



Trip of a lifetime

With more couples planning ultra-bucket list honeymoons in the wake of the pandemic, **Adam Shaw** explores the growing trend

After countless newlyweds were forced to put their dream trips on hold in 2020 and 2021, it seems that honeymooners are now opting to go much bigger with their travel plans, giving rise to a new booking phenomenon: the 'megamoon'.

These trips are essentially souped-up honeymoons, with many who were forced to postpone deciding to spend more on their post-wedding trips now travel is more predictable again – as a reward for having to wait.

Others, fearing a similar global event could derail travel plans in the future, are choosing to splash out on that once-in-a-lifetime journey sooner rather than later.

MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME

Alex Bentley, head of product at Audley Travel, notes that, when it comes to honeymoons, both average spend and length of trip are higher than pre-pandemic levels.

He says: "As a tailor-made operator, itineraries designed around a client's personal wish list are our core business and the demand for once-in-a-lifetime trips to mark a return to travel is strong, especially from newlyweds who have had to delay their honeymoon.

"Our specialists recommend honeymooners add a touch of luxury to their trip where they can, whether that is a private tour of one of the destination's top spots or

“Couples are booking everything from luxury island getaways to the Maldives and Mauritius, as well as more adventurous trips

booking a night in a penthouse apartment or a private villa with a butler to truly make the most of the trip.”

Scott Dunn has introduced new megamoon itineraries – “bucket-list trips guaranteed to create long-lasting memories” – with one combining the winter wonderland of Finnish Lapland with the Maldives.

The operator's global sales and product director Simon Lynch explains why the new itineraries were introduced: “In a recent survey more than 55% of guests identified making up for lost time as a driving factor for ➤

DESTINATIONS

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ASK THE expert



Leah Marshall,
director of sales,
Unique Vacations UK

“For agents looking to sell Sandals and Beaches Resorts to their honeymoon clients, I’d recommend discussing budget versus requirements first and working backwards from there. Are they set on a particular room category, resort, or timeframe? If they have a bigger budget to play with, start off with our signature Love Nest Butler Suites and work your way down, if needed.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Conrad Rangali Island and Resort; on safari in the Masai Mara; Marigot Bay, Saint Lucia; Milaidhoo Island Maldives

booking and this is especially the case for honeymooners after two years of postponed weddings and trips.

“Couples are booking everything from luxury island getaways to the Maldives and Mauritius, as well as more adventurous trips to Africa, Latin America and Asia and we have noticed an appetite for tailor-made, multi-destination trips.”

He adds that many couples who went on a smaller trip closer to home after their wedding – the so-called ‘minimoon’ – are opting for grander holidays to celebrate their marriage now they can book with more confidence as restrictions have eased.

BEST OF THE BEACHES

Operators have pointed out that luxury stays in the Indian Ocean are still popular with newlyweds. A survey by Expedia found 30% of UK-based couples planning their honeymoon were looking at tropical islands, with the Maldives topping the list of preferred destinations and the Seychelles also in the top five.

The Caribbean remains in demand, with the promise of romance, shimmering turquoise waters and breathtaking resorts among the key reasons for booking.

Saint Lucia, with its lush rainforests and iconic Pitons, is consistently sought after and was recently named the

