

HONEYMOON HOTSPOTS

4 UNIQUELY FABULOUS SITES FOR ROMANCE & RELAXATION

As the first and most memorable trip you will take as newlyweds, your honeymoon should be the decadent dessert waiting at the end of the feast. After months of planning every little detail of your special day, your honeymoon is your chance to finally wind down, cuddle up and focus on one another. But the idea of what entails a “romantic escape” can be as unique as the couple imagining that perfect getaway. Dreaming of sharing a sunset in the mountains? Craving a golden stretch of sand to curl up on together? Wanting to sip Champagne after a side-by-side massage? Or do you envision adventure-filled days followed by fine-dining nights? No matter what your honeymoon fantasy, there’s a good chance one of these unique hotspots will bring it to life.

1. ATLANTIS PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS

www.atlantisbahamas.com

This world-renowned, ocean-themed resort is a honeymooner’s heaven. Built around eight million gallons of fresh and saltwater pools, lagoons and waterfalls, Atlantis Paradise Island boasts one of the

world’s largest marine habitats, a 141-acre Aquaventure waterscape brimming with thrilling rides and slides, and three serene beaches where pearly sand meets clear blue sea.

Recently, Atlantis launched its honeymoon program, offering guests three separate enhancement packages designed to make their getaway the ultimate newlywed experience. “We wanted to turn the honeymoon experience into something unique,” says Jessi Hill, executive director of weddings and special events for Atlantis Paradise Island. “Our passionate team of dedicated honeymoon specialists is truly committed to ensuring that couples have the best possible experience during their first week of wedded bliss.”

Atlantis offers five levels of resort options for guests, but The Cove is its most luxurious, featuring lavish, oversized junior suites with unrivaled ocean views. Guests staying at The Cove also enjoy exclusive access to the Cain at the Cove, the adults-only ultra pool dotted with 20 posh private cabanas, where they can bask in the sun while sipping a cocktail and indulging in a bit of outdoor gaming.

