

Not a person in sight – one of the beautifully remote beaches of Cape Verde (pictured). Right and far right: The Viana desert, Boa Vista



# ‘OUR PRIVATE HIDEAWAYS’

Deciphering travel brochures to find that perfect holiday can be a tricky thing. Will that ‘sun-drenched beach’ be just a manufactured strip of builders’ rubble? Will that ‘picturesque resort’ be full of tacky souvenir shops? Here, four *Grazia* writers spill the beans on their own top-secret destinations that are far from the madding crowd...



## ‘I LOVE CAPE VERDE FOR ITS SECRET BEACHES’

*The islands of Cape Verde lie south of the Canaries off the coast of Senegal, West Africa. Still untouched by mass tourism and with fabulous beaches, the time to go is now, says*

*Grazia’s associate editor Victoria Harper*

There we were, careering off-road in a four-by-four towards Santa Monica beach, on the southern tip of Boa Vista – one of 10 islands that make up the archipelago of Cape Verde. The entire island span may be just 55km, but I hadn’t counted on it being such a trek. After a bumpy two-hour ride – roads aren’t really the island’s thing – we were finally greeted by a scene that looked like it had been coloured in by a small child – flour-white sand and a stunning emerald ocean. In the middle of this paradise, we were completely alone. The guidebooks promised this was ‘one of the world’s most beautiful beaches’, and we weren’t disappointed.

Five-and-a-half hours from the UK, Cape Verde is classified as a ‘developing country’. While the largest island of Santiago and its neighbour Sao Vicente are the cultural

nothing more taxing than choose between pool, beach or spa, we did explore. We headed into the Viana desert (10km wide) and watched as our two children (aged two and six) whooped it up in the sand on their bottoms. We passed beautiful oases and visited tiny villages – a colourful crumble of houses in bright greens and tropical orange – and waved at locals soaping up for their daily wash at the communal well.

Our best discovery on the island, though, was a visit to Spinguera at the northern tip. This once remote fishing village has been restored into a lovely boutique eco-retreat. Here we spent a blissful afternoon feasting on lobster and local fresh fish while overlooking a brilliantly turquoise ocean.

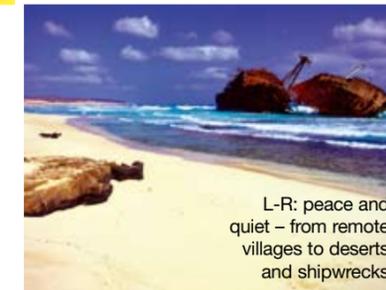
For a week, Boa Vista is the perfect secret hideaway. If we had stayed longer, I would have island-hopped to Sao Vicente and Santiago, which you can get to and from by plane in a day. In this age of global travel, it’s a pleasure to discover somewhere still so unspoilt that the roads haven’t really been built to get there. Let’s just call it our little secret. For now, anyway.

*Victoria travelled with tour operator The Cape Verde Experience. Seven nights at the four-star Iberostar Club Boa Vista Hotel start from £999 per person. (Price based on all-inclusive accommodation and return flights to London Gatwick.) Call 0845 330 2071 or visit [www.capeverdeexperience.co.uk](http://www.capeverdeexperience.co.uk)*

« IT’S A PLEASURE TO DISCOVER SOMEWHERE STILL SO UNSPOILT THAT ROADS HAVEN’T BEEN BUILT TO GET THERE »

hubs of the country – rich in art, poetry and Creole music – the resort islands (Sal and Boa Vista, where we stayed) are more chilled.

