

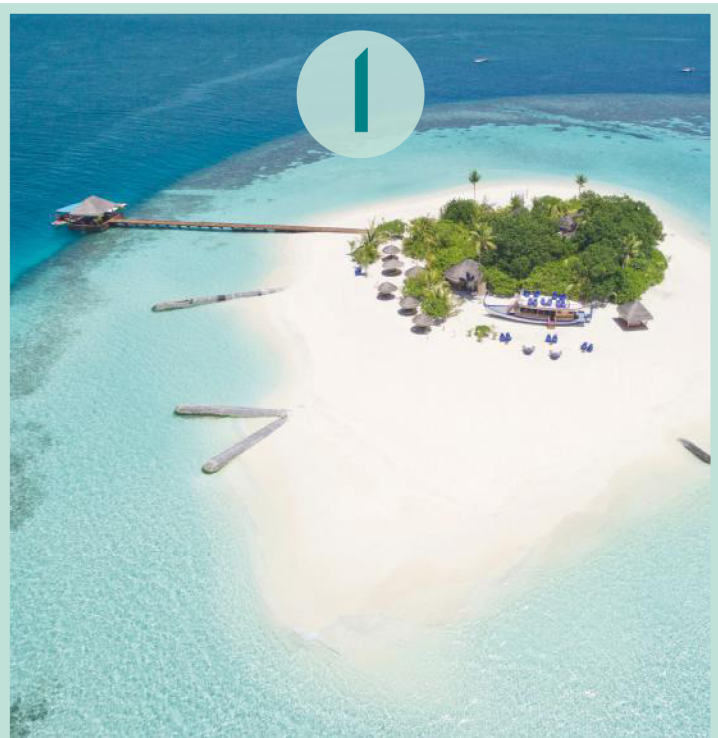
8 of the BEST

SECLUDED HONEYMOONS

Help couples get away from the crowds with off-the-beaten-track escapes à deux, writes **Katie McGonagle**

Secluded getaways are the order of the day right now, as travellers battle to leave busy areas behind in search of remote retreats. Yet long before Covid-19 came along, there was one market that was already intent on getting as far from other people as possible for all-important alone time.

Honeymoons are a lucrative sector, and for those unlucky couples who have had to postpone their nuptials from this year to next, it's even more important their first trip as newlyweds goes without a hitch. Here, we highlight some of the most romantic retreats sure to get married life off to a good start.



ESCAPE TO AN OVERWATER VILLA

The Maldives is top of the list for newlyweds and is Kuoni's most-requested honeymoon destination by quite some way, accounting for more than half of bookings, according to the operator's latest honeymoon trends report. The increase in demand for private villas and quiet, luxury escapes is only set to add to its appeal as resorts reopen for late 2020 and 2021. Kuoni recommends Maafushivaru (pictured), a small boutique resort in the South Ari Atoll due to reopen shortly after a refurbishment. Honeymoon extras include complimentary bed decoration, a fruit basket and a candlelit dinner with a bottle of sparkling wine.

Book it: Kuoni offers seven nights' half-board in a Beach Villa at Maafushivaru from £3,099 per person including Qatar Airways flights from Gatwick, for travel between January and March 2021. kuoni.co.uk



GO ALL OUT IN GREECE

Even the most-secluded suite in a sprawling resort can't compare to the privacy afforded by having your own villa in an out-of-the-way location, which is exactly what CV Villas' new Above collection is all about. The luxury range offers top-end properties with a twist, whether that's a private jetty and speedboat on hand or your own cinema and wine cellar, plus a concierge to arrange in-villa spa treatments or private chefs. Villa Glaros (pictured) on the small Greek island of Paxos offers plenty of 'wow' moments, not least sipping champagne in its private infinity pool while looking out across the sparkling blue Ionian Sea.

Book it: CV Villas offers a week at Villa Glaros from £1,281 per person including hydrofoil transfers and a day's private boat hire; flights not included. cvvillas.com

3

TAKE A TWIN-CENTRE TRIP

No one wants to rush home from honeymoon, so if clients have the luxury of a longer stay, it's a good opportunity to pair up an easily accessible destination with one that requires an onward flight. East Winds (pictured) in Saint Lucia has teamed up with Bequia Beach Hotel to create a standout honeymoon package using the new Bequia Air route between the islands. Couples spend seven nights at East Winds, where romantic add-ons include a champagne sunset cruise or chocolate-making class, then make their way to Bequia on a nine-seat aircraft to enjoy its empty, untouched beaches and emerald-green interior, with a superyacht cruise worth \$600 thrown in for good measure.