WRITER MAURI ELBEL



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ATLANTIS PARADISE ISLAND



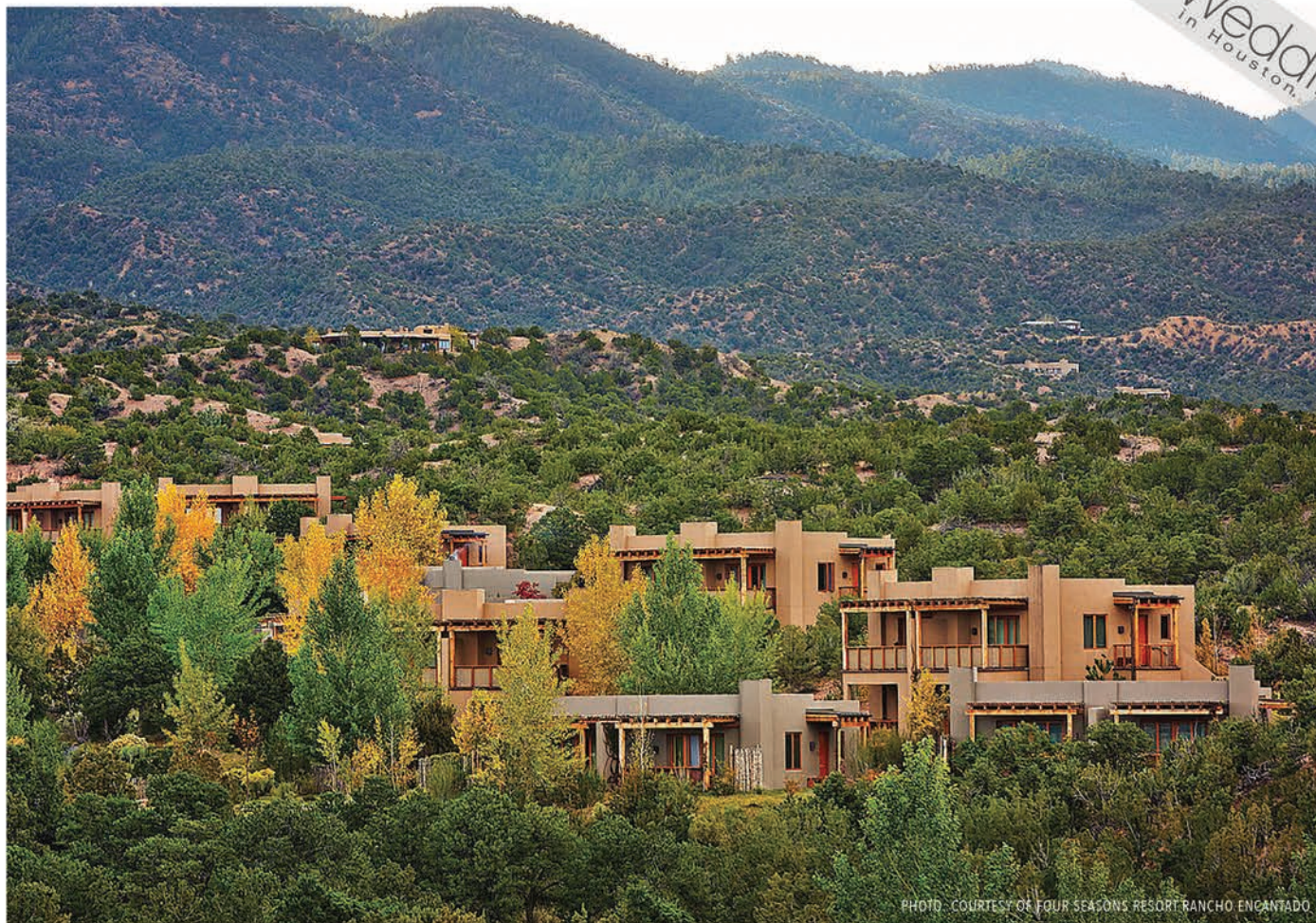


PHOTO: COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS RESORT RANCHO ENCANTADO

Adventurous couples can get their thrills at Aquaventure, while those wanting to share a once-in-a-lifetime memory can book a magical in-water interaction with a rescued dolphin at Dolphin Cay. Whatever you do, be sure to sneak in a romantic embrace beneath the single swaying palm at Palm Point, walk hand-in-hand through The Dig (a maze of underwater corridors and passages weaving through ancient Atlantic), and take a sunset stroll on secluded Paradise Beach.

2. FOUR SEASONS RANCHO ENCANTADO, SANTA FE

www.fourseasons.com/santafe

Set among 57 unspoiled acres, the Four Seasons Resort Rancho Encantado Santa Fe is tucked into the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and located just 10 minutes from the galleries, shops and distinctive architecture of historic Santa Fe. The resort's 65 casita rooms and suites feature their own fireplaces and private terraces where couples can gaze out on the vast Jemez Mountains and Rio Grande Valley.

Whether sipping cocktails while marveling at one of Santa Fe's incredible sunsets, or rejuvenating in the Four Seasons Rancho Encantado's world-class spa, known for its regionally inspired treatments and tranquil indoor/outdoor treatment rooms, newlyweds are immersed in romance and relaxation from the moment they set foot on the property. "Santa Fe's relaxed

atmosphere leads to a change of pace for couples," says Gina Valdes, sales and marketing coordinator for Rancho Encantado. "Its walkability makes it a great place to wander galleries, enjoy world-renowned restaurants, go shopping and learn about the history of the oldest capital city in the United States."

And whether you opt to rest your head in one of the property's private deluxe casitas, or in a luxury suite featuring sprawling outdoor terraces complete with fireplaces, you will enjoy filling your days with not-to-miss newlywed activities.

The resort spa's "Art of Surrender" massage allows couples to retreat together to the privacy of their suite for total relaxation. "A warm, open-air soak combined with a relaxing sauna, and signature head-to-toe massage, melts away tension while releasing the mind and body from stress," says Valdes.

Custom excursions from Rancho Encantado include everything from exhilarating bike rides through beautiful aspen-lined mountains to historic tours through downtown Santa Fe. Steal a smooch while cuddled up in the resort's signature red Adirondack chairs overlooking breathtaking vistas, or soak in the sunset from the Camino Encantado hiking trail. The ultimate romantic dining experience awaits in the Chef's Garden, a true garden-to-table dining experience, where you'll experience award-winning American cuisine beneath a starry night sky.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF OASIS HOTELS & RESORTS

3. GRAND OASIS SENS BY OASIS HOTELS & RESORTS, CANCUN

oasishoteles.net | www.senscancun.com

Newlyweds can get lost in an exotic beach paradise within two hours of leaving

Houston when honeymooning at Grand Oasis Sens. Cancun's prime honeymoon destination sits upon an idyllic powdery beach lapped by turquoise seas. Setting it apart from other Cancun hotels, Grand

Oasis Sens is an adults-only property located in a quieter area of the world-famous Hotel Zone, allowing couples to enjoy romantic solitude while on property with the option of venturing out to experience Cancun's legendary nightlife, a mere five minutes away.

