

BEST OF BOTH

These locales offer a romantic getaway that's equal parts cultural experience and outdoor adventure. *By Bekah Wright*



luxury and adventure unite

At Likuliku Lagoon Resort in Fiji, a decidedly civilized infinity pool disappears into the thrilling wilds of the South Pacific.

While planning a honeymoon promises to be a joyous undertaking, it can be an impetus for couples' differences to surface. The groom may be thrilled by metropolitan prospects such as visiting museums or attending the theatre, but the bride's pulse might quicken at the thought of kayaking uncharted waters or hiking among archeological wonders. A happy compromise can be had by visiting destinations in close proximity of one another that, when combined, offer the best of both worlds. These locales are chock full of romance and adventure, and will find honeymooners packing both their formalwear and outdoor gear.

FIJI: DIVING, SAILING, AND FISHING MIX WITH SHOPPING, TEMPLE, AND MUSEUM TOURS

On a postnuptial excursion to Fiji, the first cultural feature you'll notice when you arrive at Nadi (pronounced "Nan-di") International Airport on Viti Levu (Fiji's "mainland") is singing. The melodies of the islands seem to elicit humming from everyone, from luggage handlers to honeymooners. "*Bula*," the official greeting, means "welcome home." The 11-hour flight from Los Angeles seems to have brought travelers to a place that feels like exactly that.

Malolo Island

An Island Hopper helicopter waits for the next leg of the journey to Malolo Island in the Mamanuca archipelago. On the 10-minute flight, spy some of Fiji's 333 islands, including Monuriki, where the movie *Cast Away* was filmed. In short order, along a white sand beach, Likuliku Lagoon Resort appears, a couples-only, all-inclusive facility with

Fiji's only overwater accommodations. Standing at attention at touchdown are two resort team members dressed in traditional warrior garb.

Guests check into one of four types of bures, traditional Fijian thatched-roof dwellings. Overwater bures are just far enough from the main artery of the resort to make them feel like a private paradise. These are the only dwellings with televisions and DVD players, but the main attraction in them is the marine life spied through windows cut into the floor. The area is a marine sanctuary and breeding ground for harmless reef sharks that flit about in the bathtub-warm waters. As easy as it is to sink into the plush bed or the egg-shaped soaking tub—the view from the deck beckons. Pop champagne and toast the honeymoon ahead from chaises overlooking the South Pacific.

Three other choices are available among the resort's 45 dwellings, including opulent Deluxe Beachfront Bures, each with its own deep plunge pool for cooling off over cocktails and watching sailboats lazily skimming across the surface of the sea. A thatched daybed invites snuggling and listening to the lapping of the surf. Indoors, the air-conditioned bure is luxe with a sunken seating area where homemade cookies are available. The upper level contains bed and bath areas. There's no tub, and couples may want to forgo the oversized indoor shower in lieu of the decadent outdoor shower in the private courtyard.

The resort offers a wide range of activities: Snorkel or scuba dive in the crystal-clear water of a coral reef, go hand-fishing, kayaking, windsurfing, or sailing the lagoon in a catamaran. Island-hop to Tokoriki, Mana, and Castaway islands. Take a tour of one of Malolo's villages on which you'll meet the locals and participate in a kava ceremony—a sacred ritual led by the village chief



observed for centuries, which involves sharing a drink made from the indigenous kava root.

At Likuliku's Tatadra ("House of Dreams") Spa, get a luxuriant couples' treatment: a coconut milk bath for two, followed by a massage using hot stones and aromatic Fijian oils. Top that off with a soak in the sun at the infinity swimming pool, in which you may find a crab or two that has mistaken the blue waters for those of the ocean. Set out hand in hand for a bushwalk to discover ancient sites such as Vatu Tagi, the Weeping Rock, and Vatu Tabu, the Sacred Wishing Rock.

The ceremonial lighting of the resort's tiki torches heralds the close of each day. On Malolo, an island said to have been created by the gods as a place for the sun to set after a day of wandering, finding the best vantage point for watching the sunset is an easy task—take a sunset cruise or get close on a love seat at Masima Bar.

Checking in for dinner as a first-time Mr. and Mrs. brings with it its own special thrill. All meals at Likuliku are four-course and served at the open-air Fijiana Restaurant with Pacific Rim cuisine. On Fridays, for a traditional Fijian Lovo, food is wrapped in coconut and banana leaves

and buried underground with hot rocks to cook. Sunday dinners are Magiti (family-style). Tuesdays feature South Pacific barbecues. Dance troupes from nearby islands perform, and guests join in the shimmying and hip shaking. The best follow-up: walking barefoot back to the bure on the moonlit beach.

For more about Fiji: www.bulafiji.com. For details on Likuliku Lagoon Resort: (888) 946-5458, www.likulagoon.com. Room rates range from \$732 to \$1,221 per night (subject to change).

island luxury

Torches, Fijian textiles, and thatched roofs lend exotic flavor to the comforts at Likuliku Lagoon Resort.

