

SAFARI-BEACH HONEYMOONS

ways

Tailor this classic combo to suit any couple's budget, says **Katie McGonagle**

A honeymoon is the ultimate test for any travel seller. It has to offer adventure, romance, relaxation and excitement. It should appeal equally to both parties, yet offer some new destination or style of travel they can experience together. Plus it's likely to be the most they've ever spent on a single trip, so the pressure is on to make it perfect.

Those are just some of the reasons why the safari-beach combo is such a popular honeymoon choice, pairing the thrill of spotting lions or leopards in their natural habitats with chill-out time to unwind after the big day.

It's often seen as a high-priced honeymoon, and those with more to spend will find plenty of options, but with a bit of know-how, that safari-beach 'moon can be adapted to suit just about any budget.



Save

Sri Lanka

Few countries combine world-class wildlife and white-sand beaches in one, but this Indian Ocean island has the lot, plus a healthy dose of history and culture besides.

Minneriya National Park in central Sri Lanka is renowned for its enormous Asian elephant population, offering all-but-guaranteed sightings, especially in the dry season (April to October) when elephants gather in search of water. Tag on leopard sightings in Yala National Park or skip the crowds in favour of nearby Udawalawe, and couples can't fail to be impressed by the wildlife here.

There's more to do around the Cultural Triangle – climb to the top of Sigiriya rock fortress, visit the ancient city of Polonnaruwa or sacred Buddhist sights of Kandy – then head to the highlands for rolling tea plantations,

a gloriously scenic rail journey across Nine Arch Bridge, and a hike up Little Adam's Peak. Then top it off with time on the sandy stretches of beach town Bentota, with safe conditions for swimming, snorkelling, sailing and more.

South Africa and Mauritius

South Africa is known for its value, from local food and drink to well-priced accommodation, so couples can enjoy a safari on a (relative) shoestring here.

The malaria-free Entabeni Safari Conservancy in the Waterberg area of Limpopo province offers all the open-top game drives and wildlife sightings you can get in the Kruger but at a fraction of the cost. Look out for the big five (lions, elephants, buffalos, rhinos and leopards) plus giraffes, zebras, kudus, warthogs, hippos and crocodiles.

After three days of early-morning game drives, clients

South Africa's malaria-free Entabeni Safari Conservancy offers all the game drives and wildlife sightings of the Kruger but at a fraction of the cost

might be ready for some downtime, and the beaches of Mauritius generally offer better value compared with its Indian Ocean neighbours. Opt for a property with a good honeymoon offer to make sure clients feel like they're getting the best possible deal. 2by2 Holidays recommends Ambre Resort & Spa, where free extras include a T-shirt, pareo and fruit platter on arrival, a romantic dinner, bottle of sparkling wine and flowers. ➔



BOOK IT

Travel Gallery offers a 14-night honeymoon including Minneriya and the Cultural Triangle, a stay at Rosyth Estate House in the highlands, Ella and Udawalawe National Park, followed by four nights at Avani Bentota Resort, from £2,225 including direct SriLankan Airlines flights. travel-gallery.co.uk

2by2 Holidays offers a 10-night honeymoon staying full-board at Entabeni Manor Lodge and all-inclusive at Ambre Resort & Spa, with British Airways flights, park fees, game drives and all transfers, from £2,695 based on travel in May 2021. 2by2holidays.co.uk

Spend



Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa, Borneo

BOOK IT

If Only offers an 11-night honeymoon combining eight nights' B&B at Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa with upgrade to a Garden Wing Deluxe Seaview Room, plus a three-night Convening with Nature tour, with flights, accommodation, some meals, wildlife excursions, transfers and taxes, from £2,639. Upgrade to World Traveller Plus with BA from £1,080 extra or to business class for an additional £2,660. ifonly.net

Latin Routes offers a 16-day honeymoon from £4,299, including flights, transfers and 15 nights' accommodation in Rio, Iguassu, an eco-lodge in the Pantanal, and a five-star resort in beach town Marau in Bahia, plus a half-day jeep tour of Sugar Loaf Mountain and full-day Iguassu Falls tour. latinroutes.co.uk

Borneo

It shot to fame thanks to Judi Dench's ITV documentary last year, and with its dense jungles and orangutan population, this southeast Asian island offers a wildlife experience like no other.

