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The Maldives

THE MALDIVES

The ultimate honeymoon destination? Just maybe...

Think perfect honeymoon and for many the image will be pristine white sand beaches, sloping palms trees and little thatched bungalows sitting over translucent turquoise waters. That fantasy destination is the Maldives. Over 1,000 reef-ringed islands comprise this Indian Ocean nation, and only 200 are inhabited. With such a bountiful supply, it's not surprising that nearly every hotel has an island to itself.

The Maldives is all about relaxation, with resorts commonly boasting a 'no news, no shoes' concept. Sightseeing opportunities are minimal. Your days here will most probably be spent alternating between room, hammock and beach - unless, that is, you are divers. As each island has its own lagoon and coral ring,

the Maldives has some of the greatest underwater attractions in the world. Most resorts will offer dive facilities from where you can head out to see the plentiful marine life including dolphins, rays and barracuda. The warm, clear waters and easily accessible reef also make for great beginners' conditions so why not learn to dive together for a truly memorable honeymoon experience?

Luxury spa resorts are in abundance and draw a fair few celebrity visitors. The Maldives' iconic overwater bungalows, which form part of many resorts, are a perfect choice for your honeymoon. Plump for one of these and you will be able to swim or snorkel from your door. Some resorts even let you

Operators featuring commitment ceremonies and/or honeymoons

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glimpse the bright flashes of fish beneath you through glass panels in your bungalow's floor.

For further romance ask to be temporarily stranded on a deserted sandbar with nothing but a sunshade, a picnic and each other, or take a scenic flight in a sea plane and snap some stunning aerial photographs. To glimpse a little of Maldivian culture you can take a fishing village tour or a day-trip to Male, the Maldives' capital where there is a mosque made of delicately carved coral blocks, and you might see the day's tuna catch being unloaded. Try your own luck for grouper, snapper or barracuda by casting a line on a sunset cruise.

While the Maldives has long been a favourite with honey-

mooners, it is not possible for tourists to marry in the islands. Many resort, however, offer commitment ceremonies with all the romance of the real deal. Some couples choose to make their legally binding vows back home then don their finery for a more showy repeat on their island paradise. Another popular option is to marry in nearby Sri Lanka, and perhaps tour its stunning cultural sights, before taking a second week of relaxation in the Maldives. This is particularly good idea for those marrying with friends and family as they can head off for the second half of their holiday alone. As Sri Lanka is generally more affordable it could also help to spread your budget further.

in the Maldives include: **Kuoni, Turquoise, Virgin Holidays, Hayes & Jarvis, Thomson**

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North Male Atoll

Baros has won a multitude of awards thanks to its luxurious villas and fantastic customer service. You'll be met by hotel staff at the airport, and be transported by speedboat to the resort where you are welcomed with cold towels infused with eucalyptus to refresh you.

There's several types of villa on offer here - all stunning - from Water Villas offering direct lagoon access, to Pool

Villas and Deluxe Villas nestling discretely among lush vegetation. All villas have king-size beds, Lavazza espresso machines and personal wine chillers, filled with wines chosen by guests on arrival.

Create magical memories snorkelling or diving around the island's coral reef, or take a private Sunset Dolphin Cruise on the 50-foot motor yacht, Serenity.

Price: **Around £388-£1,126 per room per night (including Champagne breakfast)**

Weddings possible? **Yes** Info: www.baros.com