

Top honeymoon havens in Jamaica

Melanie Reffes, special for USA TODAY 6:39 p.m. EDT July 7, 2014



(Photo: Half Moon, A RockResort)

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No island caters to newlyweds the way Jamaica does. Although many couples have a budget when planning their honeymoon, all agree that jaw-dropping views of the sea and fine wine to toast the sunset morph a great honeymoon into a grand way to kick-start a life together. There is a

cornucopia of choices — from swanky all-inclusive resorts to tranquil honeymoon havens on the beach. For couples who like to dance, there's always a party on Seven Mile Beach in Negril and for twosomes looking for privacy, there are plenty of palm trees on Doctor's Cave Beach in Montego Bay, in addition to umpteen secluded beaches that dot the rest of the island.

Head south: A honeymoon at Sandals Whitehouse on Whitehouse Beach is regal from top to bottom. Butlers expertly arrange dinner under the stars and in the 'Honeymoon Romeo and Juliet Suite' steps from the beach, amenities include the king-size four-poster bed, whirlpool bath and dedicated concierge. On a 500-acre nature preserve, star attractions at the Euro-inspired all-inclusive are the grand piazza that is lined with bistros, cafes and bars, two sandy miles of uninterrupted beach and three pools — including Jamaica's largest. sandals.com

Sunset sail: With the shoreline in view, a cozy deck made for two and a soundtrack of reggae to mellow the mood, Lovers' Rock Catamaran Cruise is a must-do for honeymooners. Spicy snacks and cocktails keep things lively as the three-hour Island Routes tour that departs from Negril, Ocho Rios and Montego Bay is timed to greet the sunset. islandroutes.com

Regal rooms: Named after the crescent-shaped beach right outside its door, Half Moon, A RockResort, has been hosting honeymooners since it opened more than 50 years ago. A Montego Bay landmark, the resort is one-stop-shopping with golf on the 18-hole championship course, dinner at the Sugar Mill with its own sommelier, a nightcap at one of seven bars and a couple's massage at the Fern Tree Spa. For the ultimate indulgence, Royal Villas come with a butler and chef. halfmoon.rockresorts.com

Beach secrets: Ideal for a tryst with your new significant other, Secrets St. James is an adults-only playground on a peninsula in Montego Bay. British Colonial in style and pure Jamaican in vibe, the resort snuggles a sheltered half-mile stretch of beach. Suites are couple-friendly with whirlpool tubs and room service available for a late-night nibble or nosh. For those staying seven nights, the Secrets Eternity Honeymoon package comes with mimosas in bed, salt glow body scrub pour deux, seaside dinner with a bottle of wine and complimentary nights for a return anniversary stay. secretsresorts.com

Star status: A long road leads to the white sand where Tom Cruise once juggled bottles in the hit film *Cocktail*. Home to a delightful reef just offshore, Winnifred Beach in Portland is not only popular with honeymooners who snorkel in the bright blue but also with locals who come to toss around a football and dig into a plate of jerk fish. A treat on the weekends, boat trips make the short hop to Monkey Island and tours take riders on a horseback trot along the sea's edge.

City slickers: Across the street from Doctor's Cave Beach coveted for the healing minerals in the translucent water, Sandals Carlyle on the Hip Strip in Montego Bay is ideal for newlyweds looking for an intimate honeymoon stay. Comfy with just 52 rooms and a staff so friendly they'll remember your name as soon as you check in, the hotel on the strip is the smallest Sandals resort on the island but big on charm with 24-hour room service, two bars, three restaurants and an ambience that feels more like a B&B than a resort. sandals.com

Eat, play and stay: In Ocho Rios, the petite sandy strand known as Reggae Beach is a favorite pit stop for honeymooners who come to hear an afternoon jam session on the sand and snorkel with the coral and clownfish that cavort below the waves. Flanked by jagged cliffs and sea grape trees, there are comfy sun loungers for taking five (or longer), beach bars that chill coolers of Red Stripe, bands pumping out reggae and soca and bonfires at sunset.

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Treasure hunting: A magnet for nature-lovers, Treasure Beach is really a six-mile long collection of four coves — Calabash Bay, Billy's Bay, Frenchman's Bay and Great Bay — all far enough from the tourist hordes never to feel crowded. Shaded by the Santa Cruz Mountain and the Pedro Plains, the south coast town is better known for sweeping savannas than late-night parties. The hip honeymoon haven of choice, Jake's is flip-flop friendly with rooms, suites and three villas — Calabash Bay, Hope House and Cave Canem — that salute the sea, sun and the fine art of taking a nap. With fishermen pulling up to the shore with their catch of the day, farmers stopping by with their plentiful bounty and — according to the locals — the best pizza on the island, Jack Sprat's on the Calabash Bay side is divine dining on a sunny afternoon. jakeshotel.com

Party strand: The longest sandy strand in Jamaica is also one of the most spirited for sun-seeking newlyweds. With designated areas for nude sunbathing, Seven Mile Beach in Negril is action-central at night with dance parties on the sand. Bands belt out roots and reggae every Sunday, Tuesday and Friday at Alfred's Ocean Palace, vendors hawk jerk grilled on oil drums and in the rainforest-themed Jungle Night Club, night owls feel right at home on the high-energy dance floor. alfreds.com

Top shelf: Pure paradise is how couples describe Jamaica Inn and Ocean Spa tucked away in the cliffs of Cutlass Bay in Ocho Rios. Without TVs, radios or clocks (yes, there is Wi-Fi), the timeless resort is made for unwinding, if just for a week or two. Classic and classy, the one-bedroom beachfront Blue Cottage is honeymoon nirvana, with its large verandah shutters that give away to magical views of the ocean or close completely for total seclusion. <http://jamaicainn.com>

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