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The Art of Living

SHASHI THAROOR
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HONEYMOON HOTSPOTS

EVERY YEAR, HAWAII BOASTS MORE THAN 500,000 HONEYMOONERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. THEY ALL GO THERE FOR ONE REASON: LACK OF IMAGINATION. HAWAII'S PRETTY, BUT FOR COUPLES CRAVING MORE EXOTIC, COLORFUL ADVENTURES, RAVE*SQ PRESENTS THE ULTIMATE IN HONEYMOON DESTINATIONS. "EVERYONE'S TRYING TO BE UNIQUE," SAYS BEVERLY HILLS-BASED TRAVEL-AGENT-TO-THE-STARS GARY MANSOUR, WHO'S WORKED WITH CELEBS LIKE ANGELINA JOLIE AND RENEE ZELLEWEGER. "SO IT'S A CASTLE IN SCOTLAND, A PRIVATE ISLAND IN THE CARIBBEAN, OR OFF TO FIJI." WHILE MANSOUR SAYS MOST COUPLES NEVER LEAVE THE COZY COCOON OF THEIR HONEYMOON SUITE, WE'VE COME UP WITH SOME TEMPTING OPTIONS SHOULD YOU GET THE URGE TO EXPLORE.

by SONA CHARAIPOTRA and NAVDEEP SINGH DHILLON



Turtle Island, Fiji

1) WHERE: TURTLE ISLAND, FIJI

WHY: No TVs, no shopping malls, no tennis courts. Instead, wake up to the scent of Jasmine and Frangipani. Indulge in a breakfast of champagne and garden-grown mangoes and bananas on your own private beach. Swim naked in turquoise waters or mountain bike through jungle-edged paths. Live the ancient, exotic culture of Fiji by sharing a cup of Kava and a song with the natives.

WHEN TO GO: Enjoy warm tropical breezes and the startlingly aquamarine waters of the white powder beaches year-round, but avoid the few weeks in July and December when this usually couples-only resort goes family-friendly.

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: With only 14 thatched cottages on this 500-acre private Fijian isle in the Yasawa chain in the South Pacific, this eco-friendly all-inclusive resort has played honeymoon haven to celebs like Nick and Jessica, the Bachelorette's Trista and Ryan, and Britney Spears and hubby-number-two. Stay in one of the resorts uber-romantic grand cottages, complete with king-size four-poster bed, Jacuzzi and outdoor shower built for two. (From \$1,975 per night per couple all-inclusive, 877-2 TURTLE, www.turtlefiji.com).

IF YOU ACTUALLY LEAVE THE HOTEL: Snorkel or scuba the Blue Lagoon (yes - the one Brooke Shields frolicked naked in) or enjoy a lobster and champagne picnic while horseback riding on one of the island's 14 private white sand beaches. Bike through rainforests fluttering with butterflies and exotic birds or reserve a sailboat to island-hop while deep-sea fishing for Barracuda, yellowfin tuna and bonefish. When it's time to unwind, take an excursion to meet and greet the friendly natives in a traditional Fijian village.

2) WHERE: SEYCHELLES

WHY: With almost half of this 115-island archipelago's land mass designated as nature reserves, the lush, tropical Republic of Seychelles was dubbed the original site of the Garden of Eden. And it just might have been, considering the Eve-evoking, aphrodisiac Coco-de-Mer palm nut which is unique to the islands. The scent of cinnamon and vanilla draws you in, but the charm of the nation's distinctive blend of French Creole, Asian and African cultures is just as inviting.

WHEN TO GO: The climate offers balmy breezes and warm ocean dips year-round, but the tropical islands are warmer during the north-east monsoon season from March through May and cooler during the southeast monsoon rains from late May through September.

