

About the game: Forbidden Island is a cooperative tabletop game for 2-4 players, ages 10 and up, which takes roughly 30 minutes to play. The game comes with 24 island tiles, 58 cards, 6 pawns, 4 treasure figurines and a water meter.

Overview: Players arrive on an island previously inhabited by the ancient and mysterious Archean people. Hidden on the island are four sacred artifacts which control the Earth's core elements (The Earth Stone, the Crystal of Fire, the Statue of the Wind, and the Ocean Chalice). Fearful of these treasures winding up in the wrong hands, the Archeans rigged the island to sink if anyone ever discovered it. Players need to cross the island, get each of the four treasures, and helicopter off the island before the waters rise.



How to play: The island is formed by shuffling the tiles and placing them in a roughly circular shape, which changes the board each time. Then, each player randomly pulls a card featuring one of the six available roles:

1. Explorer
2. Diver
3. Pilot
4. Navigator
5. Engineer
6. Messenger

Players should explain their role and their abilities to the group, as each has a specific ability depending on their role:

1. The Explorer can move and shore up diagonally, not just orthogonally.
2. The Diver can move through any number of submerged and sunken tiles for one action.
3. The Pilot can fly to any tile once per turn.
4. The Navigator can move other players two spaces for one action.
5. The Engineer can shore up two adjacent tiles for one action.
6. The Messenger can give cards to a player even in a different location.

Each role has a particular starting tile, so players can place their mover on the appropriate tile. Then, two treasure cards are dealt to each player, and the treasures are placed on or near the board. (Each treasure can be claimed from two different locations.) Four flood cards should then be drawn to start the island sinking. Each flood card corresponds to a specific island tiles, and when a location is revealed on a flood card, that tile first becomes submerged by flipping it over to the blue-and-white coloured side. Finally, the water level is set on the marker, depending on the desired difficulty level—the higher, the harder.

Forbidden Island Gameplay

On your turn, you can take up to three actions from the following choices: move one spot to another tile on the island, shore up a submerged tile, give a treasure card to a fellow player, or capture a treasure. You must be in the same location as another player to give them treasure cards, and you must collect four of the appropriate card to capture a treasure. After your actions, you draw two more treasure cards, and then draw flood cards equal to the water level shown on the marker. Tiles that have not already been submerged should be flipped to the blue-and-white side, and if an already submerged tile is revealed on a flood card, then it sinks and is removed from the game entirely. Shoring up allows you to flip an adjacent tile back over—but only if it hasn't already sunk.

Within the treasure cards deck, there are three cringe-inducing Waters Rise cards. If you draw one of these, you increase the water level on the meter, and then the flood cards discard pile gets reshuffled and put on top of the deck. That means that anything that has previously been submerged becomes more likely to sink. And as the water level rises, you're forced to draw more and more flood cards at the end of each turn, which makes the island sink faster and faster as the game progresses.

There are two other types of special cards in the treasure deck: Sandbags, which allow you to instantly shore up any tile on the board; Helicopter Lifts, which can pick up any number of players on a single tile and transport them anywhere on the board. (You will need a Helicopter Lift card to leave the island from the Fool's Landing tile at the end of the game.)

The goal of the game is to get all four treasures, meet back up at Fool's Landing, and catch the helicopter off the island. There are four ways to lose: if both locations for a particular treasure sink before you claim it, if Fool's Landing sinks, if any player is on a sinking tile and there aren't any adjacent tiles to swim to, or if the water level reaches the top of the meter. It takes cooperation to find the right balance between collecting the treasures and shoring up enough tiles so that no treasures (or people) are lost. It's also important to find the best way to use each person's abilities.



A game of Forbidden Island in progress

Adapted from the article "Teamwork Is the Key to Escaping Forbidden Island" by Jonathan H. Liu on Wired.com