

PLANNING THE PERFECT HONEYMOON

By **Brown + Hudson**

Creating the perfect honeymoon requires passion, imagination and attention to detail. After all, this is an experience, which you will both remember and cherish for years to come. It is as much a part of your wedding as the ceremony itself and should be seen as part of the same story. The most amazing and memorable honeymoons usually blend engaging experiences with decadent time spent relaxing and being pampered. Plenty of personal touches will go a long way in creating a trip you will never forget. Here are a few tips from bespoke travel experts Brown + Hudson.

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The key is to give meaning to the experience

To elevate your honeymoon above other holidays and journeys you undertake, you should aim to create a trip full of experiences that are truly meaningful to you both. Meaning can be derived from who you are as people, where you met and what you have in common in terms of interests, the books you read, movies you love etc. Given enough thought, even a beach honeymoon can deliver deeper meaning, turning it into something greater than 'fly and flop'.

Meaning can inspire the overall theme of the honeymoon and generate ideas for individual highlights. For example, if your fiancée gets teary whenever she watches Flipper, you could either create a honeymoon in Southern Florida in the footsteps of everyone's favorite dolphin, or at least make sure she gets to swim with Dolphins somewhere along the way.

Visualize your honeymoon

This takes time and imagination but this is one of the keys to creating an exquisitely crafted, truly bespoke honeymoon. It's essential to set aside some quiet time to visualize how every step of your honeymoon will go from the moment you leave the wedding party to the minute you return home. Imagine each step of the way, each moment of every day and ask yourself how could you improve your bride's experience? How can you be surprisingly delightful and exceptionally romantic? Don't worry, you're probably not setting a precedent for how the rest of your life together will be but this is the perfect time to pull out all the romantic, thoughtful and considerate stops.

Timing

Consider whether you want the classic honeymoon following on straight from the wedding, have a honeymoon later, when you have recovered or when the season is right for your chosen destination/ activities. Perhaps you might opt for a mini-moon immediately after the wedding and a longer honeymoon later (that could be a themed continuation or second chapter) so you get both.

Consider the scale of the wedding. If the honeymoon follows straight after the festivities, depending on your energy levels perhaps plan for a few days at a spa to relax, before going into the active honeymoon (unless your honeymoon is a spa honeymoon). If the spa-prelude to the honeymoon isn't an option, book time for treatments and massages early on to de-stress from the wedding and travel.

Getting there

Travelling from A to B (and B to C etc.) is an integral part of the honeymoon, yet often it doesn't enjoy the planning TLC it deserves.

Imagine you just left the wedding party and you're heading to the airport ... How will you get there? What will be the nicest possible experience for your bride? Getting into the back of your local minicab or, for once in your life, opting for an elegant chauffeur driven car and being whisked effortlessly and speedily through security and border formalities all the way to the aircraft. And then on arrival, you could queue at immigration, fend off pesky luggage porters, and then haggle for a taxi ride with the dubious characters in arrivals - or even worse, wait for a free hotel bus. Instead, why not arrange to be met at the aircraft door, be swept through formalities into a waiting limousine and go straight to your room, where your luggage is already waiting for you? Sexy.

If you have connecting flights with long layovers at airports, try to organize some entertainment, or secure special access to members-only lounges where you can relax, or go to an airport hotel for spa treatments. Nothing interrupts the flow of a wonderful honeymoon more than a long wait in a noisy, grubby airport.

On a scheduled flight

Your bride's dream has always been to see Everest? Well on your flight into Thimphu Bhutan, select window seats on the left of the aircraft so that you can see Everest on the way in. When you're leaving Punta Arenas and flying north, get seats on the right of the aircraft to see the Patagonian Icefield and its myriad glaciers. Find out the side of the plane with the best views for your own flights before confirming your seats. Or better still choose the kind of company who thinks of this kind of thing for you.

In a small plane

So you've opted to get from C to D in a small-chartered plane. Great, but make sure that the flight is fully tailored to you. You and your bride don't like bumpy flights? Ask the pilot to fly higher to minimize the turbulence. You want better views of the wildlife you're flying over? Let the pilot know and he'll fly lower.

You want to make a particular part of the flight extra dramatic? Consider having the pilot play your bride's favorite tune. If you're both keen photographers charter a plane with windows that open so that you get the best possible pictures without any irritating glare or reflections. If you ask nicely the pilot will even tip the wing when you want to take a shot so that your pictures are perfectly wing-free.

Many small charter companies will offer specially made seat covers for minimal extra cost. How romantic would it be to have your names stitched on your seat covers as a surprise?

Other transportation

Select your modes of transport creatively, so going from E to F becomes part of the fun. Choose from motor or sail boats, rickshaws, dug-out canoes, to yachts and cruisers, open jeeps or local jeepneys, mules and camels, hot air balloons or helis, to limousines or the humble Trabant for a city tour of Berlin. Don't forget that walking can also be a perfectly romantic way of discovering a city's old quarter.

Think of interesting breaks and diversions. For instance, imagine you're in Vietnam traveling from Dalat to Nha Trang. Ask your driver to stop if he sees a local wedding taking place. At weddings in Vietnam it is incredibly auspicious to have foreigners as guests. On your honeymoon, how cool would it be to be invited to someone else's wedding and celebrate with them?

In your hotel

Ensure hotels have all your personal details and copies of passports before you start the trip so tedious check-in procedures are avoided and you can head straight for your room/hammock/safari vehicle/or the beach. If tipping is part of the culture of your chosen destination, you should always have small change ready to avoid embarrassing moments.

Ask hotels what honeymoon packages they might offer (many do). You could get some great extras, but plan them carefully because if each hotel gives you petals in the tub and a bottle Champagne, these romantic surprises become repetitive. Check what highlights and 'surprises' your hotel might be planning for you and see how you can choreograph them into a seamless story. If you're staying at just one hotel or rental property then how will you make each day of your honeymoon special?

It's obvious, but start by selecting the right room: if you're traveling from dreary London then you might prefer room 5 that gets lot of morning light. Oh you're South African and prefer to flee daylight and prefer shade and lazy mornings in bed? Suite 15 is shadier. Your passion is birding? Then room 7 has a huge balcony perfect for that. Call the hotels and speak to someone who can describe their rooms and the specific room they have in mind for you.

Check menus at hotels and restaurants well in advance to make sure there are things you and your bride like to eat, or ask them to have specials for you. If they don't have your favorite tippie in the cellar, you could ask them to source it for the occasion. To create meal highlights, brief the hotels and lodges to put on surprise meals in different locations just for you (a BBQ on the beach or roof, a breakfast in the bush or on a secluded terrace), they are used to these requests.

Get the wedding photographer to send you a top shot from the wedding, which you forward to the hotels and ask them to put it in a frame on the bedside table. Find out what the flower theme is of the wedding and continue it on the honeymoon. Finally, stock the minibar at every hotel you stay at with her favorite bubbly, wine, spirits, and snacks.

Romantic personal touches

Generally speaking, plan your thoughtful touches, surprises and highlights throughout the honeymoon and build towards a crescendo. Here are some ideas...

You're in Switzerland. They make great chocolate there. You HAPPEN to be in a wonderful chocolate shop – could someone have magically created a heart-shaped chocolate that says Tim & Lucy and left it somewhere prominent for lovely Lucy to discover?

You're visiting a watch factory... Would they let you make your very own watch?? Could the last piece you put on, the back of the watch, have a special loving message engraved upon it?

You're in the South of France visiting Grasse, the home of wonderful perfumes. Call ahead to tell them your bride's typical perfume preference and ask them to make a fragrance especially for her on the occasion of your honeymoon.

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