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Hot Honeymoons Happen Here

ed wetschler

w retreat & spa vieques, puerto rico

Sophisticates who want pristine nature but also crave urbane comforts and haute design love this **W**. A 20-minute flight from San Juan brings them to an island with undeveloped beaches lined by palm trees, the world's brightest bioluminescent bay, and even wild horses. The hotel fetches incoming guests from the airport to the check-in lounge, and there the fun begins. Or does it? Actually, it begins even before that with the Honeymoon Registry (wwieques.honeymoonwishes.com), one of the best in the universe of getting hitched.

Each of the **W Retreat's** 156 rooms and suites has a private patio or balcony, W signature bed, multiple electronic necessities, Bliss bath amenities, and large, open bathrooms. Patricia Urquiola's decor is itself a happy menage a trois, blending clean, contemporary lines with earth tones and Caribbean pastels.

The food and beverage service here includes beachfront Sorce, which offers refined Caribbean dishes prepared with organic ingredients and accompanied by a serious wine menu. The cafe serves first-rate coffee and pastries, the poolside bar offers small plates and lunches, and the Living Room is an outdoor lounge with

Opposite page: Paddleboarding
at Jewel Paradise Cove in Jamaica.
Right: Stunning views at Sanctuary
Cap Cana by AISol.

billiards and board games, a firepit, WiFi, and irresistible cocktails. Complimentary recreational options include snorkeling, kayaking, tennis, yoga classes, the infinity pool, beach, and fitness center. The *Away Spa* offers more than 30 treatments, and guests venture beyond the hotel to enjoy hiking, mountain biking, diving, horseback riding, and ecotours. Rates start at \$295.

wvieques.com

jewel paradise cove, jamaica

Choosing between the **Jewel Dunn's River Beach** and **Jewel Paradise Cove** resorts, both of which are adults-only, is tricky. Jewel Dunn's River Beach is a no-brainer for honeymooners on a tight budget, and room rates even include golf at *Runaway Golf*. Jewel Paradise Cove costs a few bucks more, but it offers terrific value: The level of luxury at this 225-room resort is a bit higher, and its *Enhanced Activities* program, which is included, features activities for which hotels normally charge considerably extra: golf, a sunset cruise, snorkeling trip, scuba diving, water skiing, and a visit to Margaritaville.

Like the other two Jewel resorts, Paradise Cove offers seven restaurants ranging from a beach grill and a buffet to Italian, sushi, pan-Asian, white-glove continental, and pizza restaurants. Other features include six bars and lounges (including a romantic piano bar), entertainers and a nightclub, dive-in movies, watersports, tennis, a fitness center, daily fitness classes, a sauna, three pools, three whirlpools, and (costing extra) a full-service spa.

Rooms from \$584, and *Ocean View* from \$637. The advantage of the *Butler Service Junior Suites* (from \$684), in addition to the extra space and the personal concierge, is that room service is included, which can be a pretty handy thing for newlyweds. Jewel Resorts gives honeymooners a complimentary photo shoot, and the \$199 and \$399 packages offer additional goodies (i.e. a couple's massage). A travel agent loyalty program offers monetary rewards, stars (points) redeemable toward free nights, and perks for clients. Agents earn 250 stars just for registering. Also, Jewel Paradise Cove is joining the **Hilton Curio Collection**. When agents book directly through Hilton, their clients will get their *Honors* points. jewelresorts.com/resorts/paradisecove or aimbridgerewards.com/dashboard/aim-for-the-stars-rewards

sandals barbados

Don't let the fab new **Sandals Ochi** make you forget about the company's second newest resort, **Sandals Barbados**. As is typical of the Stewart clan, when they took over the former Couples property they rejected the "refurbishment" option, instead putting \$65 million into a radical transformation of the property.

The result is a 280-room resort in which every room and suite has mahogany four-poster beds, handmade rugs, flat-screen TVs, brand-new bathrooms, and coffee-makers with Blue Mountain coffee (of course). Of the three accommodations groupings, the



Caribbean Village has the most affordable units, the *Crystal Lagoon* includes rooms whose patios have soaking tubs (some rooms also offer concierge service and private access to the *Crystal Lagoon* pool), and the premium *Ocean Village* suites have plenty of space and other amenities, not to mention location, location, location.

The 11 restaurants include Sandals' first-ever Bombay Club, Butch's Steakhouse, The Merry Monkey Pub, Kimono's, and other establishments under the oversight of Emmy Award-winning chef Walter Staib. Naturally, the house wines are Robert Mondavi. There's a *Red Lane Spa* and fitness center, daily fitness classes, watersports, live entertainment, and optional **Island Routes** excursions. The European pool even has cabanas with elegant chandeliers, baroque-style sofa and outlets.

