

romancing the adventure

Just because you've settled down doesn't mean you have lost your sense of adventure. A honeymoon is the perfect time travel to one of the world's most remote locales, writes Rachael Oakes-Ash



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Exploring the Ningaloo Reef in the Indian Ocean. Snorkeling is popular. Novotel Ningaloo Resort opened in December 2006. Don't miss out on swimming with whale sharks.



Swim with the sharks

NINGALOO REEF, WA

Ningaloo Reef has friends in high places. Hollywood stars Rachel Griffiths and Toni Collette have both sung the praises of this 260 kilometre aquatic wonderland. Author Tim Winton has also worked tirelessly to conserve the reef, home to 500 species of fish and over 200 types of coral.

Halfway between Perth and Broome on Australia's west coast, it's hard to get more remote than Ningaloo. Here in the multi-coloured reef, you'll discover the manta ray ballet when these graceful underwater dancers perform for snorkellers. From November to March you're also likely to encounter loggerhead, green or hawksbill turtles – all three species lay their eggs in the dunes.

Ningaloo is best known for the whale sharks that swim in its waters and this is one of the only places in the world where people can swim alongside these massive beasts of the ocean. If the term 'shark' scares you then think again. Whale sharks feed on krill not people

and are named for their size. They have been known to grow to 18 metres in length and their skin is dotted with a series of circles and lines unique to each shark. Swimming with them is an awe-inspiring experience – one sighting of these mammoth creatures and you'll be lining up to jump in again.

Step onto the tarmac at Learmonth Airport and breathe in nature. There's not much out here except for the town of Exmouth which has one pub, one club and one tavern. The Novotel Ningaloo Resort opened in December 2006, bringing modern style to this outback town. Its waterfront location, open bungalows and ritzy eco-interiors invite couples to relax with nature. While in the area, watch for 'roos and emus in the open brush, day trek in Cape Range National Park to marvel at the ancient gorges, and visit the remarkable Turquoise Bay.

Kings Ningaloo Reef Tours operate intimate day tours of the reef, including a swim with the whale sharks. No more than 20 guests

guarantees personalised service and their lush vessel that comes with an equally lush lunch buffet. A spotter plane pinpoints the whale sharks' location and you can also expect to see manta rays, turtles, dolphins and even dugong throughout the day.

Where: Ningaloo Reef near Exmouth, WA. Novotel Ningaloo Resort.

How much: Novotel Ningaloo Resort has suites from \$340 a night. For packages and more information see www.accor.com. Day trips with Kings Reef Tours include lunch and a swim with the whale sharks for \$345 per person. For more information see www.kingsningaloooreeftours.com.au. Adopt a whale shark with conservation group Ecocean www.whaleshark.org

Getting there: Virgin Blue flies to Perth daily from the east coast with connecting Sky West flights to Exmouth. Book your flights online at www.virginblue.com.au



Safari style

AFRICA

Africa is the heartbeat of the globe. More than 50 countries combine their unique cultures to create a melting pot of exotic travel – you won't find more adventure in one continent than in Africa.

Conservation Corporation Africa takes honeymooners into the heartland of 12 African nations, including Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia. They can even arrange an African wedding so you can go straight from the aisle to your honeymoon safari. Whether it's the swamps of Botswana, the desert plains of Namibia, the markets of Tanzania or the azure waters of Zanzibar, CC Africa tailors honeymoons to suit all desires. Think luxury tented-cabins in the African desert with private swimming pools from which to observe the wild game abundant in these parts. Canoeing, walking and driving safaris are all possible alongside gourmet safaris that herald the unique flavours of Africa.

The Grand Safari is the big daddy of CC Africa trips. A month-long adventure that starts in the Kruger National Park and includes Victoria Falls, the Masai Mara, the Serengeti and Dar es Salaam. Or combine bush and beach with a Fly-In Safari starting with the big cats of the Serengeti National Park then bed down in the Ngorongoro Crater Lodge where you'll be treated to butler service and take in the private island of Mnemba Island Lodge.

CC Africa is a member of the International Eco Tourism society and supports a number of wildlife projects so your honeymoon dollars also help protect Africa's impressive wildlife.

If you choose only one CC Africa lodge make it Phinda lodge in the Phinda Private Game Reserve where CC Africa has helped to preserve this natural conservation wonderland. Walking safaris combine with open vehicle drives that will have your heart beating in time with Africa herself.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CC Africa's Pioneer Safari. Clifftop drinks on the Great Explorer Safari. Victoria Falls. Zebras are protected in reserves. Phinda Lodge in South Africa is a must.