Our hotel for the week was the Iberostar – a chic, low-rise build in a sculpted tropical garden. Sunshine in Cape Verde is pretty much guaranteed and though it’s tempting to do



L-R: peace and quiet – from remote villages to deserts and shipwrecks



Left and below: views from the village of Ravello, hidden away above the stunning Amalfi coast, Italy



**'RAVELLO IS MY REFUGE'**

*Perched above the stunning Amalfi coast in Italy, the village of Ravello has long been a hang-out for artists, writers and musicians. No wonder – the place is an inspiration, says writer Francesca Babb*

Above the sea and way up in the hills, follow the Vespa and the three-wheeled van, and you will find the tiny village of Ravello. While there are very few parts of Italy that won't please me, it's Ravello that I will always come back to. From

« *THE MEN HAVE SMILES TO MAKE SHIRLEY VALENTINE COME A CROPPER* »

octogenarian *nonnas* with their tent-like dresses and endless plates of pasta they foist upon you, to the local men in their ankle-skimming chinos and loafers (no socks) with the sort of smile that could cause Shirley Valentine to come a cropper, the residents of Ravello are among the warmest bunch of people you could meet. But the

charm of the locals is only part of its appeal. Ravello has so far avoided the mass market tourist trap of its surrounding Amalfi coast villages and is all the better for it.

It's hard to put into words what makes the village so special. It isn't particularly showy, and the designer stores of Capri are nowhere to be seen (although according to a photo on one shop wall, SJP was a particular fan of the local china when she stayed), but visiting feels like stepping into a real piece of Italy. After a day in Ravello, I decided to write a book. After the second day, I had written the first few pages. By the third day, I'd discovered the Martinis at the bar and forgotten to write, but to feel that inspired by a place so immediately was a rare treat. Perhaps it's to do with the area's literary history. Gore Vidal, a Ravello aficionado, lived in a villa cut into the hillside for 30 years, entertaining everyone from Mick and Bianca to Princess Margaret. Then there's Virginia Woolf, Graham Greene, Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote, to name but a few.

Keeping with the theme of escapism and relaxation, the Palazzo Sasso is the place to stay in town. A 12th-century Italian villa; it may only have 32 rooms and 11 suites, but it does have a two-Michelin-starred restaurant. It also has a pool (complete with staff who, at one point, offered to clean my sunglasses for me – swoon) and a beach club, with bathing platform – oh yes, you get ferried there! While both restaurants in the hotel are faultless, if you fancy your cuisine a little more

rustic try the Trattoria Cumpa Cosima, just off the piazza. Plates piled high and the feel of a real family-run business – it's

a local gem. In short, Ravello is everything that London is not. And while London will always have my heart, there are times when an affair with Ravello is just what I need.

*Bed and breakfast at the Palazzo Sasso starts from £250 per night (including taxes). For further information call 0039 0 8981 8181 or visit [www.palazzosasso.com](http://www.palazzosasso.com) ▶*



**'MY HEART BELONGS TO MARRAKECH'**



*The vibrant Moroccan city of Marrakech may not seem the obvious choice for a relaxing holiday with your girlfriends. But it all depends where you choose to stay, says Grazia's picture editor Sara Rumens*

Just three-and-a-half hours from Heathrow and we're submerged in the colourful hustle and bustle of Morocco. Places don't get much more exciting and bewildering than this, and a long weekend was all the time we had to take it in. We knew we must throw ourselves into the labyrinthine souk, haggle to within an inch of our lives and reach that stage of retail nirvana where your arms are weak from carrying so many bags.

Thankfully, respite was at hand in the form of our own personal oasis called the Riad Ezzahra, a palatial style country house in the city's exclusive Palmerie district. Ezzahra has all the elements you'd expect of Moroccan interior – carved furniture, a cool open-air courtyard and fragrant cedar wood. Smaller parties can also stay at the Villa Alkhozama, a two-bedroomed house discreetly tucked away in the grounds.

On our first day, the wonderful housekeeper Maria took us under her wing. Later that afternoon, we retreated to the cool of a cushion-clad Berber tent by the pool for a massage, manicure and facial. As the sun started setting and shadows grew longer, we were served cocktails and, after a delicious banquet of lamb tagine with apricots, we retreated to the roof terrace for an impromptu party. And so the pattern for the weekend was set: shopping, eating, reconnecting with friends – all at that luxuriously slow pace that you only get from a brilliant holiday; a holiday I will remember for many years to come.