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: On the main island of Mahé, stay at the Banyan Tree Resort with its airy plantation-style veranda-ed villas tucked cliffside on the famous Intendance Beach. Book the magnificent Presidential Villa, situated on its own private cove complete with infinity pool, outdoor Jacuzzi and shower. (Honeymoon packages from \$1270 a night, www.banyantree.com). Or fly twenty-minutes East to a former pirate cove turned eco-resort and stay in one of the 16 ultra-luxe 2000-square-foot villas on the ultra-private Fregate Island, where Paul McCartney honeymooned with new bride Heather Mills. (From \$2,390 per night per couple all-inclusive, www.fregate.com). For a less budget-breaking but still luxurious option, try the Plantation Club, a resort and casino nestled on a 100-acre beach-edged former coconut grove, where rooms offer all the creature comforts of home, including satellite TV. (Doubles starting at \$265 per night, www.plantationclub.com).

IF YOU ACTUALLY LEAVE THE HOTEL: Don't miss the magical Aldabra, the largest raised coral atoll in the world, and home to more than 150,000 giant land tortoises. Then hit the mouth-watering Le Jardin du Roi, with its intoxicating rows of vanilla vines, cinnamon and nutmeg trees. Or take to the air for an exhilarating half-hour helicopter tour of the islands. At Fregate, charter the 43-foot Fregate Bird yacht to catch your own dinner and have it prepared by one of the island's gourmet chefs, or take a guided jungle hike narrated by one of the island's in-house ecologists.

3) WHERE: LOS CABOS, MEXICO

WHY: The southern-most tip of the Baja Peninsula, Los Cabos offers the best of both worlds, blending the party-hearty vibe of Cabo San Lucas with the old-time Mexican charm of San Jose.

WHEN TO GO: Skip summer, when temperatures hit 100 degrees, and go in late February for Carnival's parades. Mid-September brings Mariachi bands celebrating Mexico's Dia de la Independencia.

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: Perched on the bluffs of Punta Ballena ("Whale Point") overlooking the Sea of Cortez, only ten minutes from



Esperanza Resort, Los Cabos, Mexico

the heart of bustling Cabo San Lucas, the Esperanza Resort has drawn celebs like Paul McCartney and Gwyneth Paltrow (who loved it so much, she dropped about \$310,000 a year on the hotel's timeshare) with its hushed barefoot chic style. Score one of the stunning Palapa-level beachfront suites, which comes complete with a private infinity-edged ocean view hot tub. (Garden-level suites starting at \$375 per night, 866-311-2226, www.esperanzaresort.com). Honeymooners craving fiesta-style accommodations can sip tequila pool-side while a Mariachi band plays at the Melia San Lucas on Playa El Medano, which, with views of the landmark El Arco, is just four blocks from bustling downtown shopping, dining and nightlife. (Doubles starting at \$169 per night, www.meliasanlucas.solmelia.com).

IF YOU ACTUALLY LEAVE THE HOTEL: Got \$2,500 burning a hole in your pocket? Charter Esperanza's yacht and sail out to the mind-blowing El Arco at Lands End, where the ocean extends enthrallingly as far as human eyes can see. Jump ship to snorkel in the stunning turquoise Sea of Cortez or drop a line to reel in some of the area's wild marlin. Or sunbathe on the exquisite Playa de Amor, where the Pacific Ocean meets the Bahia de Cabo San Lucas. When you've worked up an appetite, skip the Hard Rock Café to sample the local fare - indulge in fresh-caught seafood delights at the rowdy Giggling Marlin and maybe catch Sammy Hagar (you know, that other Van Halen dude) at his own Cabo Wabo Cantina. If you're feeling flush, at Esperanza request the 'Night to Remember,' a \$7,000 candlelit made-to-order

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feast for two on a private beach complete with fireworks. For couples braving the club scene, best bets are Panchos, with over 200 varieties of tequila, and the iconic El Squid Roe, a pulsating three-story party where waiters with spray-tanks shoot tequila directly into willing mouths of table-dancing patrons.

