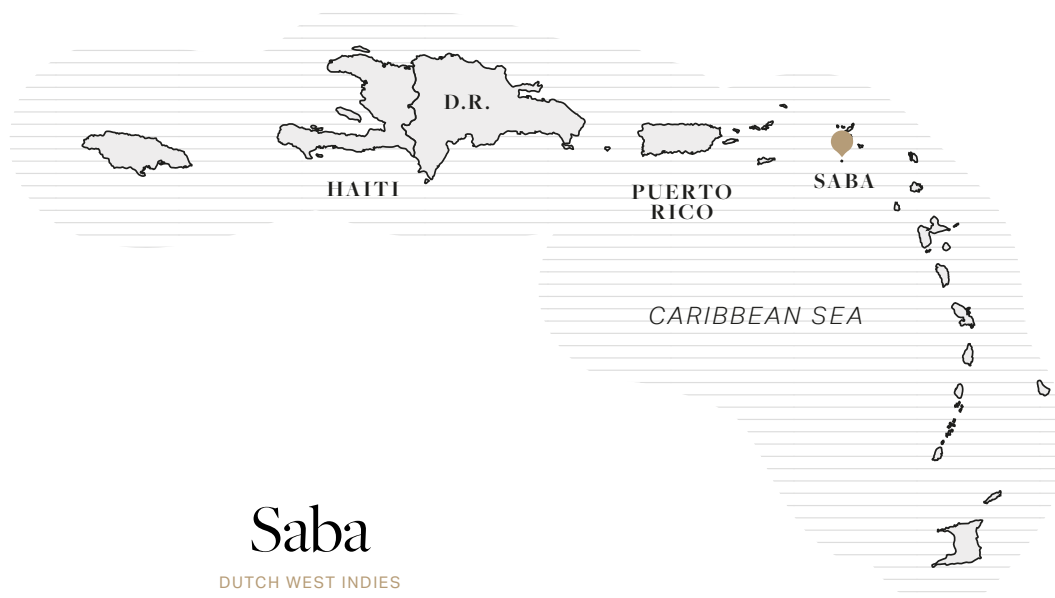


A full-page background image featuring a superyacht on the left with a red flag and a diver swimming underwater in the foreground. The water is clear blue, and a rocky coastline is visible in the background under a clear sky.

CHARTER

Ten Secret Superyacht Islands

WRITTEN BY **TRISTAN RUTHERFORD**



Saba

DUTCH WEST INDIES

A catastrophic explosion ripped Saba from the seabed to leave a volcanic isle 887m (2,910ft) high. Its active peak is the highest point in Holland.

Mountain mists shroud mahogany forests, which tier seaward past orchid groves and mango trees. Sited above Atlantic surf on the eastern tip is a commercial airstrip, the world's shortest, which welcomes an occasional turboprop from St Barths. Such fearsome topography keeps lesser travellers at bay. Saba receives just 25,000 yearly visitors – the same number that hit Monaco in a single day. That's tragic. Because the island has become an eco-tourism pioneer that maintains the moniker "The Unspoiled Queen of the Caribbean".

Eleven hiking trails run through the Netherlands' most diverse landscape, from sulphur mines to sandy beaches, where Atlantic tides sweep all footprints away. Thirty permanent moorings welcome yachts to knockout dive sites like The Pinnacles. Here 150 species shimmer around sea mounts that rise to within 25m (85ft) of the surface.

IMAGES Saba has become an eco-tourism pioneer that maintains the moniker "The Unspoiled Queen of the Caribbean"





Cayos Cochinos

HONDURAS

As National Geographic wrote: “The waters around this collection of coral cays are a marine biologist's dream: busy with creatures that may not yet have names.” Little wonder these islets, marooned far from the Honduran mainland, are luxury yachting's next big thing. This sail back in time delivers uninhabited atolls, wooden fishing boats and powder shores of Maldivian quality. The main island of Cayo Grande is hardly Times Square. With not a single tarmac road, locals are forced to walk, sail or swim. It has a census population of just 108.

Guests who paddle to shore will backstroke above the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the world's second largest coral corridor. Fishing is strictly prohibited within 8km of Cayos Cochinos. University professors studying green turtles or Elkhorn coral are more common than scuba tours.



Apataki

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Anyone can fly to Bora Bora. But only confident captains can tiptoe through the gap in the coral ring of Apataki. Inside it's an Elysian scene: a translucent lagoon, like a private bath miles wide, garlanded with a perimeter of nodding palms.

Outside the wall it's another story. Perfectly formed Pacific rollers sculpt legendary waves, with nary another surfer in sight. The steady breeze shows it's time to unhook the kiteboards from the stern beach. Shorty wetsuits be damned. All you need here are Vilebrequin shorts and a GoPro.



