

THE PERFECT HONEYMOON TRIP

The Maldives

Why? Because there's absolutely nothing to do (this is a honeymoon we're talking about). Hotels here are cooler than in the Caribbean, flights are easier than to the Seychelles, and there's no overdevelopment as in Mauritius. In fact, each hotel occupies its own tiny island – perfect for that (posh) castaway fantasy.

THE 10 TRUTHS

Stay close to the capital. A honeymoon's all about the first night, so arrive fresh and make it memorable. Most UK flights arrive mid-morning, so if you choose a resort near to the capital, Malé, you'll be in your room in time for a lunchtime nap. (Go further afield and transfers can mean you don't arrive 'til evening.) Anantara Dhigu, a 35-minute boat ride from the airport, has stylish thatched beach villas from £1,499pp a week, B&B, with Gatwick flights, through Hayes & Jarvis (0844 855 4488, www.hayesandjarvis.com).

Don't rule out all-inclusives. Nothing dampens romance like keeping check on your spouse's alcohol and pudding consumption ('Just water tonight, darling'), but with dinner averaging £85pp, it can add up fast. All-inclusives here are less tacky than elsewhere; our favourite is Moofushi on South Ari Atoll, which has several restaurants, a great wine list and free minibars. A week costs £2,616pp, with flights from Gatwick, through The Private Travel Company (020 3131 2528, www.theprivatetravelcompany.com).

Back away from B&B. If you don't go for all-in, haggle for full board – buying piecemeal is more expensive (£30 a main). For example, the Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa costs from £2,200pp per week, B&B, with flights, through Exsus (020 7337 9010, www.exsus.com), but full board is only another £885.

Budget for booze. Full board means you'll still be paying for drinks, and they ain't cheap. A mediocre bottle of wine could cost £50. And you can't bring in duty-free – you're not allowed to bring alcohol into the Maldives.

Test the water. Activities in the Maldives are mostly based underwater, so check how close your resort is to the best sites before you book – some can be an hour's boat ride away. Also check your island has a good house reef for snorkelling. Get the best diving-included deals by booking through a dive specialist such as Dive Worldwide (0845 130 6980, www.diveworldwide.com).

Time your trip. The country isn't great when it rains, so unless you're a spa lover, avoid low season when there are frequent downpours – June and July are the worst monsoon months.

Check the tranquillity factor. For peace and quiet, choose a resort that doesn't have motorised sports, such as Cocoa Island, with its whitewashed rooms, billowing muslin and

no speedboats. Sally and Alice (07780 870085, www.sallyandalice.com) has seven nights from £2,698pp, B&B, with Gatwick flights.

Save a shed-load with soft openings. Glitzy new resorts are constantly unveiled, often with highly competitive deals. Niyama is the hot new spot for 2012, complete with an underwater nightclub. ITC Classics (01244 355550, www.itcclassics.co.uk) has a week from £2,475pp, half board, with Gatwick flights – an £810pp saving on the rack rate.

Avoid cabin fever. If you're a restless soul, a tiny island could drive you insane, so go for somewhere such as Shangri-La Villingili – big enough to have a golf course, and an easy cycle via over-sea bridges to other islands. Bailey Robinson (01488 689777, www.baileyrobinson.com) has a week from £2,530pp, B&B, with Heathrow or Gatwick flights.

Don't rule out a beach villa. Everyone wants an overwater room, so they're often more expensive, and as they're laid out in rows, not always that private. Beach villas, on the other hand, often come with their own secluded patches of sand and private plunge pools.

THE ALTERNATIVES

The shoestring option: Supremely exotic, Zanzibar has heavenly beaches as well as the fascinating Unesco World Heritage Site of Stone Town. Blue Oyster (00 255 7830 45796, www.zanzibar.de), near Jambiani village on the east coast, has doubles with four-posters from £50. Oman Air (0844 482 2309, www.omanair.com) has flights from Heathrow from £449 return.

The bookish option: If your betrothed is a touch nerdy, try Messinia on mainland Greece, for a brilliant blend of beach and culture. The Romanos at Costa Navarino hotel is set on a swathe of sand close to ancient Olympia and the Temple of Apollo. Sovereign (0844 415 1984, www.sovereign.com) has a week from £1,399pp, B&B, including Gatwick flights.

The party option: Night owls should head to Cuba: explore Havana, learn to salsa and then chill on the Caribbean's most underrated beaches. The Ultimate Travel Company (020 3603 9374, www.theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk) has 10 nights, split between Havana and Cayo Lago del Sur island, off the south coast, from £1,345pp, including Gatwick flights.

The wild option: If you want to ogle other animals as well as each other, little-known archipelago Con Dao, off Vietnam's southern coast, is a great spot to combine nature and the beach. Bridge & Wickers (020 7483 6555, www.bridgeandwickers.co.uk) has a week at Six Senses on Con Son Island from £1,820pp, B&B, including Gatwick flights. >

