

# How to Choose a Honeymoon Destination

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## PICK A PLACE

Deciding where to go is exciting, but it can be a little overwhelming, too. If you're having trouble narrowing down the choices, you and your fiancé should each write a list of your top five dream destinations and compare notes.

You might find that one place appears on both, so start there -- or if the location really is a pipe dream, focus instead on that type of experience. If you both chose Bali, for example, but know it's out of your budget, look to a more affordable spot like Mexico, which is also rich in culture and replete with dreamy beaches. Here are some tips and ideas for figuring out if you want an urban escape, action-filled adventure, beach getaway, or carefree cruise to celebrate your first days together as husband and wife.



## BIG CITY TRIPS

For couples who love wandering through museums, dining in fine restaurants, and sipping cocktails in sexy lounges, a big city is just the ticket. Paris is a classic choice, but it can get pricey. Instead, consider less-expensive Buenos Aires, Argentina, which is a little gritty but completely captivating, with old mansions, sidewalk cafes, and chic boutiques (in a district called SoHo, no less). Other up-and-comers include Lisbon, Portugal -- like a European San Francisco with trolley cars, hilly streets, and even a grand bridge -- and Istanbul, Turkey, which has exotic bazaars, magnificent mosques, and palaces lining the Bosphorus. Or hang closer to home: New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas are honeymoon standards. But you can also delight in the music scene and creative vibe of bohemian Austin, Texas; check out Santa Fe, New Mexico, for its art galleries and fabulous food; and even have a blast in Chicago (in the summer) with its unbeatable restaurants and historic blues clubs.

## CITY POINTERS

Buy theater tickets, arrange passes for special art exhibits, and make reservations at popular restaurants well in advance. Pack stylish yet comfy clothes for the day, and a few hot little numbers to slip on once the sun goes down. Consider traveling in the off-season; you'll save money and won't see as many tourists. When heading abroad, a good way to understand the lay of the land is to hire a private guide for one of your first days in town. Most hotels can recommend someone stellar, but you can also stop by the tourism board's office once you arrive, or check out their site before you leave.

## **ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURES**

If you're dreaming of hiking to waterfalls and falling asleep in the jungle, heed the call of the wild. Look into national parks, eco-lodges, and glamping (aka glamorous camping) trips. Close-to-home options include Costa Rica or Belize, which have jaguars, howler monkeys, and properties that are as luxe as they are earth-friendly. For a far-flung locale, New Zealand offers hikes on the Queen Charlotte Track by day and pampering at upscale hotels by night, while safaris at places like San Camp in Botswana manage to be glamorous and thrilling at the same time. And winter-sport fanatics might want to stay in a spot like the Canadian Rockies' Purcell Mountain Lodge, accessible only by helicopter, or an upscale ski resort, like the Romantik Hotel Schwizerhof Grindelwald in the Swiss Alps.

## **ADVENTURE POINTERS**

For forays into the great outdoors, the season is critical. Will it be warm enough for hiking or cold enough for skiing? If you are thinking of visiting a national park, remember that some of the biggies, like Yellowstone, get so much snow that some roads are closed well into April. And national-park lodges fill up months in advance, so reserve early.

## **BEACH GETAWAYS**

Relaxation 101: Find sand. Spread towel. Lie down. Sigh. There's a beach out there with your name on it -- from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean to the South Pacific and Central America. In some spots, like the Maldives or the island of Anguilla, the beach is the main event. But in others, like Greece, India, and Brazil, sand comes with a side of culture. For a quick weekend trip, Key West, Florida, has quaint bed-and-breakfasts and a kicking nightlife scene; Cape May, New Jersey, is dominated by Victorian architecture; and North Carolina's Outer Banks region combines history with nature, good restaurants, and great surf breaks.

## **BEACH POINTERS**

All-inclusive resorts, where meals, drinks, activities, and tips are included in the price, can take the guesswork out of travel, but they can also cut you off from the surrounding area, make you pay for things you never used (like, say, Jet Skis), and are often filled with families -- not exactly honeymoon material. It's possible, though, to find a gorgeous boutique-y all-inclusive, like Tiamo in the Bahamas. Or, steer clear of all-inclusive entirely, for a personalized trip where you'll actually get a taste of local life.

## **CAREFREE CRUISES**

Many couples sail the seas, but not all pick the same sort of ship. Some mega-vessels are like floating resorts, carrying well-known spas and signature-chef restaurants. Cunard's Queen Mary 2, for example, can hold 2,620 passengers and even has a full-size planetarium onboard. At the other end of the spectrum are small expedition ships, such as the National Geographic Explorer, a 148-passenger boat, with itineraries that include Antarctica, Norway, Russia, and the British

Isles. In between are more traditional ships, like Holland America's ms Westerdam, which voyages to Alaska and the Caribbean.

### **CRUISE POINTERS**

Rather than choosing a boat based on its size or itinerary, get an idea of its personality by checking out its reviews online (Cruise Critic is a great resource). Will the partying go on late into the night? Is dinner always formal, or are jeans okay? Also ask a cruise representative about prices for shore excursions and tipping policies. Most lines don't include the cost of either, which can rack up your expenses. Finally, consider planning your own sightseeing trips. This will let you break away from the crowd and experience a more authentic side of the destination.

By Martha Stewart Weddings