4) WHERE: SANTORINI, GREECE

WHY: Some seventy miles south of Crete, this small island resort in the Cyclades chain in the Aegean Sea offers the typical pristine beaches - and a whole lot more. With the west side of the island cradled in a caldera cliff created by a still-smoldering volcano (which last erupted in 1956), Santorini's rough pebble-beachscape is marked by exquisite white villages against the backdrop of azure skies and the turquoise sea. Donkeys and cable cars help locals traverse the rugged terrain, which descends dramatically into the Aegean. Greek Orthodox festivals throughout the year prompt island-wide feasts and jubilation complete with spit-roasted lamb and local wines.

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: Set into a caldera cliff, the 17-villa Perivolos hotel was created from restored 300-year-old cave structures that once held a winery and stables. Modern luxury - complete with an infinity pool that seems to meld into the Aegean - blends with traditional charm in the form of island antiques and astonishingly white walls. (www.perivolos.gr/). Or stay at the charming, homey three-suite 1864 Sea Captain's House, run by the owners of Ambrosia, the best restaurant on the island. (Suites starting at \$350 a night, www.santorini-gr.com).

IF YOU ACTUALLY PLAN ON LEAVING THE HOTEL: Stomp grapes I Love Lucy-style in the fall, or head to a winery for a taste of the local grape year-round. History buffs shouldn't miss the archeological excavations at Akrotiri, the intact ash-preserved remains of a Minoan town evacuated in 17th century B.C. (www.santorini.com).

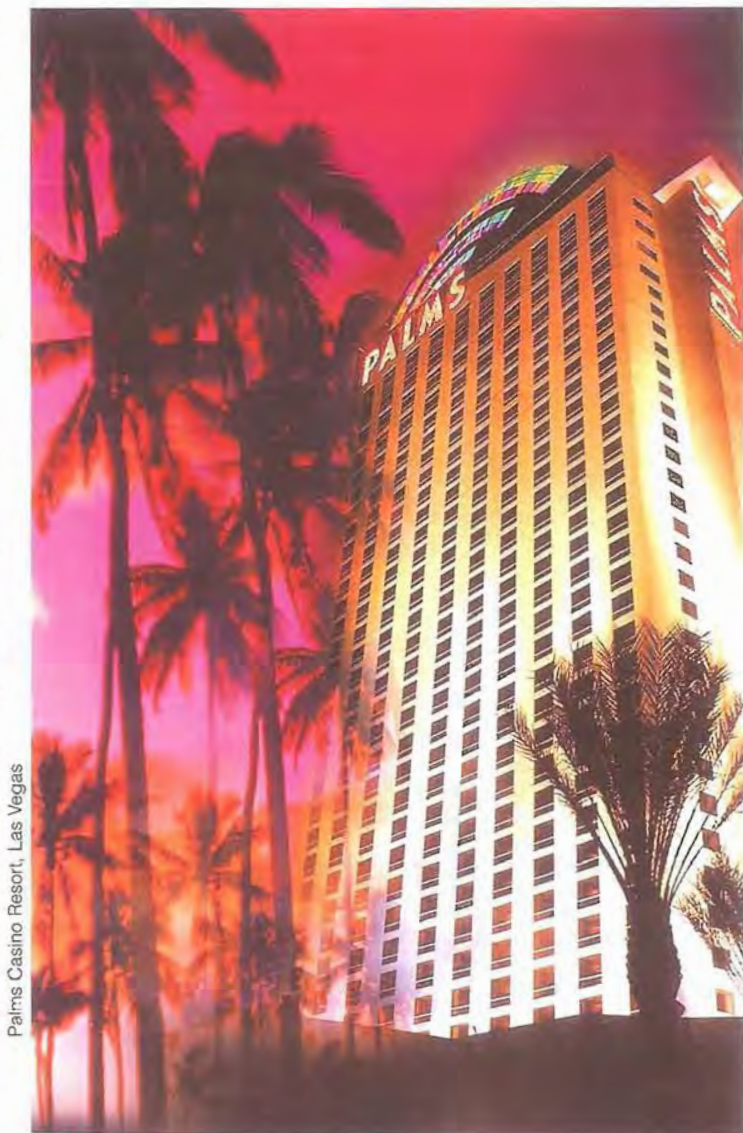
5) WHERE: LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

WHY: Not planning a quickie Vegas wedding? Up the stakes (and the sizzle) with a Sin City honeymoon that's high on glitz and glamour but still affordable. With its relatively cheap thrill-a-minute nightlife, Vegas is ripe for spend-savvy honeymooners who know that getting married doesn't necessarily mean settling down.

