresses on coral reefs. “Huge new cruise port will increase pressure.”

**36. St. Martin (Neth./Fr.), Caribbean** (SCORE: 47) The Dutch side of this binational, multiethnic island “is a mess: high-rise and strip development, loss of community character, traffic, and schlock.” A new, second cruise-ship pier will add to the crowds. The French side rates better but lacks a plan to prevent further overbuilding.

**36. Cozumel, Mexico** (SCORE: 47) “Just no escape from cruise ships”—ten or more at once. “Cozumel is hardly Mexican anymore. Diving is still a reason to visit,” with government working harder to protect reefs.

**37. Oahu, Hawaii** (SCORE: 46) Hit for lack of authenticity, environmental stresses, and because “indigenous Hawaiians do not benefit from tourism,” Oahu, especially redeveloping Waikiki, gets mixed reviews: “Confinement of a large majority of tourists to the ten blocks of Waikiki is a modern marvel,” but: “Local residents avoid Waikiki, and interaction with tourists is missing, as is the ‘Aloha spirit.’”

**37. Key West, Florida** (SCORE: 46) Despite praise for fun, heritage, and cultural character, serious problems drag the score

down: “overdeveloped,” “way too crowded by cruise-ship hordes,” and “coral reefs degraded and overfished.” A sobering perspective: Several panelists still thought Key West best of the Keys. “In comparison, the other Keys seem like a string of Motel 6s with pools in which nobody cares to swim.”

**37. Phuket, Thailand** (SCORE: 46) “We missed the window of opportunity after the 2004 tsunami” with ugly buildings, pollution, sex tourism all back in place. “Original charm as a beautiful, unspoiled, and culturally rich destination has been completely lost.”

**38. Hilton Head, South Carolina** (SCORE: 45) “Classic overdevelopment of a natural wonder.” Aesthetics win praise, but the suburbanized island is “soulless” with few hints of its Gullah past. “Golf and gated communities—monotonous in a squeaky clean way.” “Extreme pressure to continue development even though the local population wants to stop development.” “Culturally sterile and deliberately elitist. Beaches still beautiful.”

**39. Jamaica, Caribbean** (SCORE: 44) “With wonderful natural and cultural assets, it has lost control.” Panelists cite crime and poverty, large all-inclusive “tourist ghettos,” degraded reefs. “Enclave tourism keeps the culture away from the visitors.” And yet: “It’s not too late.” “Port Antonio, the Blue Mountains, Cockpit Country, and the south coast offer authentic experiences.”

**39. Providenciales, Turks and Caicos** (SCORE: 44) “Isla Generica”: Booming Provo has “destroyed the beauty of Grace Beach with excessive development.” No sense of place, but “diving and waters remain beautiful.”

**40. Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain** (SCORE: 37) “Really, something is going wrong there.” Spain’s raver nightlife island is rated as overdeveloped, with “half lost to the party circuit.” Still, many panelists thought parts retain “charm and cultural identity,” with many islanders striving to regain control.

**40. St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands** (SCORE: 37) “A mess—too many cruise ships disgorging passengers into the small town.” Four out of five visitors are cruise passengers. The capital of “Charlotte Amalie is one big ugly jewelry store” with “population density greater than Manhattan when the ships are in.” Many panelists agree with this characterization: “a totally spoiled, low-quality, high-volume destination,” while admitting that the island retains attractive corners.

## A Note from the Editors

**T**his survey isn’t the final word on the travel health of the world’s islands. It’s a work in progress, a snapshot in time. We hope that places at the bottom of our Destination Scorecard won’t be there for long. We’re interested in constructive criticism, not condemnation.

Rating islands brings the issues of sustainability strikingly close to home. We all seem to have our favorite islands, and while most have problems, we choose to forgive them because, on balance, their attractions outnumber their warts. We also recognize that some travelers actually like 24-hour casinos, gargantuan cruise ships, and neonized strips of souvenir stores.

Many islands recognize their problems and are working to become sustainable. They realize that good stewardship of place not only results in a better travel experience, but it’s simply smart business. In fact, places like Curaçao, Grenada, and Puerto Rico are discussing geotourism initiatives that, by definition, would use tourism to enhance their geographical character, addressing issues related to environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of their residents.

**And remember:** Simply because an island has problems doesn’t mean it’s not worth visiting. Many islands are grappling with issues that have yet to affect their quality of tourism. Our goal is to alert—not alarm—consumers about issues that should concern them. To help us all look to the future.

This survey is intended to be constructive. Travelers, the travel industry, and the islanders themselves are in this together. We all seek rewarding getaways—and we all want them to stay that way.

**PROVIDENCIALES, TURKS AND CAICOS: “What was once the sort of raw, romantic coastline vacationers dream of is now a strip of megahotels on an increasingly crowded beach.”** —KIM LISAGOR, JOURNALIST