



»»» Honeymoons off the beaten track →



Seventh Heaven

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Photo courtesy North Island Resort, Seychelles



Photo courtesy Viceroy Maldives

COUPLES TAKE SEVEN MARRIAGE VOWS, WALK SEVEN ROUNDS AROUND THE SACRED FIRE AND PROMISE TO BE WITH EACH OTHER FOR SEVEN LIVES. SO WHAT'S A WEDDING WITHOUT A CELEBRATION OF TOGETHERNESS THAT MAKES YOU FEEL YOU'RE IN SEVENTH HEAVEN? HERE ARE SEVEN SECRET HIDEAWAYS FOR A DREAM HONEYMOON...

1 PRIVATE BEACHES, SECRET COVES AND ISLES OF LOVE [SEYCHELLES AND MALDIVES]

Facing page: Celebrate your love amid the clear blue water and white sand at the remote Seychelles islands.

Top: For a quicker, but just as beautiful getaway, hop to Maldives and lounge around in a luxury resort.

Picture crystal-clear water stretching into infinity, white beaches and views you thought only existed in your imagination. Now, live out your fantasy at the Seychelles islands, located thousands of miles off the African coast, nestled in the Indian Ocean. Here, you'll find a hidden world of tiny islets, secluded coves and private resorts surrounded by endemic flora and fauna. Dive or snorkel hand-in-hand, stroll through tropical forests to spot iridescent birds or go on nature trails over the granite mountains. Shut the rest of the world out at remote hideaways like the Desroches Island Resort, a few hundred km away from Seychelles's largest island, Mahé. Enjoy sailing trips, cruises and indulgent spa treatments. Take bicycle rides along the island against the backdrop of the sunset, or laze around in private pool villas at the private Fregate Island, a three sq km ecological sanctuary, of which the only other inhabitants are free-roaming

Giant Aldabra Tortoises and 100 bird species. You can also set up base in hotels on the main isles—Constance Ephelia or Northolme on Mahé, Constance Lemuria and Raffles on Praslin or Le Domaine de l'Orangerie at La Digue. If travelling thousands of miles isn't your idea of fun, you can choose Maldives for a quick getaway. The island nation is just a short hop from Kochi. A private seaplane sweeps you up from Malé Airport to Viceroy Maldives Resort at Shaviyani Atoll in the uncharted north, where 60 villas encircle a lagoon resembling the hull of an inverted Maldivian *dhoni* (fishing boat). A 15-min luxury speedboat ride from Malé takes you to Taj Exotica, an exclusive island resort set in one of the largest lagoons in Maldives. While Vivanta by Taj – Coral Reef at Hembadhu Island in North Mal Atoll has numerous dive sites, a private reef and a shipwreck!

2 LUXURY AND ADVENTURE AMONG MAYAN RUINS [BELIZE]

Some of the best journeys are those that take you back in time. With horse rides to Mayan ruins, hikes through tropical rainforests, champagne picnics by the river and ancient cuisines and massages handed down across a thousand years—Belize has all the ingredients for an exotic honeymoon vacation. Located on the eastern coast of Central America, it served as a British colony for more than a century, during which time it was known as British Honduras. Caracol, one of the most impressive Mayan sites in Central America, has about 35,000 buildings, many of them fully excavated, but the Caana, or Sky Palace, takes centre stage. This is the largest structure here, housing palaces and temples.

Inspired by this is the small luxury resort of Ka'ana at San Ignacio in Western Belize, an ideal spot for romance. Stay in a private pool villa with gardens, plunge pools and your own personal houseman. Have a breakfast of *chaya* (Belizean super food), eggs and fried jacks in bed and learn the secrets of Mayan cuisine from a traditional cook. Then, test your learning as you try out recipes for tortillas, tamales, *caldo* and *dukunu*, a corn dish similar to polenta on a *fogon* (brick and mud stove). Get a Mayan abdominal massage at the Spa at Ka'ana and ride on horseback to the majestic Mayan site of Xunantunich. If you crave adventure and don't mind being a little spooked, hike through the jungle, cross three rivers and then swim into the hourglass-shaped entrance of Actun Tunichil Muknal, a sacred cave in the heart of the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve at Belize, where sacrificial ceremonies took place in ancient times.



