

WEDDINGS

How to Plan the Perfect Honeymoon

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Photographed by Patrick Demarchelier, *Vogue*, December 2004

When your brain has morphed into a Pinterest-curated art gallery, and the fear of a botched bouquet haunts you in your sleep, just envision the light at the end of the tunnel—*sunlight*, actually—enveloping your bronzed body in a warm cocoon of honeymoon bliss. Care to order a cocktail before noon? Indulge in a piece of tiramisu after (gasp!) lunch? Go for it.

This isn't just any vacation—it is *the* vacation—one that you and your partner will reminisce about for years to come. But an epic getaway requires thoughtful execution. Here, a step-by-step roadmap to guarantee painless honeymoon planning.

Determine the length of your trip.

First things first: How much time do you have? Before you begin fantasizing about a beachfront bungalow in Bali, remember that a far-flung location will cost you multiple days of travel. And while that might not matter to those with two weeks to spare, it probably isn't realistic for honeymooners on a time crunch.

Settle on a destination.

“The honeymoon comes at a time when most people have very different résumés of travel, and consequently, different ideas about what the trip should look like,” says Mark Lakin, cofounder of [Epic Road](#), a high-end travel agency that specializes in unique honeymoons. “Now that you’re starting a new life together, the key is identifying a shared value system. Does it involve luxury and treating yourselves? Is it about seeing, exploring, and elevating consciousness? Or is it a mix of everything?” Once that’s decided, couples may want to consider choosing a locale that pushes their respective comfort zones. Tom Marchant, cofounder of luxury travel company [Black Tomato](#), recommends being as open-minded as possible. “Sometimes the most unthinkable pairings tend to work very well and have easily accessible flight routes,” says Marchant, who suggests multi-stop combinations like Rwanda and Mauritius, or Zanzibar and Oman.

Start planning.

The ideal lead time depends on where you’re headed and what time of year you’d like to travel, but as a general rule, experts advise planning six to nine months out. Couples seeking an über-exclusive experience during peak periods (like over New Year’s) should start a year in advance. For off-peak travel or “shoulder season”—the weeks that fall just before or just after a destination’s peak periods—three to six months will suffice. Booking during shoulder season also gives couples a price break and helps ensure the crowds are more manageable, says Marchant. “If you’re looking to relax in the Caribbean or Maldives, but the weather isn’t your top priority, go in the summer. Some of the best luxury hotels have great offers during those months,” he explains. “Even safari destinations have phenomenal ‘green season’ deals where you’ll still see great wildlife, but also be able to take advantage of cultural activities, like visiting local villages.”



Decide whether to enlist the help of an expert.

For complicated trips involving multiple destinations, save yourself the headache and let a professional handle the logistics. “People also like to think of us as arbitrators,” explains Lakin. “I always ask couples to have an initial call together so we can figure out how to reach a compromise. If the bride is more adventurous and the groom is apprehensive, it’s my job to figure out how to make her feel challenged, and him feel safe.” However, if you’re in the market for something super straightforward—a weeklong stay at a resort in Anguilla, for instance—hiring an agent isn’t necessary.

Select a hotel.