A *Garden View Caribbean Village Honeymoon Premium* starts at \$395 pp; an *Ocean Village Beachfront Club Level Suite with Balcony Tranquility Soaking Tub*, from \$523 pp; and a *Crystal Lagoon Swim-Up One Bedroom Butler Suite with Patio Tranquility Soaking Tub*, from \$729 pp. Of course, Sandals' full range of travel agent incentives apply. sandals.com or sandals.com/weddingmoons/tropical-honeymoon-packages

la toubana hotel & spa, grande-terre, guadeloupe

A member of **Des Hotels & Des Iles**, which includes chic hideaways like **Le Tom Beach** in St. Barts, **La Toubana** serves as a reminder that nobody does romance like the French. Located on the protected south coast of Grande-Terre, the eastern half of the Guadeloupe butterfly, La Toubana lies atop a bluff near Sainte-Anne, with its friendly public beach and Afro-French eateries and boutiques. Farther east lie the restaurants and bars of yachtie haven Sainte-Francois, and to the west, the clubs of Le Gosier (the Beguine began here) and the romantic restaurant of **Hotel Auberge de La Vieille Tour**.

The other islands beckon, too: Basse-Terre, with its lofty vistas, waterfalls, marine preserve, Cacao Museum (because what could ►►

The Travel Impressions Difference

Travel Impressions has been selling the Caribbean for the last 40 years. Jeff Clarke, president of the company, notes, “We are recognized as the market leader for the region by key industry sources.”

The Travel Impressions portfolio includes almost all the resorts in this story as well as the Caribbean weddings story (see p. 20). And as if 350 resorts on two dozen islands were not enough choice, Travel Impressions, which is part of **Apple Leisure Group**, continues to expand, thanks to strong demand. “We also offer more than 800 luxury villa rentals on more than 20 Caribbean islands via **The Villa Experience** collection,” adds Clarke.

“Travel Impressions is invested in the travel agent distribution channel and is therefore optimized to support retail agents,” he explains. “Our volume of business allows us to negotiate advantageous rates and amenities from hotel partners, helping to give agents a competitive edge while rewarding them with incremental commission and bonus incentives.”

Speaking of bonuses, yet another advantage of Travel Impressions is that its *Dedicated Vacation Flights* provide early morning charter flights from 20 U.S. gateways to Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. As Clarke points out, “This means vacationers get to spend more time in their resorts instead of the air.” travimp.com



be sexier than chocolate?), and prize-winning rum distilleries; Marie-Galante, which offers yet more first-rate rum tastings; and Terre-de-Haut, whose French cafes and village look like some Brittany in the tropics. And that’s just for starters.

Still, it’s hard to leave the hotel grounds, where 32 bungalow spacious rooms and suites offer a sense of privacy, elegantly simple decor (some with vaulted ceilings), WiFi and air conditioning, as well as kitchenettes or kitchens. The spa is as sophisticated as a spa in Paris. A path leads down to a private beach, replete with beach bar/restaurant. And that large infinity pool! By day the illusion of blending with the sea below is perfect; by night sexy purple lighting gives that pool, reached by a walkway over purple-lit fish tanks, the vibe of a worldly dinner club. The poolside bartenders serve with a smile all day and well into the evening, and meals—especially dinners—are all about savoring and lingering. From \$220 a night, breakfast included. Children are welcome, although you don’t see many of them here. toubana.com

sanctuary cap cana by AISol

AISol relaunched **Sanctuary Cap Cana** on Dec. 15, 2014, but that’s yesterday’s news. The new news is that come Dec. 15, 2015, the resort will be adults only.

Even with some children there, this 3-section, all-inclusive beach resort really does feel like a sanctuary. It starts with the design, a savvy mix of Spanish colonial architecture (carved wood balconies, castle-like walls with turrets, stained glass windows) and spacious accommodations with clean lines and other contemporary touches, lots of space, and wicker. Every one of the 176 suites and villas has silk robes, WiFi, double sinks, espresso machines, a minibar that’s refreshed daily, and 24-hour room service. Put it all together, and you feel like a lord or lady, albeit a modern one.

The accommodations include a wide range of choices—e.g. *Junior Suites*, *Honeymoon Suites* with private pools, *Oceanfront Villas*, and *Island Suites*, each with a little causeway connecting the suite to a tiny private island where couples can play castaway. Sanctuary has five swimming pools (one is saltwater), five restaurants (four are a la carte) with plenty of indoor and outdoor seating, four bars/lounges, a fitness center and spa, daily activities and night-time entertainment (including a piano bar and a disco), boat rentals, and a kids’ camp that will keep children away from honeymooners until that Dec. 15 adults-only policy kicks in. Guests can play golf at two of the best courses in the Western Hemisphere: Two Jack Nicklaus layouts, including the legendary *Punta Espada*.

Where should honeymooners stay? The *Island Suites* are tempting (from \$567, all-inclusive); just one caveat: The little islands have no beaches. Each *Honeymoon Suite* (from \$702 per night) comes with a substantial private pool, and beachfront *Junior Suites* start at \$441 and the larger *Ocean Villas* start at \$567. AISol pays agents 10 percent or more on its Cap Cana resorts (a recent special on **AISol Tiara** was 20 percent), and agent rates are \$125 pp per night dbl. In addition, AISol will soon offer an online portal for agents only. sanctuarycapcana.com ●