

Happily ever after

Honeymoons and the Indian Ocean make a perfect couple, but the pressure's on to get it just right, says Laura French

@laurafrench121

Take skies of fire over topaz waters, serene catamarans sailing to castaway islands and vast blankets of stars over white-sand beaches, and you have a glimpse of why the Indian Ocean is top of the list when it comes to honeymoons.

Throw in candlelit dinners, flower-filled baths, couples' spa treatments and impressive room discounts for newlyweds, and you have a destination that practically sells itself, if you know what to highlight.

It's the type of holiday you can upsell, as couples seek a once-in-a-lifetime experience they'll remember in years to come. "Although the client's initial budget might be limited, as they approach the departure date

they often start to think about upgrading room types, meal plans, cabin class or booking a special dinner," says Tom Higgins, marketing manager at If Only. That means you can bolster an already high-value package with handy add-ons and bag yourself some repeat business by giving clients an all-out incredible trip – so they won't only be the only ones with a reason to pop the champagne.

▶ THE MALDIVES

Honeymoons here mean personalised packages, romantic gifts and generous freebies, so highlight these extras to help sell a big trip and secure yourself

some happy clients.

"One thing a lot of hotels in the Maldives do is set up special romantic dinners in private or semi-private locations for people celebrating a honeymoon," says Tricia Birmingham, senior product manager for the Middle East and Indian Ocean at Gold Medal. "Some hotels also offer cooking classes and couples' spa treatments."

Among them you'll find Anantara Kihavah, which gives newlyweds a free two-and-a-half-hour Maldivian Romance spa ritual for two, an in-villa

champagne breakfast and daily origami bed decorations as part of a special package. It's the 'dining by design' experience that really stands out, though: guests get a personal chef with an individually tailored menu, served up on a secluded stretch of beach.

Kuoni recommends Kandolhu Maldives, which offers a four-course candlelit dinner on the beach. "It's a tranquil paradise



star-naming that sets it apart. Couples can dedicate a constellation to each other, and then get a certificate to prove it; talk about making a mark.

It's also worth looking at add-ons and upgrades beyond those exclusive to honeymooners. Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu, for example, offers a castaway-style experience where couples stay for a night in a hut on Embudhoo, a private island which they have entirely to themselves. They'll enjoy a barbecue on the beach and wake up to a backdrop of deep blue sea and white sand (from \$250). Robinson Crusoe, eat your heart out.

MAURITIUS

If the extras aren't enough to get happy couples hooked, the special offers might be – especially for budget-conscious clients looking for a slightly cheaper alternative. Deborah Wadhams, Travel 2's senior product manager for the Middle East and Indian Ocean, says Mauritius is a good suggestion for those wanting to make the biggest savings, with plenty of honeymoon deals to be found.

Some provide completely free accommodation for the bride. Among them is Maritim Resort & Spa, which also throws in a complimentary

island with a beautiful marine-rich house reef, alongside an excellent all-inclusive package and honeymoon offers," says Sheena Paton, commercial and product manager. Treats include a complimentary 30-minute massage, fruit basket on arrival and 10% discount on spa treatments – worth mentioning to couples wanting to pamper themselves.

But for those more swayed by the idea of cruising on the water, exotic cocktail in hand, while the sun dips below the horizon, suggest Outrigger Konotta, where honeymooners get a sunset catamaran cruise alongside various extras while staying in secluded, overwater villas for added ambience. Among the resort's plus points is a romantic bath ceremony.

The latter is something Four Seasons Anahita, over in Mauritius, also knows a thing or two about. It has a dedicated bath menu that includes an option called The Art of Seduction – think frangipani flowers, rose-scented aromatherapy candles and chocolate-dipped strawberries – for those in the mood for romancing.

For something even more special, look to Milaidhoo Island Maldives, which opened in November in Baa Atoll, a Unesco World Biosphere Reserve. Here, newly married couples get an impressive array of perks – an hour-long spa treatment, a candlelit dinner on their villa deck and a romantic bath – but it's the



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Premier Holidays offers seven nights' all-inclusive at the Heritage Awali Golf & Spa Resort in Mauritius from £1,699, including flights and private transfers. trade.premierholidays.co.uk

Abercrombie & Kent offers a week's B&B at Constance Lemuria, Seychelles, from £4,698 departing July 1, including £100 resort credit per room per night and flights from London. abercrombiekent.co.uk



ABOVE: Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas

RIGHT: Four Seasons Anahita, Mauritius

PICTURE: KEN SEET

RIGHT:
Shandrani
Beachcomber
Resort & Spa

FAR RIGHT:
Constance
Lemuria,
Seychelles

BELOW:
Veranda Paul et
Virginie Hotel,
Mauritius



ASK THE EXPERT



Tom Higgins,
marketing manager,
If Only

“The Indian Ocean is great for romantics - spectacular sunsets, star-filled skies, powder-white beaches and boat trips past coral reefs to deserted islands. And honeymoons are an especially good seller for agents since they're usually planned well in advance, meaning you can tap into early-booking offers. Agents should carefully assess their clients' aspirations and agree with the couple whether a regular offer or a 'honeymoon' offer is best - the honeymoon extras can be fabulous.”

➔ upgrade to the next room category, and The Residence, which adds fruit, champagne and a catamaran cruise with lunch. The latter is one of Carrier's top recommendations thanks to its underground spa and new outdoor cinema - worth highlighting to couples swayed by the prospect of snuggling up under the stars, popcorn in hand.

Heritage Awali Golf & Spa Resort offers the bride and groom a 35% discount along with free gifts, provided they stay at least five nights. Set on a sprawling golf course and surrounded by a 2,500-hectare nature reserve, it's a good suggestion for those wanting to get outdoorsy and explore the rest of the island while making the most of the newlywed savings, though it's worth noting it's quite family-oriented.

Shandrani Beachcomber Resort & Spa gives 30% off, as well as free champagne from 6pm daily and complimentary watersports.

For a slightly more affordable,

adult-only option, Travel 2 recommends the three-star-plus Veranda Paul et Virginie. It offers discounted rates for honeymooners as well as a fruit platter, bottle of sparkling wine and candlelit dinner, and also features double hammocks where couples can relax in peaceful, beachfront surroundings. The hotel is set to reopen in August after a series of renovations.

▶ SEYCHELLES AND SRI LANKA

Over in the Seychelles there's the five-star Constance Lemuria - home to the archipelago's only golf course - which gives the bride up to 70% off accommodation (on a half-board basis). Both Mr and Mrs also get various goodies alongside £100 resort credit per person, per night on select dates, which is a big bonus for those wanting to dine in style or make the most of the wellness facilities.

For a really top-end experience

there's Denis Private Island, a 375-acre patch of paradise home to nesting turtles, exotic birds and other rare wildlife - alongside zero phone signal and just 25 villas and cottages. It offers a 30% discount for the bride, as well as a surprise gift, free cocktail and starlit dinner for the happy couple.

Or suggest Shangri-La, whose Hambantota property in Sri Lanka, complete with an 18-hole golf course, gives all newly married guests a generous 20% off accommodation, food, drink and spa treatments, as well as in-room dining and a 'dine by design' meal. Clients who might not ordinarily consider a resort this high-end may well be tempted when they hear of the savings they'll be making, and the priceless personalised experiences that come with it, so highlight the perks to couples wanting to pull out all the stops and you'll have them booking before you can say 'wedding bells'. **TW**