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: High rollers can score the 2,900-square-foot 3-bedroom 'Real World' suite at the shiny new Palms Casino Resort for a mere \$10,000 a night. But with deluxe rooms starting at just \$89, even broke folk can party like Britney, Paris and Lindsay at the resort's super-trendy Ghostbar and Rain nightclub. (Deluxe king from \$89, 866-942-7770, www.palms.com). In the mood for something a bit less flashy? Go minimalist (Vegas-style) at THEhotel, a Mandalay Bay-built skyscraper whose chic, spacious 750-square-foot suites come complete with 42-inch plasma screen TVs, a wet bar and marble baths.

Chill in the lobby billiards lounge or at the super mellow Bathhouse Spa where you and your honey can indulge in hot and cold facials or a crystal energy massage. (One bedroom suites from \$169.95, 877.632.7800, <http://thehotelatmandalaybay.com>). And of course, there is always the luxurious Bellagio with its lush botanical gardens and art gallery. (888-987-3456, <http://bellagio.com>).

IF YOU ACTUALLY PLAN ON LEAVING THE HOTEL: Get matching his-and-hers tattoos (and your reality TV fix) at the Hart & Huntington Tattoo Company at the Palms where they're currently shooting the BRAVO reality series INKED. (702-942-7777, <http://www.hartandhuntingtontattoo.com>). Not ready for that kind of commitment? You could always jump ship, er, plane. Skydiving in the Nevada desert, half-an-hour from the strip, is sure to be a honeymoon highlight. (Look Tours, \$189 per person, <http://www.looktours.com>). Honeymooners looking for excitement from the safety of their seats can check out Cirque du Soleil's new shows, the operatic O (www.bellagio.com) or the racy Zumanity (www.lasvegas.com). Oh yes, and then there's always gambling.



Palms Casino Resort, Las Vegas

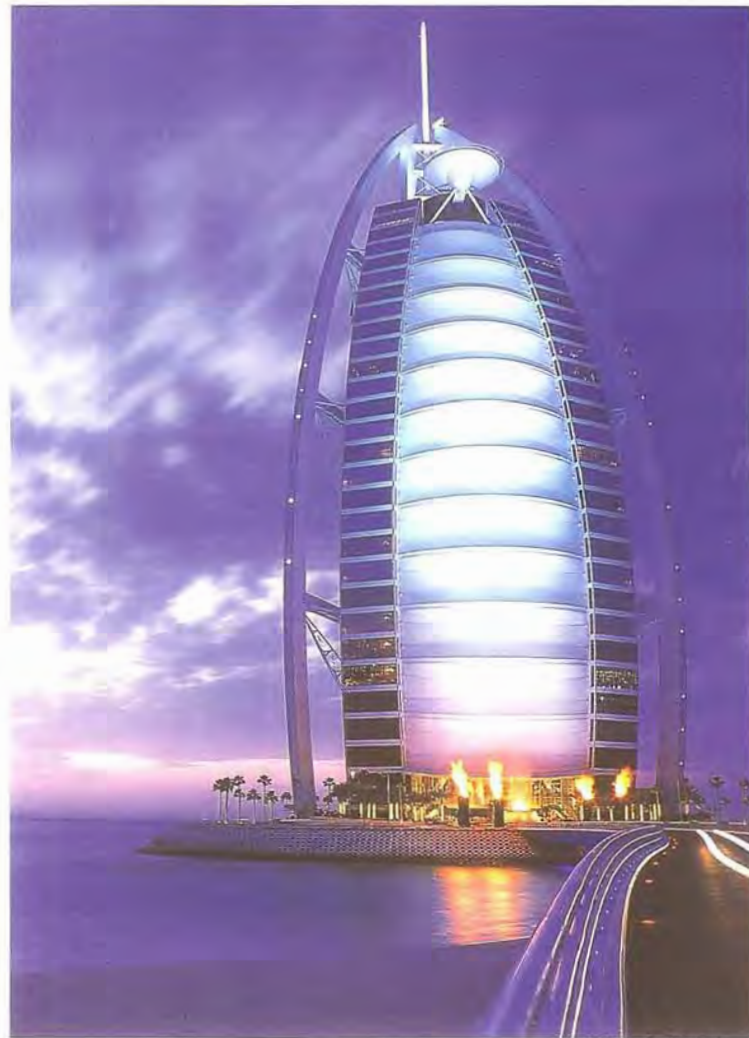
6) WHERE: DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

