



## POSITION VACANT: DREAM JOB

For some people, working in a remote location would be an ordeal, but for others, it sounds ideal. Katherine Purvis speaks to four people to discover how their dream job worked out.

### A. Karen Aspen, onboard cook, Scotland and the Caribbean

The first time Karen Aspen set foot on a boat, she ended up on an eight-month adventure sailing around the Caribbean. As a temp for a catering company, she was sent to work as the onboard cook for a group on a weekend sailing trip around Scotland's west coast. But then she decided to stay with the yacht, helping out with a two-month renovation before joining its next voyage across the Atlantic. 'I just said: "I could do that," as you do when you're 19,' laughs Aspen. Once in Antigua, she cooked for wealthy tourists who chartered the yacht before it was hired by the filmmaker Gregory Colbert to track whales for his film *Ashes and Snow*. 'I was one of those girls who had dolphins on her pencil case,' says Aspen. She never thought she'd see a whale or dolphin in real life, let alone learn to listen out for them on a hydrophone or have a job 'where you could walk up on deck and there'd be a whale 10 feet from you. It was a real turning point for me,' says Aspen. 'I was meeting all these people who were following their passions and doing what they really wanted with their lives ... it's something I would aspire to do – to live life on my own terms.'

## B. Jada Yuan, *The New York Times* '52 Places' traveller

When *The New York Times* announced it wanted to send a journalist to every location on its annual list of the top 52 Places to Go, the posting went viral, memes were generated and 13,000 people applied. Who wouldn't want the chance to visit places like Croatia, Mexico and Chile? Jada Yuan was chosen as the lucky writer and soon embarked on a tour covering 38 countries over six continents. Yuan knew she was going to be busy pumping out Instagram updates about her exploits, photographs and a print column each week, but then she learned last-minute that she'd also be organising the transport and accommodation herself. 'It wasn't until two days before I left that I realised that would mostly be on me,' she says. Despite missing trains in India, running out of money in São Tomé, and battling an ever-growing list of articles to file, Yuan found ways to overcome any 'travel rage' and enjoy the small wins. 'Even if you were in a place where you weren't having the greatest time, you could always take a pause to watch the sunset,' she says. 'I have flashbacks all the time. I'll just be doing something and it reminds me of a fruit I ate somewhere or a time I was driving in the rain ... I can't even pinpoint what triggers them but I'm grateful for them. None of them are bad.'

## C. Craig Stanford, archaeologist of St Kilda, Scotland

'There wasn't really an average day on St Kilda, it's a pretty wild place,' says Craig Stanford, who worked as resident archaeologist on the isolated archipelago. The islands of St Kilda are home to seabirds, sheep, and the St Kilda field mouse, but most human residents left in 1930. The post is a 'semi-legendary job in Scottish archaeology', says Stanford, who spent six months conserving, promoting and protecting the archipelago's cultural heritage, including 1,260 unique stone huts that were once used by farmers. A helicopter will try to deliver food twice a week, provided wind conditions are favourable, but in a place where 'every hour of your day is defined by nature', this is no easy feat. 'You end up eating some weird things from the back of the cupboard,' Stanford confesses. And with poor satellite internet connection a major obstacle to communicating with the outside world, the tiny St Kildan community must make their own fun. Whether it's a burger night, film night or gathering to celebrate a birthday, 'the social life on the island can be brilliant', says Stanford. 'I made some extremely good friends I imagine I'll have for the rest of my life.'

**D. Mari Huws, warden of Ynys Enlli, Wales**

It was somewhat by chance that Mari Huws and Emyr Glyn Owen became the new wardens of Ynys Enlli – a remote island off the Welsh coast, famous for its wildlife and sites of archaeological interest. The couple met on the island as day-trip visitors on ‘a perfect summer afternoon’ two years ago, so when they spotted the vacancy to run the place, ‘we shared one of those looks between us – the looks that speak louder than words. We had to go for it,’ says Huws. ‘Many people assume that people who want to live on an island are escaping from something, but for us it was more about realising a dream.’ The pair quit their jobs, and have been working hard ever since they arrived last September. As the island is now largely uninhabited, they have to be self-sufficient. ‘We are responsible for the upkeep of 10 listed buildings,’ says Huws. ‘There’s always a wall to paint or a ceiling to plaster.’ She adds, ‘I’ve had to get my head around things I’ve never had to consider before, like how the water system works and the language of volts and amps and solar panels.’ Huws has also dug drains and mixed cement, and has been building fences at weekends, too. But no matter how tough the work, the pair can always end their day with a walk through the fields and a swim in the sea at sunset. ‘There aren’t many aspects of mainland life that we miss,’ says Huws.