Viti Levu

Although its population may be small as big cities go, Viti Levu has much to offer those looking to immerse themselves in the culture and traditions of Fiji. A serene base from which to take in the island is The Sofitel Fiji Resort & Spa, located on Denarau Island. A palm tree-lined drive leads honeymooners to the 26-acre beachfront property, on which all rooms and suites are ocean-facing, and most views are spectacular.

HONEYMOONERS' HOTLINE: THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

Hawai'i is one of the world's most romantic spots, and some of the islands' most lauded resorts offer packages that make it especially easy to plan your honeymoon there.

► **The Ritz-Carlton on Maui** just completed a \$180-million renovation. Take it in by booking the Pilialoha Romance Package. Champagne

and truffles welcome you on arrival. Enjoy a flower-petal turndown on the first night of the three-night stay. Daily breakfast in The Terrace Restaurant and a romantic dinner for two at The Banyan Tree Restaurant are included. Seasonal pricing starts at \$599 per night; www.ritzcarlton.com.

► Giving couples a sweet taste of pampering is Hawai'i Island's **Four Seasons Resort Hualalai**. Among two new treatments at their spa is the 80-minute "Coffee & Chocolate Decadence," which begins with a coffee exfoliation, followed by a chocolate wrap, and the application

of chocolate bliss cream. If the sensory experience works up your appetite, a romantic dinner on the beach or in a cabana can be included on your itinerary. Accommodation rates at the resort begin at \$725 per night. Look for specials offering a fourth night free; www.fourseasons.com.

► **Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa's Amour Package** delivers romance. In the room at check-in are wine, fruit, and cheese. Enjoy an in-room breakfast from Ilima Restaurant or, better yet, have breakfast in bed. Seasonal pricing starts at \$530 per night; www.hyatt.com. (Rates are subject to change.)

At the resort's Mandara Spa, individual treatment villas feel like hideaways, especially those with a private courtyard where couples can share a whirlpool bath and take part in a tea ceremony.

On-site activities that speak to the adventurous at heart include jet skiing, parasailing, waterskiing, and wakeboarding. Various vessels are available, from Flying Fish and Banana Rides to Adrenalin Cats and Hovercraft. Kick back by the lagoon-style pool or play beach volleyball.

Daytrippers will be thrilled by Viti Levu's offerings. Nadi has myriad cultural attractions to explore, including Sri Siva Subramaniya Swami Temple, which features ornate carvings of Hindu deities and ceiling frescoes. Take a leisurely bike ride at the Garden of the Sleeping Giant in the foothills of the Sabeto Range. The place to fervently declare "I love you": atop Castle Rock at Koroyanitu National Heritage Park.

A visit to Suva, Fiji's capital, brings with it the romance of colonial-style architecture and sites of historical and cultural significance, such as the Fiji Museum, where visitors can take in island history, including the years of cannibalism (which ended in the late 19th century), and peruse an

impressive gallery of Indo-Fijian contemporary art. Bringing out the inner Mr. & Mrs. Indiana Jones is Colo-i-Suva, a rain forest within the city with rope swings, streams, and walking trails.

After the sun goes down, dine by candlelight at The Sofitel's sophisticated V Restaurant (one of three eateries on the property) amid stark tree branches painted white and strung with blue lights. The resort buzzes with evening entertainment from special meke dance performances to live music in one of The Sofitel's three bars. In town, groove to a DJ alongside city dwellers in Ed's Bar, a Nadi institution. The biggest draw though, is your balcony's oversized outdoor Jacuzzi tub, where stargazing together draws contented sighs, so common on the Fijian Islands they've gained their own name: *isa lei*.

For more about Sofitel Fiji Resort & Spa: (800) 221-4542, www.sofitelfiji.com.fj. Room rates range from \$245 to \$1,499 per night (subject to change).

IRELAND: FALCONRY, HORSEMANSHIP & ARCHERY MEET GARDENS, ART, THEATER

There's an ethereal quality about Ireland. Perhaps it can be attributed to the lilting accents or Celtic

music that tugs at the heartstrings. Definitely, it's due to a stunning landscape that ranges from rocky coastline to big-city grandeur and often shimmers under rainbows. It's a magical place for newly marrieds to indulge diverse travel desires.

Dublin

The bustling capital of Ireland is no medieval city. Cranes are busily constructing new buildings in this metropolis. Still, Dublin maintains a charm that speaks to the country's history and culture.

For example, in southeast Dublin on Upper Merrion Street, inviting rows of cheery Georgian townhouses display brightly painted doors and ornate knockers. A doorman in a top hat and cape in front of one is the only giveaway that these are not residences, but accommodations in one of Dublin's premiere hotels, The Merrion.

The birthplace of the first Duke of Wellington, The Merrion, which was built in the 1760s, maintains old-world charm coupled with contemporary energy. Inside, the pleasant aroma of peat fires lures guests into drawing rooms with cozy couches for a pot of tea or an Irish coffee. Peruse the hotel's museum-quality art collection.

Venture out into the brisk air for a stroll through the hotel's 18th-century-inspired gardens, studded with fountains, obelisks, and sculptures, including a statue of James Joyce surrounded by quotes from *Ulysses*.

