

Guide to Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu – South Pacific paradise on the rise | Skyscanner Australia

The largest of Vanuatu's 83 islands, Espiritu Santo is often overshadowed by her famous neighbors – namely Fiji and New Caledonia. It's no reflection on the ni-Vanuatu people who warmly welcome visitors to their sun-kissed shores. Ssshhh, Santo is kind of a secret! [Skyscanner Australia](#) peeked at Santo's South Pacific charms, a destination promising to headline 2018 holiday wish lists.

What's with the strange name?

First things first, let's deal with the unwieldy name. Espiritu Santo is actually a shortened version of the archipelago's original name *La Austrialia del Espiritu Santo*. This mouthful hails from a Spanish Portuguese expedition tasked with finding the legendary Great Southern Land about 400-odd years ago. Mistaking Espiritu Santo for the mythical *terra australis incognita*, Captain Queros named the archipelago in recognition of the Spanish King's descent from the Royal House of Austria.

So, with the history lesson dispensed with, let's just call this dreamy plot of paradise Santo like everyone else does. Not to be confused with the big guy in the red suit scrambling down chimneys in your neighborhood soon.

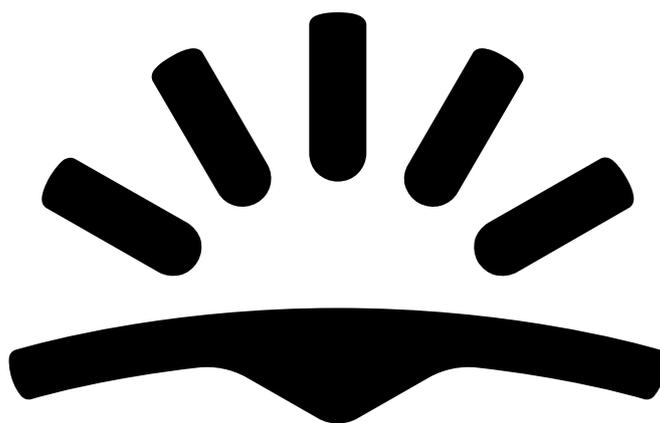
Why go to Santo?

It's a good question. Divers, snorkelers, swimmers, beachgoers, culture fiends and foodies listen up.

Like any self-respecting Pacific Island paradise, Santo has stacked the deck with enough beaches to make a sun-starved Melburnian weep. Champagne Beach please take a bow. Not just for your celebratory name that conjures up visions of balmy tropical decadence. You my friend are the real deal. White sand, tick. Aquamarine water, tick. Coconut palms swooshing in the breeze. Yep, by the plantation load. Bonus points for a sparkling spring that bubbles up into the bay. Hence the name. Seriously. But you'd be forgiven if you stashed a bottle of bubbles in your beach bag – beachgoing is thirsty work!

Million Dollar Point is one of Vanuatu's most famous and fascinating dive sites (truth be known, Vanuatu is a five-star dive playground). The site is so named after the US military dumped millions of dollars' worth of military equipment in the sea as WWII ended. On a clear day snorkelers are as equally rewarded as divers as some relics lie in just a few metres of water.

Blue Holes are to Santo what mountains are to Nepal. There's a gazillion of them. Though admittedly Blue Holes don't quite scream look at me like those Nepalese drama queens do. Blue Holes are far more subtle, requiring a mask and snorkel to reveal their true underwater charms as they plummet 30m below the surface. (drone photographers love them too)



Still not convinced why you should go to Santo? One word: kava. Actually, let's make that two: Kava Bar. Kava is a traditional drink of Vanuatu made by pounding the roots of the piper methysticum plant, adding water and sifting it through silk. Drinking kava has a sedative, spiritual-like effect – leave your dancing shoes at home when going to a kava bar! Look for bare light globes outside some buildings in downtown Luganville to find a kava bar (the local name is Nakamal). A word of caution – Vanuatu kava packs more punch than its Fijian cousin.

But before you drift into a kava-induced sedative state don't forget to eat. You could partake in the usual tropical paradise suspects like lobster, fish and crab but in this case, we recommend you beef up on bovine. Unexpectedly for a country on a similar latitude to Cooktown, on Santo it's all about beef. World class Santo Beef no less. Grazing on lush grassy pastures shaded by swaying coconut palms, Santo cows are as laid back as the farmers who tend them.

Getting to Santo

Qantas, Virgin Australia and Air Vanuatu all offer direct flights from Australian east coast cities to Port Vila. From there it's about a one-hour domestic flight on Air Vanuatu to Luganville, the hub of Santo.

Download the Skyscanner App and check out our [Cheapest Month](#) game changer search function to find the cheapest airfares to Vanuatu.



Where to stay on Santo

15 mins by boat from Luganville lies [Aore Island Resort](#), offering the sort of chilled out, no-fuss beach holiday many promise but few deliver. An open-sided traditionally crafted central lodge on the beach is the hub of Aore where guests gather for meals and convivial sundowners at dusk. Aore is friendly and simple, promising total beachfront relaxation

Beachfront bungalows are a few measly steps from gin-clear water loaded with coral bombies pulsing with colourful tropical fish. Snorkelling straight off the beach is brilliant and visibility is usually exceptional thanks to a white sand seabed.

[Bokissa Private Island Resort](#) is on a teeny slip of an atoll east of Aore. If you're looking for a private and romantic island getaway with enough wilderness to feel like you've been castaway Robinson Crusoe style, Bokissa offers a stylish relaxed retreat for couples or families.

Dugongs and turtles also hang out here thanks to fertile seagrass beds that provide sustenance for these gentle inquisitive creatures.

[Ratua Private Island](#) is an indulgent luxury resort island perfect for couples wanting quiet 'us time'. Understated and elegant, Ratua is all yacht club and overwater day spa, thatched roofed bures linked by boardwalks. Timber decks furnished with teak daybeds and plump outdoor sofas are just made for canoodling on.

As the sun sinks beneath the South Pacific Ocean, tiki torches are lit for barefoot-style fine dining on the beach. Tiny scaredy-cat sand crabs scurry between tables and toes, diving into their burrows as waiters arrive bearing delicate plates of delicacies.

Unleash your inner wild child and check into a plush 35sqm Safari Tent with outdoor bathroom encased by jungle on its own private beach

When to go to Santo

Santo sits within the cyclone belt (Tropical Cyclone Pam wreaked havoc on Vanuatu in March 2015), which means that from December to March it's wet season. Cyclones aside, the upside to visiting at this time is that the wind is usually very light, ensuring the seas are calm – a bonus for seasick prone divers, snorkelers and fishermen.

Come April, the season changes and things settle down into a predictable pattern that revolves around south easterly trade winds that blow steadily until November. Days are warm, nights are balmy. When its winter in Australia and the southern states are gripped by winter chills, Santo is bathed in blessed warm sunshine.

Are you ready to plan your tropical holiday to Santo? Check out Skyscanner Australia's flight search function to find the [cheapest month](#) to visit Vanuatu.

About the author	
	<p>Fiona Harper //</p> <p>Fiona Harper is an Australian travel writer who likes to get offroad and offshore. Follow her at Travel Boating Lifestyle.</p> <p>Widely travelled, highly acclaimed and much published, Fiona's articles & images are published across the globe. When not writing she's probably running a marathon or exploring the world by foot, bike, kayak, camel or boat: whatever mode of transport she can get her hands on!</p>