Willing to splurge on the resort's most luxurious accommodations (this is your honeymoon, after all)? Book the resort's brand-new bridal suite, which boasts an expansive terrace with a private gazebo, and a Bali bed for sunbathing while looking out on panoramic views of the Caribbean ocean.

Dining options abound: Head to Hacienda Benazusa, the crown jewel of the resort's portfolio; The Box Gastrobar, a tapas-style restaurant by chef Rafael Zafra; or, for a truly one-of-a-kind dining experience, enter The Black Hole, a "dark-dining" adventure where guests use every sense except sight to savor a superb multi-course meal. "Each of these gourmet dining options offers a completely unique experience that couples will never forget," says Paloma Flores, weddings director for Oasis Hotels & Resorts.

If playtime is part of your plan, charter a yacht for a romantic sunset cruise, enjoy a couple's spa treatment while taking advantage of the Grand Sens spa's outdoor hydrotherapy circuit, Flores recommends. She adds that Sakura Sunset Restaurant creates an ideal setting for sipping Champagne while watching the sun sink behind picturesque Nichupté Lagoon. Or, for the ultimate in intimate dining, arrange for a private moonlit dinner right on the sand. "Whether for the foodie couple or the couple looking for sensuous relaxation, Grand Oasis Sens is an ideal honeymoon destination," says Flores. "Everything that newlyweds can hope to do on their honeymoon can be found at just one resort."

 An advertisement for Four Seasons Resort Rancho Encantado Santa Fe. The background is a photograph of an outdoor wedding reception set on a stone patio overlooking a valley at sunset. Rows of black chairs with white cushions are arranged for guests. A white canopy is visible in the background. The text is overlaid on the image.

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4. RITZ-CARLTON BAL HARBOUR, MIAMI

www.balharbourflorida.com

Unlike the bustling beaches you'll find along much of Florida's coastline, Bal Harbour offers couples a golden stretch of secluded serenity. Sitting on the northern tip of buzzing Miami Beach, Bal Harbour drips with extravagance from everywhere in this one-square-mile exclusive enclave.

If starting married life on a semi-private stretch of sand amidst exceptional luxury sounds tempting, book a stay at The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour—one of the four opulent hotels in the area. "Graced by white sand beaches and turquoise waters, The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour is a stunning retreat for the senses," says Kristina Walstatter, director of catering. The hotel's iconic 18-story glass tower sits along a coveted 750-foot expanse of beautiful Bal Harbour Beach where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Intracoastal Waterway.

Take in unobstructed ocean views from the hotel's 124 guest rooms and suites, which range in size from 510 to 2,800 square feet. Perfect for honeymooners, ocean-view one-bedroom suites boast two incredible views: the sparkling Atlantic Ocean and the

stretch of Bal Harbour all the way to dazzling Miami. Bathrooms feature freestanding egg-shaped tubs positioned in front of floor-to-ceiling windows with in-mirror televisions and showers built for two.

If you can be persuaded to leave the luxury of your guest room, you may want to peruse the 100 posh shops that have made Bal Harbour Miami's most fashionable beach destination. Of course, you could always stay on property and simply cozy up in a plush daybed poolside, or reserve a private cabana with its own plunge pool. "The honeymooners' ultimate escape would include a retreat to our row of private cabanas complete with personal hot tubs enveloped in tropical flora," says Walstatter.

For pampering, look no further than Exhale Spa, an idyllic sanctuary for unwinding and disconnecting. "Newlyweds can find their moment of zen with our Couple's Treatment, offering tandem tension relief." For a romantic dining experience, savor South Florida's flavors at Bistro Bal Harbour, the resort's fresh-from-the-sea-to-table dining experience. Afterward, stroll to the picturesque point where the Atlantic meets the Intracoastal for a steamy smooch session.