WHY: How about doing something out of the ordinary on your honeymoon like sand skiing down the dunes of Dubai? Or perhaps you're in the mood for something a bit more relaxing after your stressful wedding? Whether it's a soothing massage at the world's only seven star resort, some serious jewelry shopping at the Gold Souk, or a romantic stroll on the pristine, sandy beaches of the Jumeirah Beach Park, Dubai has something for everyone. And there is nothing conservative about this Middle Eastern Mecca. Dubai is home to more than 200 nationalities - and their food! Restaurants serve everything from Polynesian to Lebanese cuisine.

WHEN TO GO: Check out the madness at the Dubai Shopping Festival from late June through September, when you can roam through handcrafted carpet emporiums and pick up authentic Prada for bargain prices! Don't worry guys, there's a lot for you to check out too including fashion shows and all the latest electronic gadgets for dirt cheap. Avoid the winter months of December and January unless you like light showers.

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: When money ain't no thang, splurge on a 3,604-square-foot 2-bedroom suite at the world's only seven star hotel, Burj Al Arab, where \$3,188 gets you a private 24-hour butler and chauffeured Rolls Royce. Too steep? Seven-star luxury can still be yours for \$1,739, which gets you a 2,421-square-foot one-bedroom suite with gorgeous panoramic views of the Arabian Gulf. (Burj Al Arab, 971.4.301.7777, <http://www.burj-al-arab.com>). Looking for something a little less extravagant? The five-star Le Meridien Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Marina offers 1,640-feet of private beach and ample opportunity for romantic strolls. (King studios starting at \$109, <https://www.lemeridien.com>).

IF YOU ACTUALLY PLAN ON LEAVING THE HOTEL: Dubbed the City of Gold, the Gold Souk is one of the largest retail gold markets in the world. Bargain hunters who are "in the know" come here for all their jewelry needs ranging from intricately designed gold earrings for \$60 to \$2000 pearl necklaces. Hagglng is all part of the show in acquiring bargain prices on exquisite jewelry from all over the world. (<http://www.goldsouk-dubai.de>). When all that shopping wears you out head to Jumeirah Beach Park, a magnificent melding of environment and landscaping. Opened in 1989, and partly designed by Pashaura Singh Dhillon, the park is an artist's canvas of colors from imported grass, golden sand, and clear blue gulf water. Its specifically designed "resting area" is perfect for a picnic or a little snooze under the trees. For thrill seekers, sand skiing is the hottest thing to do in this city of golden sand dunes. Safe for even the most uncoordinated couples . . . no injury occurs when you fall, and there are no trees to hit. Knight Tours offers all sorts of opportunities for adventurous honeymooners starting at \$100 (www.knighttours.co.ae).



Burj Al Arab, Dubai

7) WHERE: KASHMIR, INDIA

WHY: Long considered an unstable tourist destination, Kashmir's concerns over real and imagined safety issues have started to subside, and tourists are slowly trickling into this pristine place. With tourism still in its infancy, the good news for honeymooners is prices are down, but luxury is up. Why settle for a lake view when you can spend your honeymoon on still waters? Houseboats afloat on Srinagar's shimmering lakes Dal and Nagin make an idyllic honeymoon haven. The picturesque view of snow-capped mountains is just the icing on the cake!