*Three nights for eight guests at Ezzahra costs £7,000. At Villa Alkhozama, four guests for three nights costs £3,750. For more information call 0035 0 2007 7470 or email [info@ezzahra-morocco.com](mailto:info@ezzahra-morocco.com). (Villa Alkhozama is not suitable for children.)*



Below and left: The Riad Ezzahra, Marrakech – cocktails by the pool, anyone?

**'MY MAHE PARADISE'**



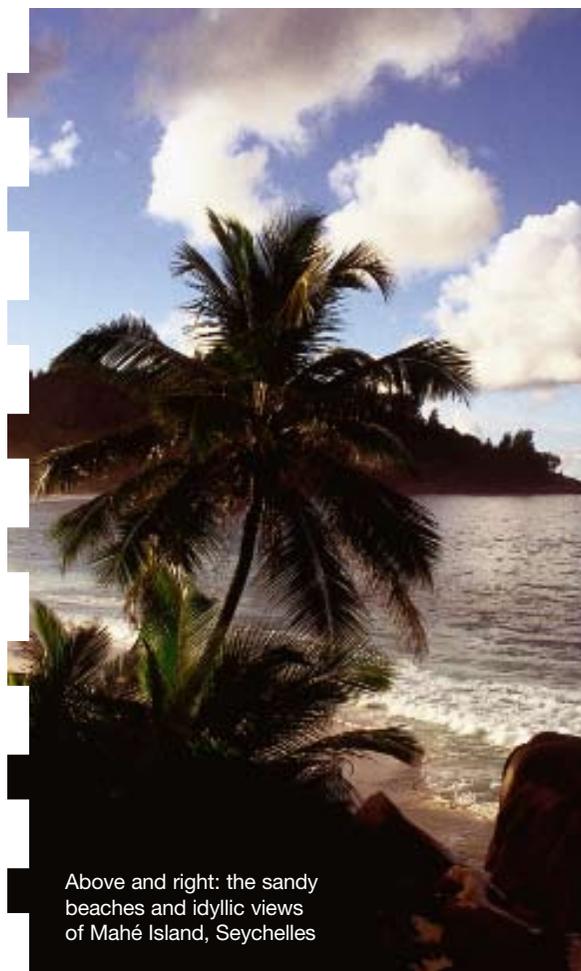
*A pristine archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, the Seychelles are a nine-and-a-half-hour flight from the UK. But it's worth it, says Grazia's acting news picture editor Anna Dewhurst – you've just landed in heaven*

From the moment I got through the door to my own private villa at the Four Seasons Private Residences in Mahé, I felt I had come home. Nestling among the cinnamon trees,

each bungalow is decorated with carefully chosen pieces by local artists and has its own private infinity pool. You're driven around the grounds in golf buggies which appear within minutes of picking up the phone.

Victoria is the capital of the Seychelles – to say it's dinky is an understatement. There's a mini version of Big Ben called Little Ben; a relic of when the island was a British colony. Before that the Seychelles were French, so the streets have colourful buildings with intricate wrought iron balconies. The Victoria market is worth a trip, but be warned: you'll come home with more sarongs than you can cram into your suitcase! But you don't go to the Seychelles for its capital. You go to escape and pamper yourself. We chartered a boat and skipper from the hotel and found an even more remote island – I felt like a Robinson Crusoe who didn't want to be rescued!

*Four Seasons Resort Seychelles offers villas from €550 per night with two nights complimentary for every five nights booked. Visit [www.fourseasons.com/seychelles](http://www.fourseasons.com/seychelles) or call 00800 6488 6488. Return flights with Air Seychelles from £610 including tax. ■*



Above and right: the sandy beaches and idyllic views of Mahé Island, Seychelles



Photos: 4 Corners