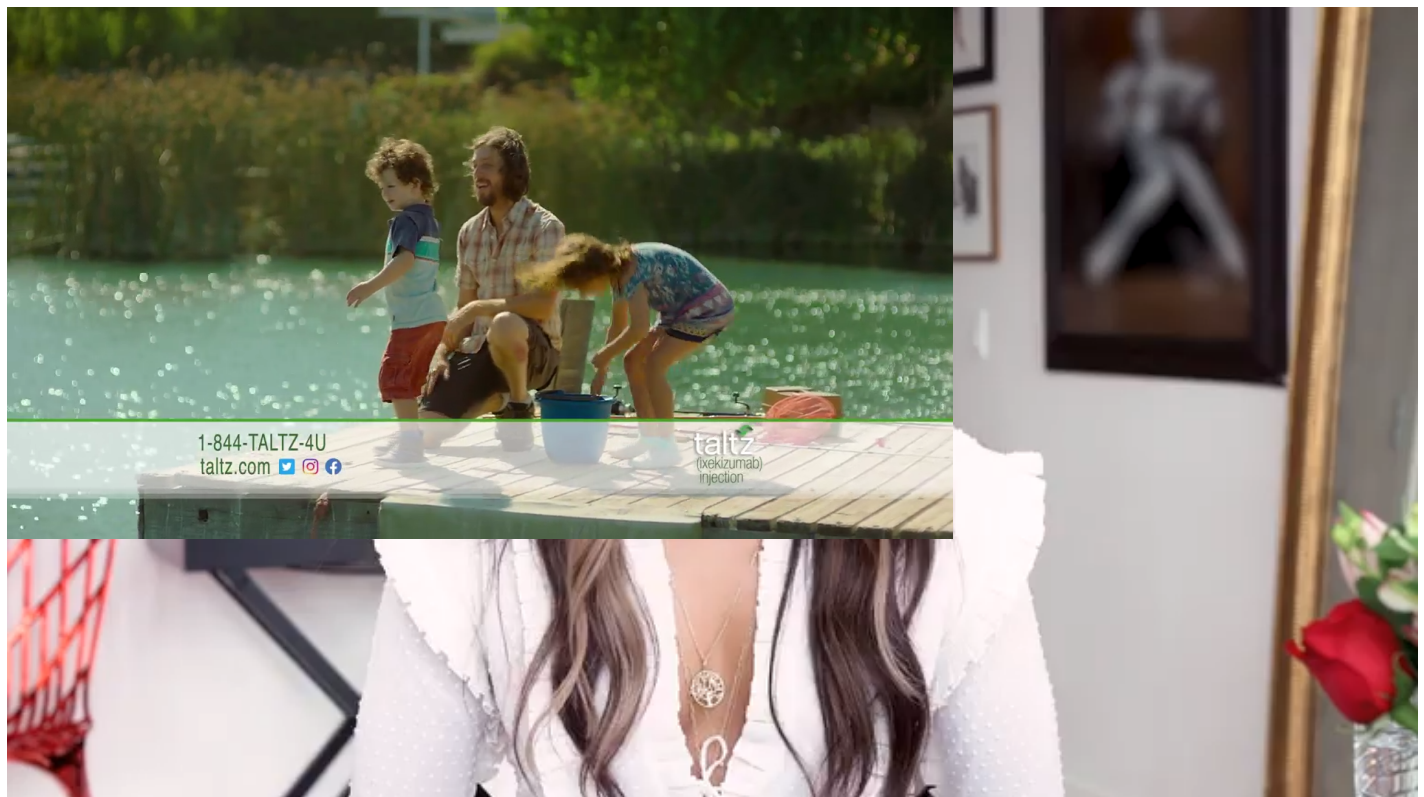
Couples making their own arrangements often feel inundated with options. An easy way to narrow things down, says Lakin, is to

think about the best places you've stayed and what you liked about each. The size of the property is another major factor: Are you partial to bigger, mainstream brands like the Four Seasons and One&Only, or would you prefer something more bespoke and boutique? "We also recommend looking into what type of perks the properties offer honeymooners, which range from standard amenities—the obligatory champagne and treats on arrival—to suite upgrades," says Marchant. "Aside from the perks, it's really about whether the couple wants to be in the middle of it all in a world-class city or get away from it all at a beachside resort." Lakin adds that while hotels don't typically advertise honeymoon "discounts," many properties will offer lower rates to newlyweds, who tend to spend more than the average guest.

Finalize your itinerary and arrange activities.

"The build-up to the wedding can be exhausting for most couples, so we recommend that you start with the more relaxing part of the trip, then embark on something adventurous," says Marchant. Of course, being "adventurous" doesn't have to mean jumping out of a plane; it's about experiencing something for the first time together, like adopting a baby elephant in Africa or learning to blend a bottle of Malbec in Argentina. "The best honeymoons are the ones where the couples get to know each other better," says Lakin. "You're starting a new life together and the trip is an incredibly powerful way to connect."

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