Book it: Elegant Resorts offers 14 nights in a Deluxe Cottage at East Winds and Beachfront Suite at Bequia Beach Hotel, both all-inclusive, plus flights, airport lounge passes and private transfers for £5,389 per person between January 20 and March 10, 2021. elegantresorts.co.uk



4

RECHARGE IN A JUNGLE RETREAT

Eco-luxe resorts are always a winner with honeymooners, offering the chance to reconnect with nature – and each other – while still allowing for little luxuries. Kalima Resort & Villas (pictured) in Khao Lak, Thailand, combines a jungle setting, surrounded by rubber plantations and wildlife-filled mangrove forests, with the golden sands of Khao Lak beach. Explore waterfalls at Sairung and Lampi, browse the stalls at Bangnieng afternoon market or take a boat trip around the area's neighbouring islands, then return for a dip in the beachfront infinity pool or an early evening cocktail at the open-air beach bar.

Book it: Emirates Holidays offers a week at five-star Kalima Resort & Villas in Khao Lak from £975 per person including breakfast and upgrade to Grand Deluxe Room, and Emirates flights from Heathrow, valid from June 1 to July 10, 2021. emiratesholidays.com



5



DRIVE THROUGH THE HEART OF FRANCE

It would be hard to think of a more agreeable way to spend a week than pootling through the French countryside, stopping off at cellar doors for a snifter of champagne or strolling through the finely manicured gardens of grand chateaux, before retiring to a beautiful abode specially chosen for its quirky character or idyllic views. That's exactly what awaits those who opt for Abercrombie & Kent's Loire Valley self-drive, where a tailor-made itinerary might include expert-led champagne tastings in Epernay, a chance to find out the real story behind Dom Pérignon in Hautvillers, and time to explore the fairytale castles and quaint medieval villages of the Loire Valley (pictured) at their own pace.

Book it: Abercrombie & Kent offers a Champagne & Loire Valley Luxury Self-Drive Tour from £2,969 for seven nights, including car hire, high-end accommodation and private tours. abercrombiekent.co.uk



SPLASH OUT ON SAFARI

A honeymoon will probably be the most expensive, most adventurous trip your clients have ever taken, so it's worth pushing the boat out with an experience that deserves its higher price tag – and in the safari world, that means Botswana. Wilderness Safaris can loop together a circuit staying at small-scale camps such as the new Little DumaTau, a four-suite property opening later this year within the main DumaTau camp. By opting for smaller, more-secluded accommodation, couples will enjoy the true safari experience – think wandering out of the tent to find an elephant drinking from their private pool, or sipping sundowners on a private game drive while herds of zebra cross the plains ahead – and can guarantee they'll see more animals than people during their stay.

Book it: Mahlatini Luxury Travel offers a seven-night honeymoon staying at Wilderness Safaris camps – two nights at Jao Camp, two at Little DumaTau and three at Mombo – from £10,150, with all-inclusive accommodation, flights from London, transfers and daily activities, in March 2021. mahlatini.com



6

WATCH SUNSET FROM A CLIFFTOP VILLA

Striking the right balance between finding a secluded place to stay while still enjoying all the facilities of a resort can be a challenge, so if couples want the best of both worlds, suggest upgrading to a quiet, out-of-the-way spot within a bigger property. The Sunset Bluff Oceanfront Two Storey One Bedroom Butler Villa Suites at Sandals Regency La Toc in Saint Lucia are set 50 feet above sea level, so couples can admire views over the Caribbean Sea from their private terrace or their very own plunge pool. They've also got the added benefit of a butler, a choice of bars and restaurants, and other hotel facilities, so if they fancy a quiet dinner in their private dining area, all they have to do is lift the phone.

Book it: Prices for a week's all-inclusive with BA flights from Gatwick start at £3,050 for travel from September 1 to October 15, 2021. If the honeymoon is within 30 days of the wedding, register for free upgrades including a flower petal turndown service and breakfast in bed one morning. sellingsandals.co.uk

8

ESCAPE TO THE COUNTRY IN IRELAND

You don't have to fly far to get away from it all, with plenty of out-of-the-way rural retreats right on our doorstep. Ballyfin Demesne in County Laois, set at the foot of the Slieve Bloom mountains in the heart of Ireland, is one such refuge, where couples can recover from the stress of the big day in total tranquillity. Adjacent to the main manor house, the one-bedroom Gardener's Cottage (pictured) has views over the estate's enormous lake at the front and a private hot tub to the rear, plus couples can cosy up in front of one of its two fireplaces after a day spent fishing, hiking or cycling through 600 acres of private grounds.

Book it: The Gardener's Cottage at Ballyfin Demesne costs £1,790 per night including all meals (which can be delivered to the cottage or eaten in the main house), soft drinks and minibar. relaischateaux.com



PICTURES: Shutterstock; Karry Media Productions; CrookesAndJackson