Mercury Islands

NEW ZEALAND

Imagine a sub-tropical Cornwall where the sun blazes all summer. The Mercury Islands sparkle like quicksilver at the end of the Coromandel Peninsula, a spit of sub-tropical kauri forest that crumbles into limestone islands and white sand.

The seven ocean specks read like a botanist's field book. Only Great Mercury is inhabited (where a private villa is the preferred retreat of U2 frontman Bono). Residents on the other six include Pycroft's petrels and tuatara lizards. Wetsuits are required for deep sea swims with demoiselle fish and giant snapper that guard the underground caves. The ultimate warm-up is a hot toddy and a thermal soak on Hot Water Beach, just across the sound.

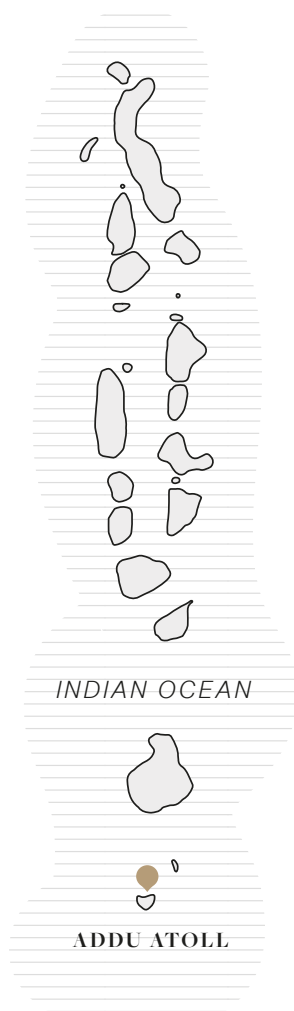


Mayaguana

BAHAMAS

Good luck trying to reach Mayaguana by air. It's the most distant, least developed and most unspoiled of all the inhabited Bahamas islands. Most of the 300 residents earn a living by fishing for conch. For leisure, they gather land crabs for creole chowder on Horse Pond Beach. The other dozen beaches are footprint free.

Like many isolated islands, Mayaguana boasts pristine seas. Take a tow on a Seascooter to Curtis Creek, where boxfish and triggerfish parade in a natural aquarium. Or kick back with a Hendrick's tonic and a telescope, as hummingbirds, oystercatchers and flamingos buzz around the bay.



Addu Atoll

MALDIVES

Addu, the southernmost atoll in the Maldives chain, is nature's gift to yachtsmen. Stranded on the equator some 500km (300 miles) south of Malé, the atoll forms a magic circle around a limpid lagoon. Ships may moor safely, while barrier reefs have thwarted El Niño currents, ensuring healthy coral from snorkelling depth to deep scuba levels.

Giant pelagics like spotted eagle rays and spinner dolphins adore Addu as much as superyacht guests. Those who land, anchor or splash down on a floatplane will find traces of a British airbase that shut up shop in the 1970s. Tarmac roads make for joyously untaxing bike rides through the nodding palms – rest assured, you're pedalling through the flattest country on earth. Just pack the Nikon, and remember to cycle on the left.







TOP The Bay of Taiohae, Marquesas Islands **MIDDLE** A traditional Polynesian statue found in the Marquesas **BOTTOM** The peaceful port of Atuona at the head of the Taaoa Bay



Hiva Oa

MARQUESAS

The Marquesas make up one of the most isolated island chains in the world. Which is why artist Paul Gauguin sailed in to Hiva Oa in 1901 for a bit of peace and quiet. When not boozing and carousing, he found another way to annoy the strict French colonial authority: painting staggeringly colourful, and scantily clad, women against a backdrop of mean, green mountains.

Gauguin would recognise the massive tikis that still doze in dreamy rainforest today. With a hiking guide, visitors may circle Hiva Oa's 1,213m (3,980ft) peak. Peer down to see Pacific rollers crash midway between Australia and the Americas onto white sand, black sand and pebble beaches.

The population of this Malta-sized no-mans-land? Just 2,000 locals lost in time.