Where: CC Africa www.ccafrica.com
How much: From as little as about \$1200 per person for two nights to about \$89000 per person for a month-long Grand Safari.
Getting there: Relax in comfort with award-winning Emirates Airline. They fly to Africa from Sydney and Melbourne via Dubai daily. See www.emirates.com





Ski bunny

SOUTH AMERICA

South America provides serious boasting rights when it comes to snow. Intrepid honeymooners will love the ski areas in Chile and Argentina. The Andes are grand and majestic with loads of steeps and deeps to keep wannabe Olympians happy.

Start at Portillo, a ski resort high in the Chilean Andes where condors guard the skies. They take things easy here: most skiers don't hit the slopes till mid-morning and afternoons are spent slope-side with a glass of Chilean wine before siesta. Enjoy a late dinner and then get ready for an *après ski* scene that starts after midnight.

Valle Nevado, the biggest ski resort in South America is also nearby. Or ski by day and spa by night at Termas de Chillan.

Across the border in Argentina you'll find the ski town of Bariloche. This party town runs 24-7, and with the exchange rate in your favour you can spend half as much for twice the time.

Design Suites Hotel (epoquhotels.com) is *de rigueur* for honeymooners who want a lakefront position and swanky design to impress. Or for a traditional ski lodge under a blanket of snow, opt for Pire Hue Lodge (pire-hue.com.ar).

When the lifts open, be first in line at Cerro Catedral in the Nahuel Huapi National Park. Further afield, visit Tierra del Fuego, the most southern tip of Argentina, Las Leñas for steeps and the undiscovered Cerro Bayo. Prepare to extend your trip before you've even gone. Iguaza Falls, Perito Moreno Glacier and Lake Capri are all well worth a side trip.

TOP TO BOTTOM: South American skiing provides some serious boasting rights, whether you visit Argentina (pictured) or Chile. Snow polo at Bariloche. Picturesque views of the ski areas of Bariloche. Pire Hue Lodge is a traditional ski resort in Argentina.



Where: South America

How much: Ski Argentina and Travelplan offer tailor-made journeys to a selection of both Chilean and Argentinian ski resorts from as little as \$669 per person for seven nights' accommodation, ski lifts and bilingual guide. See www.skiargentina.com

Getting there: LAN airlines will extend its five-times-a-week service from Australia to Chile and Argentina to daily in December 2007. Fly to Santiago and take advantage of the LAN South American AirPass which allows for one-way ongoing travel between cities in South America. For more information see www.lan.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: A pool at Nihiwatu Resort on Sumba in Indonesia. The boathouse at the Resort. The Sumbanese people will remain in your heart. A pathway leading to one of the seven bungalows and three villas at the Nihiwatu Resort.



Secret surfing
SUMBA, INDONESIA



The idyllic Nihiwatu Resort can be found on Sumba, an Indonesian island yet to be discovered by the masses. Leave the trappings of modern life behind and embark upon a journey that will imprint itself in your memory with intense visual scenery and people who will remain in your heart.

Sumba is 400km east of Bali, but don't expect the big city lights of Seminyak. Mammoth slabs of funeral stone can be seen during the 90-minute drive to the beachfront retreat – these slabs were dragged across the island in ancient times and are considered sacred.

Arrive at Nihiwatu and blink twice. Yes, the water is really that milky blue and yes, you have truly arrived in paradise. The seven bungalows and three villas of Nihiwatu perch upon a clifftop with easy access to the waters below. Surrounded by a natural forest, the resort's private two kilometre beach is reserved for guests (and the occasional

Sumbanese farmer watering his buffalo.)

Do nothing or everything. Sumba is a surfing mecca (you'll see the names of pro surfers Mark Occhilupo, Layne Beachley and friends scattered throughout the visitors' book.) Novices can take surf lessons with Nihiwatu's resident surf pro. Add deep sea diving expeditions, private boat tours to nearby bays, forest treks to freshwater waterfalls and swimming holes, yoga classes and visits to local villages and towns to mingle with the locals.

Finish the day with a massage in the hilltop open-air bungalow or sip cocktails poolside. There's a wonderful communal feel to Nihiwatu. Dine with the other guests in the sand-floored dining pavilion or take a romantic dinner for two to your bungalow verandah and enjoy a sunset that was seemingly made for lovers.

All too soon your time will end and they'll have to pry you kicking and screaming from

the resort. (Tip: you could always hide in the nearby jungle!)

The resort has its own Foundation, the Sumba Foundation, dedicated to raising funds for education, health and medical clinics on the island and Nihiwatu has won a number of responsible tourism awards.

Where: Nihiwatu is a member of Select Hotels. See www.selecthotels.com

How much: About \$460 per night for two people with all meals included in the tariff (breakfast, lunch, dinner and mid morning and afternoon snacks), a full body massage, horse ride and local village tour. Honeymooners receive a romantic dinner under the stars and a bottle of champagne upon arrival.

Getting there: Garuda fly from most Australian cities to Denpasar. Nihiwatu has it's own charter flight from Denpasar every Thursday. www.garuda-indonesia.com