WHEN TO GO: Visit from April to June when religious festivals like Durga Ashtami and Baisakhi have Kashmiris bringing on their best Bhangra moves and thamasha of color on Dal Lake.

HOW TO GET THERE: Soak in the serenity of it all while feeding each other locally grown grapes on a pimped out houseboat in the middle of Dal Lake. While booking on arrival is always much cheaper than reserving online, particularly since none of the houseboats have websites, there are tour companies that can assist you. JK Tourism offers a double room deluxe for just \$30. (www.jktourism.com). For more all-inclusive luxury, try Himalayan Tours' five-night deals (starting at \$696 per person, www.Himalayantours.com). If lake-top living isn't your cup of chai, get the next best thing - a room overlooking the still

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waters. You can't beat the view or the rates at the five star luxury Centaur Lake View Hotel. (King rooms starting at \$88, www.hoteliers.com).

IF YOU ACTUALLY PLAN ON LEAVING THE HOTEL: Although there is no real need to leave your houseboat - the lake is a city unto itself with everything you can imagine being sold by shikaras (Kashmiri gondolas). From barbers in boats to pashmina shawl sellers to men bearing mutton samosas and the spicy local delicacy, alu dum - the surrounding area is worth exploring. If places of worship and history are your game, Srinagar won't disappoint with its historic Gurdwara Chatti Padshahi, shrine to the Muslim saint Makhdoon Sahib and temple of the goddess Sharika. All templated out? The Mughal Garden houses three distinct and magnificent gardens: Shalimar Bagh, Nishat Bagh, and Chashmashai. For a spectacular view of both Dal Lake and the snow-capped Pir Panjal mountains, head to Nishat Bagh. Or check out the remnants of a Buddhist monastery at Chashmashai (www.koausa.org/Nature/gardens.html).

8) WHERE: BHUTAN

WHY: Walking through the unpaved streets of this magical kingdom tucked away between India and China is like going through a time warp. Nobody carries cell phones, you can't find a McDonalds every three blocks - there aren't even any blocks! There are, however, plenty of yaks and shaggy dogs. And let's not forget the greenery; lots of greenery, breathtaking views, and landscape that looks like it was edited in Photoshop. The glitch? If you want to see heaven on earth with that special someone, be prepared to fork over some cash - at least \$200 per day. The perks of paying up? You will be one of the very few people who get to enter the kingdom of Bhutan this year - one of 5000 people in the world to be exact. That's the Himalayan monarchy of Bhutan at work in an effort to keep the culture unspoiled.

WHEN TO GO: Avoid the monsoons during July and August. The best time to go to Bhutan is during October and November and April through June, not only for the clear skies, but because that's when the most colorful celebrations take place. Visit during one of the many vibrant Buddhist festivals, such as the "tschechu," performed at the end of the harvest season in mid-April. The main event is watching the monks bust out dance moves using a variety of colorful costumes and elaborate masks!

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: Accommodations included in the \$200 aren't all that plush. A double bed is considered opulent, and make sure you bring extra socks during the winter since there is generally no central heating. Fortunately, there are some high-end resorts to the rescue to make your honeymoon in the magic kingdom even more magical - and keep you warm and toasty at the same time! Try the Uma Paro, complete with endless views of forests, mountains, and valleys from every room, heated towel racks, minibars, yoga mats,

and even a complimentary Shambala massage! (All-inclusive ten day-packages starting at \$8,388, www.uma.como.bz).

IF YOU ACTUALLY PLAN ON LEAVING THE HOTEL: Whether it's sights you crave, time to relax or even mouth-watering eue chum (Bhutanese pink rice), your mandatory tour guide is the person to arrange it for you. Adventurous couples can go on mountain excursions through the gorgeous Paro valley, while those who want to take it easy can do so in the confines of a massage table at a local massage joint or at the hotel. Or go and spend the day with a yak herder's family, exchanging "How we got hitched" stories, translated through your guide.