▲ Actun Tunichil Muknal, a sacred cave in the heart of the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve at Belize, was once a site for sacrificial ceremonies. You'll find chills and thrills aplenty here.

Image courtesy Ka'ana, Belize



Anuraag Mallick

4 COASTAL DRIVES, CASTLES & FAIRYTALES IN THE EMERALD ISLE [IRELAND]

▲ If road tripping is the way to go for you, do it on one of the world's best drives, along the Causeway Coastal Route in Ireland. You'll see the best of Northern Ireland on the way.

A landscape of lakes, glens, sandy beaches, rolling hills and winding roads around a patchwork of emerald green countryside, the romantic scenery of Ireland is the stuff legends are made of. Little wonder then that the TV series *Game of Thrones* chose Northern Ireland as its filming location (fans, listen up, there's a three-day medieval tour retracing plot points and key scenes!).

Here, you can have a royal honeymoon at one of the many fairytale castles, or enjoy each other's company in a quiet country cottage. There's no better place to start your Irish journey than Dublin. The city that was founded by Vikings a thousand years ago is today a vibrant place buzzing with art, culture and music. For a honeymoon on-the-move, head north to Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, and take a road trip down the Causeway Coastal Route, touted to be one of the most scenic road journeys in the world. Break your journey at exotic castles and beaches. Drive past Larne, the gateway to the Glens of Antrim and visit the Glenarm Castle, one of Ireland's oldest estates. Stop at Ballycastle, a seaside resort, and walk across the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge suspended over a 20-metre chasm. Drive to Armoy and past the Dark Hedges—a canopy of trees that look like the entrance to a magical realm. Chalk in a halt at the Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage site comprising about 40,000 hexagonal basalt columns jutting out of the sea, that were created by a volcanic activity millions of years ago. The ruins of the Dunluce Castle nearby are both scenic and a repository of history. End your tour at Londonderry (Derry, for short), the only walled city in Europe.



Photo courtesy SeaDream Ship, Marina Sports

3 LUXURY YACHTING IN THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS [CARIBBEAN]

While a cruise ship is great for a luxurious holiday, the privacy of a yacht is a better fit for a honeymoon. SeaDream's ultra-luxury twin mega-yachts—SeaDream I and SeaDream II—operate trips in the Mediterranean, the Amazon River, the Black Sea and the British Virgin Islands of the Caribbean between November and April. The yacht's compact size allows you to sail into exotic ports and unexplored harbours. Stop by at idyllic islands like Charlotte Amalie on St Thomas, Nevis, Norman Island and Virgin Gorda, famous for The Baths, a geological wonder. Soak up French flavours at St Barts, Tobago Cays in the Grenadines, or Gustavia with its stunning beaches, resorts, restaurants and adventures. Plan a boutique yachting experience of a week or 10 days, with just more than a hundred guests for company. All-inclusive fares include an impeccable wine cellar, 'Cuisine A La Minute' and an open bar with unlimited sushi. You can also choose from offshore activities like mountain biking, helicopter rides and swimming with dolphins.

5 MOUNTAIN TRAIN RIDES, SKIING OR PARAGLIDING FROM THE TOP OF EUROPE [SWITZERLAND]

Your love is at its peak and you feel on top of the world. So why not pick a destination to match? A flight to Zürich, Switzerland's financial powerhouse, followed by a quick train ride, gets you to Interlaken. As the name suggests, it is the area between the two lakes, named after the towns of Thun and Brienz. Check into the exclusive Victoria Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa overlooking the large central meadow of Höhematte, for an unhindered view of the majestic Mount Jungfrau standing high at 13,842 feet. With casinos, restaurants and shops selling souvenirs, the main street, Höheweg, is quite literally the tourist highway. Enjoy a horse carriage ride, explore Interlaken on foot or take a guided electric-bike tour to a local Swiss farm to sample the local cheese and bread. Later, strap some skis on and



Image courtesy Belmond Sanctuary Lodge



Photo courtesy Interlaken Tourism

Facing pages:
Above: Renew your marriage vows in the ancient Andean tradition at the Belmond Sanctuary Lounge near Machu Picchu.

