

The 130-acre Lupita Island in Tanzania.

africa

out of africa come ROMANTIC RETREATS

The continent is awash with dreamy destinations that promise romance.

sergio ortiz

south africa

Even a thumbnail list of Africa's enticements is enough to make some would-be travelers start packing, let alone couples with an urge to begin their life together with extraordinary adventures: South Africa offers it in spades. Its splendid Kalahari Gemsbok and Kruger national parks are the most accessible nature zones in Africa and are sprinkled with properties custom-made for newlyweds.

And if romance in the veldt heads the post nuptial registry list for a starry-eyed couple, then **Shambala Private Game Reserve** (about \$2,000 per night per couple), in South Africa's majestic central Waterberg Mountains, is the ticket. The property consists of seven chalet-style accommodations furnished in chic Afro-French Provincial style, each with a private entrance and a shower area that opens onto a deck with panoramic views.

Shambala, a word borrowed from the Tibetan to roughly mean "earthly paradise," offers seclusion and a peaceful atmosphere. The chalets are shaped like honeycombs, imparting an incongruous sight in a remote corner of South Africa. Tributaries from a nearby river slice through the camp adding the gentle murmur of rushing waters to the serenity and the area is famous for its sunsets.

The property offers a first-rate spa, elephant safaris, bush picnics, river cruises, opportunities to go star-gazing and first-rate chefs prepare meals to suit individual tastes.

Contact: shambalagamereserve.com

Couples who want a different South African experience will find that

honeymooning in the country's so-called Garden Route in the Western Cape Region will be filled with peaceful days of wine tasting, beach outings and exploring small, remote historic towns.

In Paarl, a charming town about 30 minutes removed from downtown Cape Town, the **Palmiet Valley Estate** provides a secluded paradise for newlyweds who opt to honeymoon in South Africa's equivalent to California's Napa Valley, with more than 200 cellars producing South Africa's most respected wines. Quaint villages that have not changed since the 19th century dot the area while mountains loom in the horizon. There are vibrant townships, museums, galleries and festivals throughout the year and the Palmiet Valley Estate is hard to top as a base from which to explore the area.

The property sits on a 300-year-old winery that looks like a Cape Dutch homestead. The 18th century dining room is dominated by a stone fireplace and is lit by candles at night. The vineyards at the entrance stretch out to the foot of the nearby Drakenstein Mountains while beaches at Gordon's Bay and Strand are only a short drive away, full of hidden coves perfect for picnics which the staff will prepare.

A private staircase leading to a romantic nook under thatched eaves accesses Palmiet's honeymoon suite. A four-posted Dutch bed is accented daily with lavender and rose petals and the Victorian en-suite bathroom is dominated by an antique tub. Rates vary during the seasons but range from approximately \$250 pp dbl for the romantic standard suite, to \$500 for the luxury suite.

RECOMMEND

Date: Friday, June 01, 2012
Location: MIAMI LAKES, FL
Circulation (DMA): 45,674 (N/A)
Type (Frequency): Magazine (M)
Page: 20,21
Keyword: Botswana

Pampering is a priority here. Lazy walks, sunbathing by the swimming pools or indulging in a therapeutic massage in the Bedouin tent housing the rooftop spa, highlights its laid-back ambiance.

Contact: palmietvalleyestate.co.za

kenya

From balloon flights at dawn soaring over the Maasai Mara to diving into the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean, Kenya is a wonderfest of romantic options that will have honeymooners gliding gleefully into their new life as a married twosome.

Romance will flower with an African honeymoon at **Elsa's Kopje**, a stylish and romantic hideaway named after the famous lioness in George Anderson's book "Born Free." Elsa's Kopje (kopje means "hill") towers above Anderson's original camp and each of its nine cottages blends in with the rocky hillside. The honeymoon suite is a 3-level secluded haven shaped around the twists of a giant rock and overlooks the plains of Meru National Park, home to elephants, rhinos, and giraffes, as well as the occasional leopard. The animals can often be spotted from the private terraces in every room.

During safaris, honeymooners receive individual treatment. Guides and drivers will stop the vehicle to pour drinks and serve snacks while the couple watches the scenery at dusk. Rates begin at approximately \$625 per night.

Contact: elsaskopje.com

tanzania

Couples who want to experience a unique honeymoon in a far more remote location should consider Tanzania, one of Africa's most distinctive destinations—very remote and full of names that invoke adventure and romance: Serengeti, Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar, Ngorongoro, etc. This is a country that offers everything from sun-splashed beaches to mountains, as well as moss-covered ruins of ancient Swahili kingdoms and treks over barren landscapes guided by genuine Maasai warriors.