9) WHERE: SCOTLAND

WHY: Imagine waking up to tea and biscuits and the inviting smells of a full Scottish Breakfast wafting up the stairs. Imagine being curled up in the arms of the "one" as you both look down on the rolling emerald highlands from the balcony of your own castle. Now stop thinking about it, and have the honeymoon of a lifetime in Edinburgh.

WHEN TO GO: Go during the summer months when the weather is at its breezy best. In August, the city comes alive with thousands of theater-lovers pouring in for the Festival Fringe - a dizzying dose of culture with over 1700 shows in more than 200 venues, from street-corner Shakespeare to truly impromptu stand-up comedians. (August 7-29, www.edfringe.com).

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: Live like a King and Queen . . . literally . . . in one of the many real life castles with spectacular views. Give your sugarplum a rub-a-dub-dub in the hot tub at the luxurious \$491-a-night honeymoon suite at the 13th century Dalhousie Castle and Spa. For the ultimate in relaxation, try the Aqueous Thermal Hydro Spa - the first of its kind in Scotland! (Deluxe doubles starting at \$230, breakfast inclusive, www.dalhousiecastle.co.uk). If castles aren't your thing, cozy up at the peculiarly-named Auld Reekie bed and breakfast, which offers luxury and prime location smack in the center of Edinburgh for \$48 a night, including a hearty Scottish breakfast (www.auldreekie-guesthouse.co.uk).

IF YOU ACTUALLY PLAN ON LEAVING THE HOTEL: Considering poor dollar-to-EURO exchange rates, score the biggest bang for your buck with the Edinburgh Pass, which, for \$282, covers mundane things like airport transport and entrance fees for museums and attractions, letting you focus on the important things - like making your honeymoon as romantic as possible! (www.edinburgh.org). For a more cultural adventure, try spotting Nessie at Loch Ness, or gallivant through the highlands with tours by Viator starting at just \$70 per person (www.viator.com). Tired? Relax with a pint at the colorfully named Last Drop Pub, also the site of the last public hanging in Scotland (www.edinburgh247.com).



Uma Paro Hotel, Bhutan



Menai Bay Bungalows, Tanzania



Dalhousie Castle and Spa, Scotland

10) WHERE: TANZANIA

WHY: Absorb stunning sunsets while elephants and zebras roam free and birds with wingspans bigger than the plane you arrived in soar past, and luscious, intoxicating aromas of cinnamon, vanilla, turmeric, cloves and banana waft in from nearby plantations. National Geographic redux? Nope, welcome to the most romantic place on earth - your honeymoon in the lush greenery of Tanzania!

WHEN TO GO: While your family and friends shiver in January and February, you'll be slathering sun block on your shorts-clad legs. But if you want to catch the animals, visit between late June and October, when the heat is tempered by cool breezes.

HONEYMOON BUBBLE: For the ultimate in relaxation and romantic luxury, check out E Unoto Retreat's honeymoon suites, starting at just \$180. All the bungalows have Maasai tribal themes with intricate furnishings and carvings, but the best part is the wildlife. With panoramic views of the beautiful Lake Miwaleni, you can spy hippos wading and baboons prancing, and maybe even a leopard lounging by the pool - hey, it happened once. (www.maasaivillage.com). You can't beat the land of spices for exoticism on a budget: score a beach-front bungalow for \$90 during high season at Menai Bay on the country's eastern coast, where you can sway in your hammock staring out at the Indian Ocean or stroll on the white sand. (Doubles starting at \$40 include breakfast, www.menai bay bungalows.com).

IF YOU ACTUALLY PLAN ON LEAVING THE HOTEL: Tanzanian tour guides offer everything from nature walks where you can stop to smell the cinnamon trees, to safaris at the six mountain peaks of the Ngorongoro Crater Conservation where you can spot lions, elephants, rhinos, buffalo, and leopards. Better yet, take to the skies on a romantic hot-air balloon safari. (www.tatotz.org). Craving a bit more human company? Visit the Maasai village of Mto wa Mbu - home to more than 120 different tribes - to chat with locals over a cup of Mbege, a traditional beverage made from banana and local grains. ☒