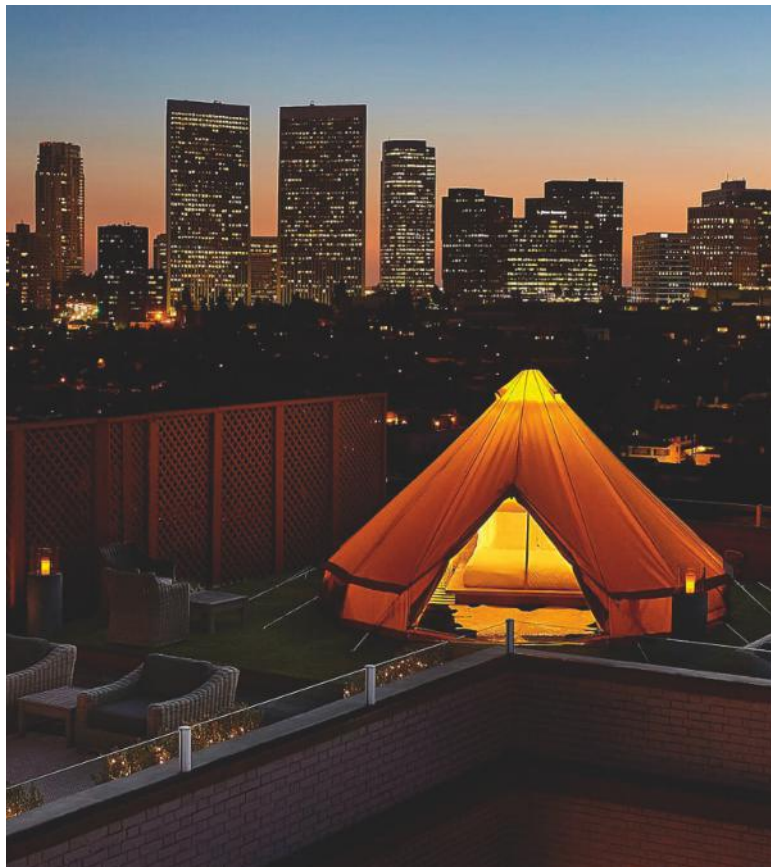
“Luxury experiences can start with helicopter transfers. Couples can arrange private dinners, with champagne delivered by a zipline.”

Caribbean’s top honeymoon destination at the World Travel Awards. Patricia Charlery-Leon, director of UK and Europe at the Saint Lucia Tourist Board, says: “It is a popular choice with honeymooners as there is a real breadth of hotels and experiences and, of course, the stunning beauty of the island as a backdrop.”

“Luxury experiences can start with helicopter transfers upon arrival, private boat trips or a romantic sunset cruise. Couples can arrange private beach dinners, with champagne delivered by a zipline. Romantic spa treatments on the beach or spas can be easily arranged.”

GLITZ AND GLAMOUR

Others are choosing the glitz and glamour of swanky US destinations, with America the fourth most-popular honeymoon spot for couples in Britain according to an Expedia poll.



ABOVE: Beverly Wilshire Glamping ABOVE RIGHT: Celebrity hangout Beverly Hills has received an uplift in interest from honeymooning couples PICTURES: Beverly Hills Conference & Visitors Bureau

There has been a “significant uplift” in couples booking to go to the celebrity hangout of Beverly Hills in recent months, with newlyweds looking to experience what it’s like to live like a star in the city’s luxury hotels and explore its palm-lined streets.

Julie Wagner, chief executive of Beverly Hills Conference and Visitors Bureau, explains that honeymoon postponements have helped couples realise how important it is to spend quality time together and create incredible memories, with many looking to “fulfil their bucket list in style”.

“Specifically, what we are seeing in Beverly Hills is that people want beautiful hotels and exclusive services that can completely cater to their needs, along with fantastic food and high-end shopping, allowing them to focus on each other,” she says.

While traditional honeymoons are the go-to for many couples, there has been a move towards people booking alternative experiences. More expensive multi-city trips are becoming increasingly popular, like road trips through romantic European destinations such as France and Italy.

EPIC ADVENTURES

There has also been a shift towards more adventure-themed honeymoons, with couples opting to take in dream diving trips or wild jungle treks after tying the knot.

Safaris remain the biggest draw for those looking for an extra special holiday, with African Bush Camp’s head of marketing, Andrew Bridge, noting there has been an almost 100% increase in interest in its Romantic Africa tour compared with before the pandemic.

fast fact

Luxury European trips remain popular with celebrities, with A-listers Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez honeymooning in Italy’s Lake Como in August.

ASK THE expert



Ciara Hazley, concierge manager, Audley Travel

“We recommend once-in-a-lifetime experiences that can’t be found in a guidebook, such as travelling to a private mountain-top picnic by helicopter from a Canadian wilderness lodge, sleeping under the stars on Botswana’s salt flats or enjoying wine tastings on a private cycling tour through the caves of a Loire Valley winery.”



Yoho National Park, Canada

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Stephen Bridger