Down a breezeway connecting the main building to an adjoining wing, find a gym and spa. A spa treatment designed for couples looking

to tackle Dublin, the two-hour "Urban Warriors" combines a massage and facial. Enjoy a workout in the gym or a swim in the indoor pool.

Utter romance can be found in The Merrion's breathtaking first-floor rooms with high ceilings, marble fireplaces, intricate plasterwork, and gilt mirrors that speak of an elegance of days gone by.

Many of Dublin's sites are within walking

distance, including the National Gallery, Natural History Museum, and National Museum. Close, too, is Trinity College, where the Book of Kells can be observed in the Long Library that *Star Wars* fans will recognize from *Episode II—Attack of the Clones*. A great way to get an overview of the city is through a bus tour, stopping along the route to visit locales such as Dublin Castle, Christ Church Cathedral, and the Ha'penny Bridge. Or snuggle beneath a blanket during a horse-drawn carriage ride. Explore the Guinness Storehouse to learn the history of the internationally popular beer. Enjoy a complimentary pint at the Gravity Bar, then catch a panoramic sunset over Dublin.

Sustenance can be found in Dublin's myriad gourmet restaurants. At The Merrion, The Cellar Restaurant and Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud serve up regional cuisine. Or make reservations in other dining hot spots such as Peploe's Wine Bistro, Pearl Brasserie, Chapter One, Ely, or Town Bar & Grill. Later, see an evening performance at the historic Abbey Theatre or the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra at the National Concert Hall. Get a nightcap at a pub, where it's easy to get caught up in a chorus of "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" during a sing-along. Before calling it a night, spend a few hours by the fire at The Merrion's No. 23 cocktail bar, gazing into one another's eyes.

For more about Ireland: www.discoverireland.com. For details on Dublin: www.visitdublin.com. Contact The Merrion Hotel: 011-353-1-603-0600, www.merrionhotel.com. Room rates range from \$712 to \$4,670 per night (subject to change).

Cong

Ashford Castle is downright dreamy. This Gothic edifice on the shores of Ireland's second largest lake, Lough Corrib, has long spoken to the hearts of lovers, such as the fiercely devoted Lord and Lady Ardilaun, Guinness heirs and previous owners of Ashford Castle, as well as modern-day spouses Pierce Brosnan and Keely Shaye Smith, who celebrated their wedding at the estate. It's hard not to get swept away by the rolling green meadows, peaceful lake, brilliant blue sky and, of course, the castle itself.

Bespeaking a time when chivalry was in full throttle and swooning was an art form, the castle ensures much of both in the 21st century. There are two wings of rooms/suites, and no two are alike. A stateroom in the oldest section dating back to the 13th and 17th centuries is perfect for getting carried over the threshold. High ceilings make way for a romantic four-poster bed.

HONEYMOON TRAVEL

Windows garner vistas of lush grounds, Lough Corrib, and the River Cong. A fireplace keeps things cozy after a co-bubble bath in the claw-foot tub. In the new section of the castle, a room in a turret provides a bank of windows offering views of the sun setting over the lake from bed pillows plumped for the occasion.

Pastimes include rambling through the gardens of the 350-acre estate, arousing visions of heroic knights and fair maidens on horseback rides, testing your skills with golf, tennis, archery, and clay shooting, and fly-fishing or cruising Lough Corrib aboard the castle's lake cruiser. For a once-in-a-lifetime experience through Ireland's School of Falconry, take a Harris hawk on a woodland stroll and learn to fly the majestic bird of prey from your gloved wrist to a tree and back.

On rainy days, recline in the spa solarium before a couple's hot stone massage. Later, enjoy afternoon tea in the drawing room. Combine adventures in driving on the left side of the road in a convertible Mini with daytrips to idyllic villages, stalwart castles, or local pubs to sample Irish beers. Include on your itinerary the 12th-century Cong Abbey just down the road from the castle or Galway to buy one another Claddagh rings from the birthplace of these Irish wedding bands.

Sate your appetites in the castle's three diverse dining establishments. Cross the bridge for dinner at Cullen's at the Cottage, a quaint, thatched-roof abode in which a fire casts a warm glow and an accordion-pumping raconteur sings gripping Irish folk songs. Candles welcome from a table for two where dishes like hearty Irish stew await.

Take a step back in time with dinner at the castle's signature restaurant, The Connaught Room. Twenty-foot-high ceilings and a hand-carved Inglenook fireplace create the essence of timeless sophistication and inspire terms of endearment like *a chúiisle mo chroí* ("my treasure"). A romantic seven-course tasting menu paired with vintages from the cellar warms the heart further. Another venue for exchanging sweet nothings and bites of dessert is the castle's regal George V.

Before retiring for the evening, partake in some revelry at the Dungeon Bar. Cocktails and Irish coffees keep things lively, as do performances by audience members accompanied by a live pianist. Share the stage for a duet of "You're the One That I Want" before bidding the crowd adieu and heading off for a sweet Irish slumber.

For details about Ashford Castle: (800) 346-7007, www.ashford.ie. Room rates range from \$381 to \$1,851 per night (subject to change). ■