If Only product and commercial manager Alison Murphy says: "As well as some beautiful properties along the coast, Borneo is bursting with unspoilt natural landscapes and vibrant wildlife. One of my favourite beach resorts is Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa in Kota Kinabalu, whose location in the heart of a nature reserve allows guests to enjoy sparkling ocean on one side and lush rainforest on the other. There are daily wildlife tours

through the surrounding reserve, then guests can spend the rest of the day in the spa or at the pool."

Murphy suggests combining the beach resort with a nature tour to add a visit to the Sepilok Orangutan Centre, Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre and a night safari river cruise, with accommodation in a wetland resort in the middle of the jungle.

Brazil

This Latin American behemoth might not be the first country that comes to mind when considering a safari, but its Pantanal region is awash with unique wildlife-watching experiences that you won't find anywhere else.

“Brazil offers a honeymoon with a difference thanks to coastal hideaways, stunning Iguassu Falls and the wild Pantanal

Honeymooners might spot the stealthy jaguar, be oddly enchanted by hefty rodent the capybara, spot giant otters swimming through its waterways or come across the crocodile-like caiman lounging in the shallows. And that's before they even start on the rainbow-coloured array of birdlife, from the orange-

beaked toucan and the electric-blue hyacinth macaw to the surprisingly graceful jabiru stork.

After all that nature, hop over to Brazil's legendary beaches – but if clients picture the packed sands of Ipanema or Copacabana, fear not. There are many quieter stretches that don't require wearing a dental-floss bikini to match the locals. Sophie Tomlin, product executive at Latin Routes, says: "Brazil is perfect for those wanting a honeymoon with a difference. As well as remote coastal hideaways and deserted beaches for that all-important relaxation, you also have the stunning Iguassu Falls as well as the wild Pantanal, one of the world's best spots to see the elusive jaguar."

Tanzania

This east African country was practically made for safari-beach honeymoons, pairing world-famous wildlife in the Serengeti – just one of the stunning safari parks – with enviable island resorts on Zanzibar.

Accommodation ranges from affordable to out-of-this-world luxury, so the key here is tailoring a package to suit your clients' price range. Kuoni's Essential Tanzania tour, for example, includes a private guide and lodges that can be adjusted to suit couples' budgets.

From Arusha, the gateway to the northern circuit of national parks, honeymooners will be driven in a private 4x4 to the Ngorongoro Crater, where sweeping views of the caldera – a 100-square-mile crater formed by a huge volcanic eruption two million years ago – are punctuated by sightings of black rhinos, Masai lions and more.

Then comes the Serengeti, where the landscape is different but the wildlife even more impressive. It's famous for its annual wildebeest migration, but whatever time couples visit, they'll find herds of buffalo or elephants roaming its open plains, lions stalking their prey, lightning-fast cheetahs or leopards basking

lazily in the sun. Then they can reflect on their incredible sightings with a few days' relaxation on the white-sand shores of Zanzibar.

Botswana and Seychelles

Botswana positions itself at the upper end of the safari market, while the Seychelles sits in a similar position even among luxury Indian Ocean escapes, so they are a natural pairing for couples looking to push the boat out.

The magnificent Okavango Delta is the big drawcard for the former, its winding waterways weaving in and out through marshy grassland from the highlands of Angola to the barren sands of the Kalahari Desert, creating an oasis during the dry season, and best viewed from a *mokoro* (canoe) poled along its shallow channels.

Clients can expect a good level of luxury at any high-end lodge here, but Carrier recommends a route combining three andBeyond lodges, namely Nxabega Okavango Tented Camp, Xaranna Okavango Delta Camp and Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge. Follow that with a week in a private pool villa at Maia Luxury Resort in the Seychelles, and you can justify the hefty price tag. **TW**

BOOK IT

Kuoni's five-night Essential Tanzania tour with private 4x4 and driver-guide, staying full-board at Lemala Ngorongoro and Lemala Ewanian luxury tented camps, can be combined with a five-night beach stay at five-star Gold Zanzibar (half-board). Prices for a February 2021 departure start at £5,395, including Qatar Airways flights, transfers and entry to Ngorongoro Crater. kuoni.co.uk

Carrier offers a 15-night itinerary pairing a week fully-inclusive in the Okavango Delta with a week's all-inclusive at Maia Seychelles in an Ocean Panoramic Pool Villa with butler (with a massage, candlelit dinner and champagne), plus all flights and transfers, from £14,425 per person. Upgrade to Club World flights for £17,455. carrier.co.uk

Splurge



Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge, Botswana

PICTURES: Shutterstock; Steve Mann