

An Island Gig

Don't know where to go on your next vacation? We asked for advice from the worldliest of travelers.

BY VIJU MATHEW

THINK YOU'VE HAD JET LAG? Imagine how your circadian rhythms would flat-line after 2,400 flights. That's how many hauls Graydon "Gig" Gwin estimates he's been on during his quest to visit every country in the world. Gig, a member of the prestigious Travelers Century Club, has visited 317 countries. Founder of Gwin's Travel in St. Louis, Missouri, this wanderer has visited many of the world's islands, but when asked to list his favorites, he warns, "That's like trying to pare the Gettysburg Address down to one sentence." So we peppered him with other questions — and did manage to get him to name a few of his favorite islands.

Q: In your opinion, what are the next new island destinations for tourism?

A: Generally speaking, I always say follow the new resorts. I don't care how exotic an island is, if it doesn't offer a place with basic comforts it will lose potential visitors. Though having said that, in my opinion, and without any second choice, the next "new" destination would have to be Cuba ... for its vibrant people and culture and the natural beauty of the island. When the current regime passes, that island will become the hottest tourist spot for the next 20 years.

Q: What is your favorite mode of travel?

A: Cruising. I think we're in the golden age of cruising because there is such a variety of ships and amenities. There is an experience for everyone — even if you're the guy who just wants to smoke cigars and eat hamburgers at sea for six days. If you want to get away from everything, but be waited on hand and foot, it's a good way to go.

Q: What's your most memorable island experience?

A: Robinson Crusoe Island, about 400 miles off Chile, has to be a leading candidate. The island's topography is dramatic and pictur-

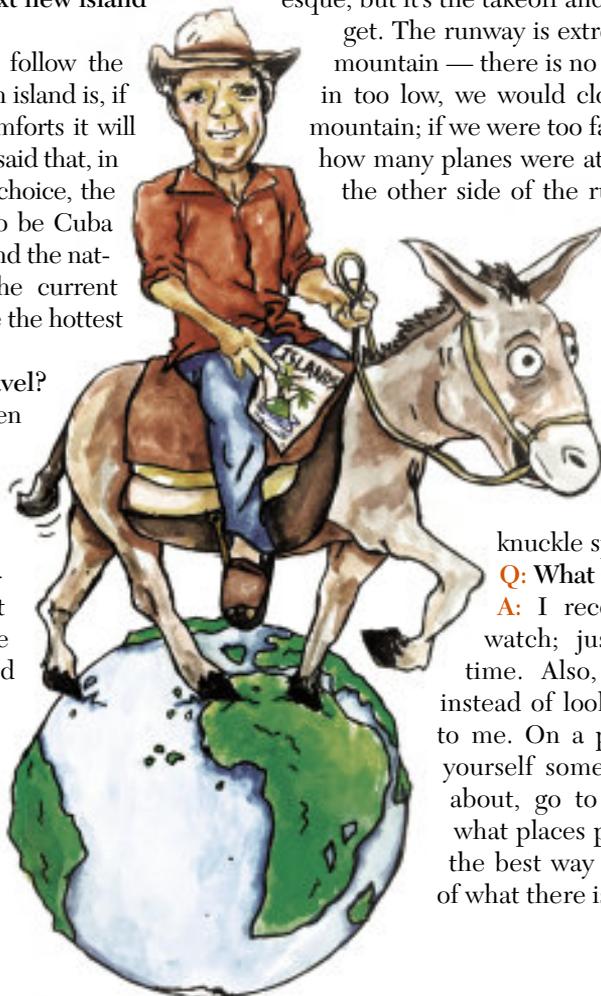
esque, but it's the takeoff and landing that I'll never forget. The runway is extremely short and sits atop a mountain — there is no room for error. If we came in too low, we would clobber into the side of the mountain; if we were too fast ... well, I just wondered how many planes were at the bottom of the cliff on the other side of the runway. The departure was

even more gripping as our small plane started up on a hill, hoping to gain enough speed by the time we were ready for lift off. The pilot revved the engine, then popped the brakes, and we exploded down the strip. It was a white-

knuckle special.

Q: What are your island travel tips?

A: I recommend taking off your watch; just let the island dictate time. Also, I adapt to the culture instead of looking for ways it can adapt to me. On a practical note, if you find yourself somewhere you know nothing about, go to a postcard stall and see what places postcards highlight. This is the best way to get a quick assessment of what there is to see. Finally, I never go



anywhere without luggage on wheels.

Q: What's your most memorable travel predicament?

A: Watching my plane take off as I stood in a water taxi on a little French island off Madagascar. The only reason I was there, honestly, was just to say that I was. The next flight out wasn't for another week. With nothing other than some cash in my pocket, I had a moment of mellow resignation and thought, "I'm really screwed, aren't I?" I survived the week thanks to French locals.

Q: What would be your perfect island day if space and time were not a factor?

A: I would start by waking up on Nevis and having breakfast at the Four Seasons, followed by some penguin-watching on South Georgia. After lunch and a round of golf at Kapalua on Maui, I would enjoy a late-afternoon bike ride around Martha's Vineyard before cocktails on a Bali beach at sunset. ♦

See more PICKS at www.islands.com/gigqwin

Gig's Island Picks

Americas **Vancouver Island** An island of elegance. The Butchart Gardens are the most beautiful in the world. **Bermuda** Wonderful beaches. One of the cleanest islands I've visited. **Martinique** Lush jungles and amazing blend of Carib and French culture.

Europe and Africa **Guernsey** Very green, very tranquil and very British. **Rhodes** For the Greek history and archaeology. **Zanzibar** A fascinating collision of cultures.

Middle East, Asia and the Pacific islands **Sri Lanka** Intriguing culture and mystical landscape. **Mauritius** The most sensual dancing I have ever witnessed. **Lord Howe Island** Closest place to paradise, in my opinion. The most amazing night sky I have ever seen. **Christmas Island** (just above Australia) Red crab migration is not to be missed.

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