

The Dow Jones Island Index

Torn about where to take your winter vacation? You may want to factor this in: Some islands are being hit harder by climate change and environmental risk than others, which means they are more likely to be affected by things like hurricanes and coral bleaching. Below is a look at how 40 islands scored on our environmental-risk index, which took into account 12 different factors. The lower the score, the lower the risk by our measurements; the islands are listed in order of best-performing to worst-performing. In the chart, we also included a few of those data points on their own.

ISLAND/OCEAN	RISK SCORE	SEVERE HURRICANES ¹	ACTIVE VOLCANO	CHANGE IN WATER TEMPERATURE ²	COMMENT
Prince Edward Island (Can.) North Atlantic	29	0		1.09° F	This had the lowest risk rating, according to our index. December temperatures, though, average 24 degrees.
Martha's Vineyard (U.S.) North Atlantic	31	0		0.42°	Serious erosion from Atlantic waves, especially along its south shore, has prompted plantings of beach grasses on dunes to stabilize its beaches.
Easter Island (Chile) Pacific	35	0	✓	0.28°	One of the most isolated islands in the world, its once thriving population was nearly wiped out centuries ago by environmental damage.
Curaçao (Netherlands Antilles) Caribbean	36	0		0.79°	Ranked best among Caribbean islands in our index. Tourists generally choose beaches on the sheltered south coast to avoid the trade winds.
Florida Keys (U.S.) Caribbean	36	1		-0.07°	This island chain was pounded by Hurricanes Rita and Wilma this fall, knocking out power and flooding some streets.
Bonaire (Netherlands Antilles) Caribbean	37	0		0.79°	The waters around the island are full of unusual creatures like orange cup coral and frogfish, which hop on finned feet.
Grand Cayman (Cayman Isl.) Caribbean	37	0		0.30°	Though last fall's Hurricane Ivan narrowly missed landfall on the Caymans, the island was still pummeled by the storm's strong winds.
Crete (Greece) Mediterranean	38	0		2.14°	Its waters warmed more than any other in our index, both because of its higher latitude and its smaller ocean basin.
Barbados Caribbean	38	0		1.07°	It's got a UN climate-change "plan of action" for islands named after it (it hosted a 1994 conference), but it's got its own beach-erosion problems.
Aruba Caribbean	39	0		0.65°	Temperatures on this island stay relatively constant year-round (at about 81 degrees).
Cyprus Mediterranean	40	0		1.42°	Its symbolic animal, the moufflon (similar to sheep), has been declared a protected species after nearing extinction.
Malta Mediterranean	40	0		2.04°	Because of a dearth of rainfall, Malta relies heavily on desalination for its drinking water.
Galapagos (Ecuador) Pacific	40	0	✓	0.04°	Sierra Negra, a volcano on the island of Isabela, began erupting last week for the first time since 1979. The good news: The native tortoises are safe.
Cape Verde North Atlantic	40	0	✓	0.61°	Though a type of Atlantic hurricane takes its name from these islands, the storms form just south of the islands, sparing them damage.
Tahiti (French Polynesia) Pacific	41	0		0.91°	Because it's east enough in the Pacific, where the water is cooler, it has a relatively low risk of typhoons.
St. John (U.S. Virgin Islands) Caribbean	41	0		0.64°	St. John's Elkhorn coral has bleached, and some local marine biologists say it is the first time they can remember that happening here.
St. Croix (U.S. Virgin Islands) Caribbean	42	0		0.64°	Its six-year-old coastal reserve is the nesting site of three species of endangered sea turtles.
British Virgin Islands Caribbean	43	0		0.64°	Except for several streams on Tortola, the islands have few local sources of freshwater.
Corsica (France) Mediterranean	43	0		2.07°	Hurricanes essentially don't exist in the Mediterranean, and the reefs get some measure of protection from its rugged cliffs.
Bermuda North Atlantic	43	1		0.35°	Thanks to warm waters from the gulf stream, it is surprisingly hot for an island this far north.
Grenada Caribbean	43	1	✓	1.01°	Last fall's Hurricane Ivan wiped out 90% of the country's nutmeg crop, and the island was smashed again this summer by Hurricane Emily.
Lombok (Indonesia) Indian	44	0	✓	0.57°	The top performer in the Indian Ocean, but earthquakes are common in this region. (A 4.5-magnitude temblor struck the area earlier this month.)
Bahamas North Atlantic	45	4		-0.11°	It has the most direct flights from the U.S. of any island in the Caribbean region, with at least 678 a week.
St. Lucia Caribbean	45	0		0.88°	Its government has contracted to build "wind farms" to generate energy. Makes sense: It was one of the windiest islands on our chart.
Maldives Indian	45	0		0.84°	The highest point on these low-lying islands is just six feet above sea level, making it susceptible to tsunamis and rising sea levels.
Tuvalu Pacific	46	2		0.75°	Scientists say these low-lying atolls could be the first inhabited islands to be abandoned if seas continue to rise.
Azores (Portugal) North Atlantic	47	0	✓	1.20°	Last summer, its seafood-rich waters were opened up to international commercial fishing; this fall, though, seabed trawling was banned.
Seychelles Indian	48	0		0.98°	A serious bleaching event in 1998 killed up to 90% of the coral in some places, and the reefs were again damaged by last winter's tsunami.
Jamaica Caribbean	48	1		0.18°	Its reefs have been severely damaged for decades due to overfishing and pollution, resulting in the recent establishment of marine-protected areas.
Hawaii (U.S.) Pacific	49	1	✓	0.30°	Every hurricane whose eye has passed over the state in the last 50 years has hit only the island of Kauai.
Bali (Indonesia) Indian	52	0	✓	0.57°	In the wake of two terrorist attacks on this popular Asian tourist spot, the U.S. State Department has issued a travel warning for Americans.
Sicily (Italy) Mediterranean	54	0	✓	1.88°	Its volcano, Mt. Etna, is one of the world's most active. Though eruptions haven't hurt anyone recently, they occasionally disrupt air traffic.
Puerto Rico Caribbean	55	1		0.64°	Its reefs were rated among the most at-risk of any in the Caribbean by the World Resources Institute, with 93% threatened.
Guam Pacific	60	4		0.95°	One scientist calls Guam "a bowling alley for hurricanes [with] a strike every time."
Mauritius Indian	61	6		-0.40°	Mauritius had the highest incidence of landfall from severe typhoons in the last two decades on our chart.
Fiji Pacific	64	4	✓	0.21°	A popular spot, despite frequent drought conditions in some regions, 151 days of rain a year in others, and a military coup in 2000.
Cuba Caribbean	69	2		0.10°	Home to 272 threatened species, more than any other Caribbean island, including the critically endangered Cuban kite.
Dominican Republic Caribbean	92	2		0.44°	This island attracts more tourists than most other Caribbean spots; bad risk rating was due to recent flooding and prevalence of hurricanes.
Sulawesi (Indonesia) Pacific	98	0	✓	0.90	Much loved by divers, its coral reefs have experienced major bleaching in recent years, leading to new fees for diving at one marine park.
Sri Lanka Indian	100	0		0.87	The island has been pummeled by natural disasters from flooding to drought; over 30,000 people died in last winter's tsunami.

¹Only counts hurricanes (or typhoons) of category 3 and above (between 1985 and 2004) when the eye passed directly over the island; doesn't include all incidents of hurricane-force winds.

²Change in average annual ocean surface temperature (between 1975 and 2004), converted to Fahrenheit and rounded.