


 **Recharge** Health, fitness & the latest short breaks



# PASS *the* REMOTE

Whether for weddings, reunions, reward or rehab, private islands are the hot new destination. Our enthusiastic castaways indulge in the luxury maroon life.

## RATUA ISLAND, VANUATU

AT TIMES, BEING ON RATUA PRIVATE ISLAND FEELS LIKE visiting the set of a Melanesian *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There's a sheep called Horse because she thinks she is one; a horse called Isabelle who is actually an unsuccessfully gelded stallion (four mares in foal); a drake that takes brutal liberties with young female ducks; a rooster that doesn't know sunrise from sunset; and, somewhere, a pet baby python that has rejected its assigned accommodation. But, then, Ratua – between the islands of Malo and Aore, 30 minutes by powerboat from Luganville, on the south-east coast of Vanuatu's northern island Espiritu Santo – is very much paradise unplugged.

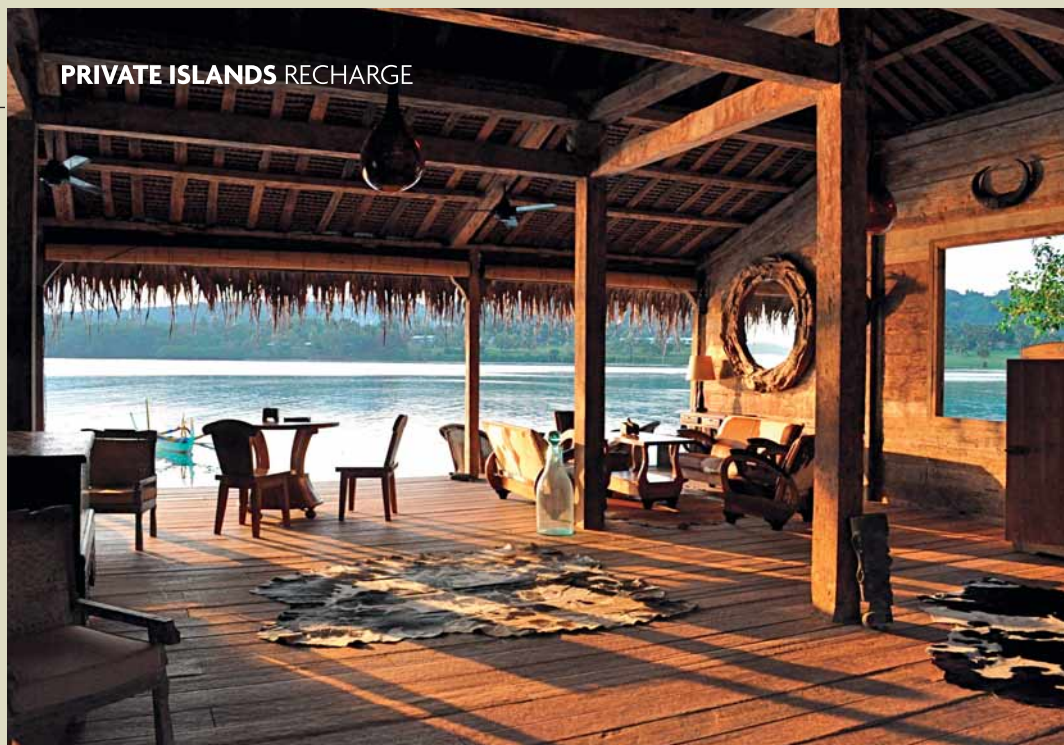
It is not your standard island resort. You won't find a Hollywood-style pool, flat-screen TV, phone lines to room service, multi-jet spa baths or shops. Nor will you find air-conditioning, a hairdryer, kettle or much made of plastic at all. This is deliberate, as the establishment is aiming to be as self-sustainable and environmentally responsible >

Still life with lagoon:  
Ratua Island, Vanuatu

PHOTOGRAPHY: KATE AYRTON



## PRIVATE ISLANDS RECHARGE



Clockwise from left: open sitting room at Fish Village; dog at villa door; the blue hole on Malo Island



## “ Ratua’s seductions are those things people leave city lives to find ”

as possible. Environmental scientists advised on energy saving and operators are looking at powering the island’s generators with a coconut biofuel, replacing existing golf buggies with horse and cart, and harvesting coconut oil for soaps and toiletries. Profits after operating costs will be returned to the community, mostly as health-care and education. The resort recently launched the One Bag, One Book program, encouraging visitors to the island to bring with them a used schoolbook for under-resourced classrooms.

Ratua was leased in 2004 – in Vanuatu, property is leased from tribal owners for 75 years, the productive lifespan of a coconut tree. The 15 villas comprising North Point and South Point Villages and Fish Village are said to be more than 200 years old, sourced in Sumatra and reassembled on the island via a workshop in Bali. Doors, squeaky floors, walls, shutters, bathrooms, beds and verandahs are timber; roofs are thatched or woven, a ceiling fan directs the breeze.

If you want a tropical paradise you have to get the working island that comes with it. Ratua’s seductions are those things people leave city lives to find: there’s a beach in front of practically every hut; you can wade out (carefully) into water that is all the blues of a Derwent pencil set, snorkel among coral and blue cushiony starfish; or go horse riding, bike riding or walking around the island.

Just a boat trip and canoe or kayak excursion away is the blue hole of Malo Island, scuba diving on wrecks such as the *SS President Coolidge* (which went down in 1942), or a physically challenging expedition to Millennium Cave in the central region of Espiritu Santo.

Ratua is like an eccentric who doesn’t always behave. In the resort’s early months, it wasn’t uncommon to come across a taro plant uprooted by a boar overnight; wake in the small hours to hear a horse



shredding foliage disconcertingly close by, or the patter of little trotters on the verandah. Not surprisingly, construction of enclosures for sheep, pigs and chooks has been underway since (the poultry was caught once too often dining on vegetable plot seedlings).

Produce comes mostly from Ratua’s own backyard: from sweet, rich carrot juices to banana and papaya pancakes for breakfast, to lobster terrine and ni-Vanuatu beef for dinner by the sea. All kinds of bread – from tomato-streaked to fennel flavoured, brioche and fruit toast – is baked by the chef, and the wine is French.

Recent additions include an overwater spa and an airstrip to allow small private planes to access the island direct.

Individual villa hire is VUV43,000 (\$490) per person a night, subject to availability. The entire island can be hired for VUV1.5m (\$17,125) a night; a good proposition for weddings, workshops or reward/incentive groups. The best time to go is May-October. For more information visit [ratua.com.au](http://ratua.com.au)

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**SUSAN SKELLY**

CANOE & DOG PHOTOGRAPHY: SUSAN SKELLY; FISH VILLAGE: KATE AYRTON