



A BEACH OF ONE'S OWN

The search for solitude has a simple solution – a private island sanctuary. **Peter Swain** examines the exclusive marketplace and assesses the options

In the interconnected, technology-driven 21st-century village, no man is an island, but owning one can be the first step towards reclaiming one's personal space. Other trophy real estate assets can, of course, promote suitably lavish lifestyles, but owning a private island enables a sense of being lord of all one surveys. It can also be a gateway to a simpler life, avers Farhad Vladi, doyen of private island brokers.

"The vast majority of our buyers want to be closer to nature. They're looking for seclusion, tranquillity and 360° views they can control. Of the 130 or so properties currently on our books, I would describe 90% as adventure islands, with the rest being quality islands."

For most buyers, who conventionally hail from Europe and North America,

but also of late from China, Japan and the Middle East, traditional Caribbean and Mediterranean locales still top the wish list. The undeveloped Nissos Makri, a paradisaical 100ha island in the Ionian Sea, is typical of destinations currently attracting interest.

"One of the most beautiful Mediterranean islands currently on the market,

it would suit either a buyer wanting complete privacy and a trophy estate unlike any other in Greece at the moment, or a developer who wants to establish a truly unique resort," reports Alexandros Moulas of Savills Greece. The former Emir of Qatar and Russian oligarch Dmitry Rybolovlev have recently acquired other islands

in the Echinades group.

By way of contrast, Bonefish Cay in the Bahamas is a treasure island ready for immediate occupation. In the Vladi portfolio, the 5ha coral haven has 1,393 soigné square metres of fully air-conditioned accommodation, suitable for up to 16 guests, two long white-sand beaches, and Sean Connery's favourite tropical golf links, just a short boat ride away on the main Abaco island.

"We first ask our clients about their budget and geographic preference, and then usually suggest they rent an island before they consider buying it," says Hamburg-based Vladi. The most remote destination he has sold was D'Arros Island in the Seychelles, 100 kilometres from the main island of Mahé, and among some of the more unusual properties that have crossed his desk is Singer →





Castle on Dark Island, one of the famously exotic Thousand Islands in upstate New York.

Rural seclusion is increasingly prized by today's buyers. So Eilean Rìgh, a maritime sanctuary in western Scotland currently being offered by London-based Knight Frank, would be perfect for a nature-loving sportsman with a fondness for single malts. The 100ha King's Isle has two modest houses, a helicopter hangar and superfast internet connection, so is far from barren, but it's the stunning natural scenery of this tiny, cloistered kingdom that makes it so inviting.

Kaulbach Island off Nova Scotia in eastern Canada also represents a new breed of destination much in vogue, combining breathtaking off-the-grid natural beauty with a *recherché* degree of sophistication. Its 27 rugged hectares include an imposing 11-bedroom residence and an anchorage deep enough to accommodate serious yachts, but it's also within easy reach of the mainland.

A little further inland, on the St Lawrence River just north of Montreal, Celine Dion is selling her

opulent island chateau, Île Gagnon, through Sotheby's International and Vladi Private Islands. The property is close to the action but has a degree of physical separation that appeals to those who appreciate privacy.

Of course, other glitterati such as Aristotle Onassis, Richard Branson and Johnny Depp have always prized the seclusion and security afforded by their own islands, but with prices starting at \$500,000 or so, private Scottish, Canadian, Fijian, Italian, Australian and New Zealand islands are now within reach of mere mortals. Greta Garbo, who famously wanted "to be alone", now could be in her native Sweden would certainly find plenty of choice in her native Sweden.

Vladi does, however, regularly receive requests he is unable to accommodate. "Clients sometimes ask for tax sovereignty or even to become an independent state, which is not possible in any way." But if your fantasy runs to an isle in the Venetian lagoon, French Polynesia, or the 2015 trendsetter, Greece, where more islands are coming to the market as the country's financial crisis bites, now could be the time to make a move. It's one few buyers will regret. ●

■ Clockwise from top left: Eilean Rìgh, knightfrank.com; Kaulbach Island, vladi-private-islands.de; Nissos Makri, savills.gr; Bonefish Cay, vladi-private-islands.de