Below: Take the plunge again, this time from several thousand feet above ground, as you paraglide over scenic Switzerland from the summit of Jungfrau.

Right: Get to the top of the Mount Gubalowka, Poland, and go skiing, hand-in-hand.

take the amazing century-old narrow gauge Alpine railway to Kleine Scheidegg, or ride past stations like Wilderswil and Schynige Platte to Grindelwald. After a typical lunch of rostis and fondue, walk to the cable car station for a ride to First, a summit, for a great view of the Bernese Alps. Zoom down at 80 km per hour on the exhilarating First Flyer and take the cable car from Schreckfeld to Grindelwald. But for the ultimate high, escape to Jungfrauoch, one of the highest points in Europe at close to 3,500 m above sea level, for a guided tour of the snowy attractions—Alpine Sensation, Ice Palast, Plateau and the Sphinx Observatory, at 3,571 m, one of the highest observatories in the world. Perched on snowy crags against a dramatic backdrop of peaks and glaciers, the domed astronomical station has served as a lair for super villains and mad scientists in several films—from the Bond series to Krrish 3. Drop by at Lindt Swiss Chocolate Heaven, opened by Swiss tennis star and Lindt ambassador Roger Federer. Savour a romantic meal at the Restaurant Crystal, touted as the highest in Europe. And if weather permits, paraglide from Jungfrau all the way down to Interlaken! On your way out, visit St Beatus Caves at Beatushöhlen, Switzerland's first and only underground cave museum around a maze of stalactites, stalagmites, lakes and waterfalls. Stop for lunch at the Castle Oberhofen and continue to Thun for a guided city walk, before flying out of Zürich.

6 VOW RENEWAL CEREMONY AT MACHU PICCHU [PERU]

Fly to Cusco, the historic capital of the Inca Empire, where the pre-Colombian architecture and dramatic Inca wall art on the streets will enchant any visitor. Stay at the Belmond Hotel Monasterio as you visit the Cathedral of Santo Domingo, the formidable 'fortress' of Sacsayhuaman, the amphitheatre, the Inca baths and other impressive sites like the Plaza de Armas, or Square of the Warrior. From Cusco, board the luxurious Belmond Hiram Bingham train and rumble through the dramatic landscape of Sacred Valley before arriving at Machu Picchu. Belmond Sanctuary Lodge, the only hotel adjacent to the Inca site, is where you enjoy an earthy dinner at the in-house Tampu Restaurant and rise early to have privileged access to the site at sunrise. You could enjoy your honeymoon in this exotic, mysterious place or renew your marriage vows in the ancient Andean tradition, with live Andean music and an authentic Shamanic ritual, to strengthen the bond of love.

7 ROMANTIC BATHS IN THERMAL GEYSERS OF THE TATRA MOUNTAINS [POLAND]

Fly down to the charming former Polish capital of Krakow and drive about 80km south to the village of Bukowina Tatrzenska near the Slovakia border. The geothermal health complex at the Bukowina Hotel here is the largest of its kind in Poland. Thermal waters rich in sulphur, calcium, chloride and sodium are channeled from fissures as deep as 2,400-2,700 metres. Rejuvenate yourself in 20 indoor and outdoor swimming pools equipped with hydro-massages, choose from eight saunas—with options such as Roman, Finnish, Highlander, Floral and Infrared—and indulge in a range of spa and wellness treatments. With the temperatures of the thermal water ranging from a warm 30°C to a simmering 38°C, they're a perfect way to stir up some heat in the winter! After you've calmed your nerves and senses, hop across to Zakopane, often called Poland's winter capital, which is 14km away. Zakopane is an adventure sports hub where you can try out Nordic hikes, alpine and cross-country skiing, snowboarding and ski jumping. For a more leisurely experience, take a ride in the decorated *kuligi* (horse-pulled sleighs) or a romantic stroll down the Krupówki Street lined with stores, restaurants, carnival rides and street performances. Shop for souvenirs like the *ciupaga* (shepherd's axe), the highlander hat, or *oscypek* (mountain cheese). Put the icing on your perfect day with an authentic Polish meal at Bakowo Zohylina Wyznio, with highlander music in the background. Along with your meal, you can also grab a slice of the regional Goral culture through the dances, music, costumes and wooden architecture.



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