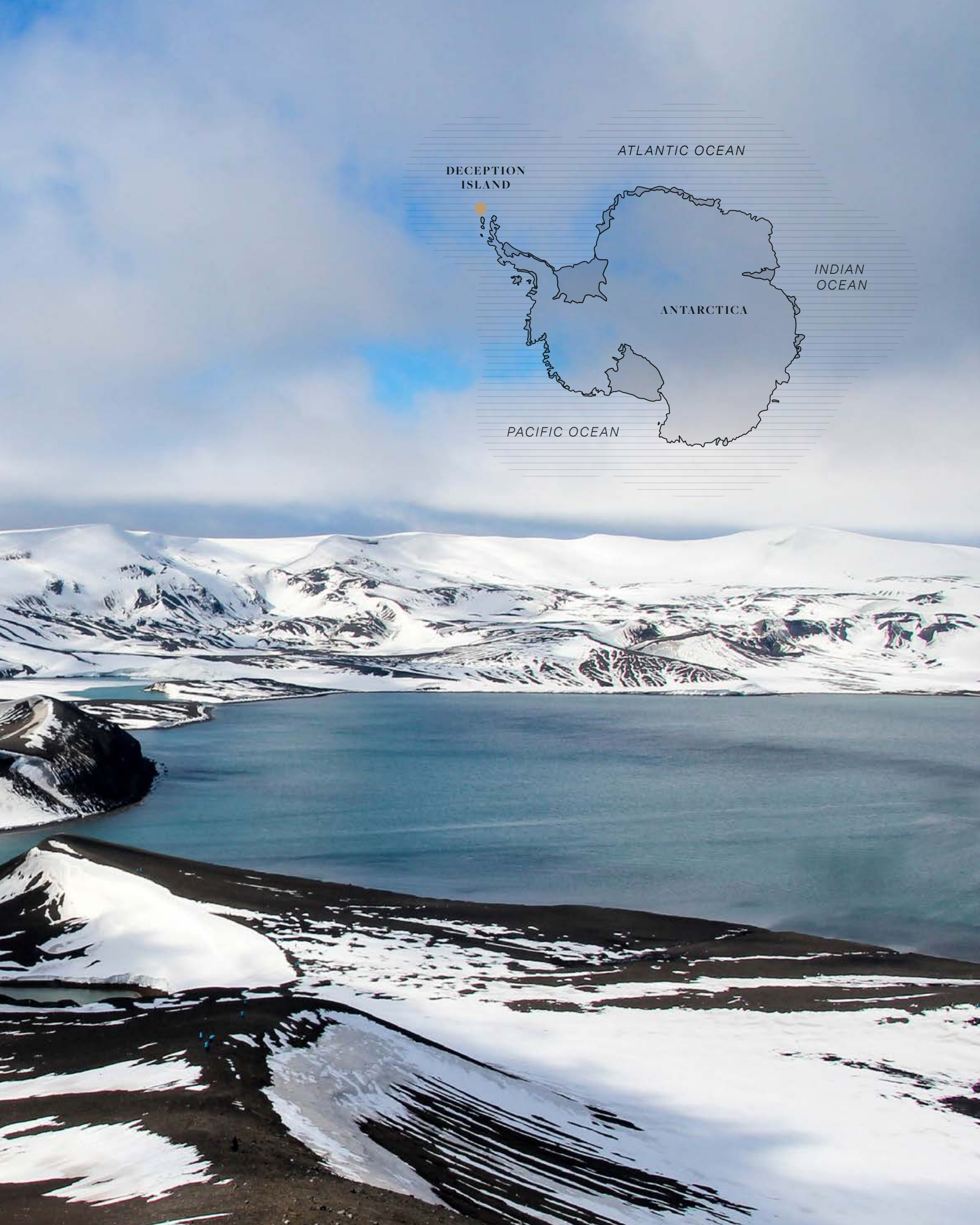
Deception Island

ANTARCTIC

Amid the maelstrom of the Southern Atlantic sits a sailor's haven of unparalleled history. Deception Island is an active volcano partially sunk into the icy ocean, allowing captains to creep into its sheltered caldera. Ships have sought refuge here for decades; their salty remains are frozen in time. Don immersion suits and ride in the RIB to explore a British naval base, a whaling factory and a discarded airplane fuselage (Antarctica's first flight took off from the beach here in 1928).

Bring a swimsuit too. Deception's geothermal core heats up rockpools on the steaming shingle, allowing guests to pose on Instagram while taking a volcanic Jacuzzi bath. A breezy hike up Baily Head passes Deception's nine species of nesting seabird. The world's largest colony of chinstrap penguins, 200,000 in all, squawks up from the shoreline.





DECEPTION
ISLAND

ATLANTIC OCEAN

INDIAN
OCEAN

ANTARCTICA

PACIFIC OCEAN

Santa Maria

AZORES

Santa Maria rests in the mid-Atlantic, the southernmost and sunniest of all the Azores. Since time immemorial, whale sharks have migrated through its bottomless depths, followed by a carnivalesque entourage of giant tuna and pilotfish. When seen from below the scene is planet earth's ultimate dive experience. With a hook and line cast from the yacht, marlin, wahoo and swordfish can be poled for an evening sushi feast.

Inland Santa Maria is a different story. It's like an inebriated deity has experimented with nature, adding bits of Africa and Asia as he went. Barreiro da Faneca is a rock-red pyroclastic desert blasted from the earth's core, best seen by mountain bike. Ribeira de Maloás is an ancient lava flow, standing still like a stone waterfall. The warm seas are best entered from the white sand of Praia Formosa, the Azores' finest beach.





TOP The white sands of Praia Formosa **RIGHT** The arid desert landscape of Barreiro da Faneca
BOTTOM Whale sharks migrate through the waters of the Azores