Ngorongoro Crater Lodge sits on the lip of the famous crater, making it one of the most attractive lodges in Africa. The property is designed to look like a Maasai camp. The *Tree Camp* has six bungalows, while its neighboring *South* and *North Camps* are composed of 12 suites each. All offer views of the crater. The property reeks of upscale comfort, with flower petals scented baths drawn by a personal butler. The floor-to-ceiling windows are dressed with curtains made from raw silk and the accommodations are lit with chandeliers made by local artists.

The main area sits on stilts and is accented with antiques, chandeliers and African masterpieces, giving it a graceful blend of modern European and ancient African styles.

Ngorongoro Crater Lodge also overlooks Lake Tanganyika—the longest and deepest lake in the world, which stretches a distance roughly 500 miles. It is a very secluded and romantic property. Rates from approximately \$720 per night dbl.

Contact: (866) 356-4690; ngorongoro-crater-lodge.com

Lupita Island by **Firelight** is Tanzania's ultimate retreat, a 130-acre wilderness haven with luxury accommodations in the pristine shoreline of Lake Tanganyika.

With 11 luxurious bungalows and two larger cottages, all lavishly decorated, there is no place within the property that does not offer uninterrupted views of the lake. Rates start at about \$2,200 dbl for a luxury suite, and include all game viewing excursions, meals and even laundry service.

Guests can either bask in the luxury and island tranquility, or enjoy watersports and join excursions to catch a glimpse of tiny, undiscovered

villages nearby. In addition, guests can opt for helicopter rides to view the spectacular Kalambo Falls, take in a spa treatment, and go fishing, game viewing or water skiing.

The award-winning resort has a first-rate restaurant considered one of the best in the region.

Contact: firelightexpeditions.com

botswana

Some expert African travelers consider Botswana the destination of choice for a taste of the so-called African experience. For honeymooners, it offers unparalleled experiences that can add zest to a different type of honeymoon. Botswana is where safaris on elephant backs were practically invented and there are activities galore for newlyweds including treks into the fabled Kalahari Desert. Some go as far as saying that if Africa is the most bewitching continent on earth, then Botswana is the sorcerer.

Zarafa, a chic and romantic nook, is a camp where honeymooners can opt for private dinners, private pools and spend nights in a canvas-style luxury tent overlooking the Aibadianja Lagoon.

The brainchild of National Geographic filmmakers Dereck and Beverly Joubert, this intimate 4-tent camp on a private 320,000-acre reserve overlooks a lagoon teeming with hippos and elephants. Big cats, wild dogs, and other game are common throughout the area.

It is very romantic, accommodating a maximum eight guests, each receiving personal service. Every tent features a private pool, private bath and outdoor showers that could easily have the best view in Botswana.

Zarafa is in the Okavango Delta and the solitude, service and richness in animal viewing and hiking plus the nights spent under the southern constellations make it a magical spot.

This all-inclusive resort is ideal for those who seek complete solitude and comfort. Rates are \$1,150-\$1,800 pp per night dbl.

Contact: greatplainsconservation.com/zarafa

morocco

Away from wild game, tropical weather and in the continent's extreme north, where Africa touches the Mediterranean, Morocco offers newlyweds an experience unrivaled because its culture is so different from others in the continent. Couples coming here will feel like they're living amidst the pages of an Arabian fairy tale as Morocco is firmly entrenched in a culture that's centuries old and where the pull of romance is as enchanting and melodious as the call from a muezzin from a lonely minaret at dusk.

At the foot of the Atlas Mountains on the plain considered the gateway to the South Moroccan desert, Ouarzazate, the "door to the desert" in central Morocco, is full of lush oases. This is also home to **Dar Ahlam**, an all-inclusive, 13-suite cluster of magnificent structures that look like red sandcastles. This mirage-like vision, a **Relais & Chateaux** property, is one of the most romantic places in Africa.

As befits a resort owned by a French theater director, Dar Ahlam (\$925-\$2,500) offers an unqualified romantic atmosphere highlighted by choreographed, candlelit dinners in locations that stretch from olive groves to rooftops and long romantic moonlight treks into the desert.

If that isn't romantic enough, guests can also choose to spend a night in a tent for two among the majestic sand dunes that stretch away from the area or to explore little-known desert towns nearby.

Contact: relaischateaux.com/darahlam ■

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