

HONEYMOONS & DESTINATIONS

“If It Were Me...”

Travel insiders who specialize in these honeymoon-worthy destinations reveal the itineraries they'd follow on their *own* romantic getaways. **EDITOR: LEIGH CRANDALL**

GREECE

EXPERT: Christos Stergiou, founder, TrueGreece **LENGTH OF TRIP:** 10 days

HIGHLIGHTS: Historical Athens, beaches of Patmos, and sunsets on Santorini

DAY 1 | ARRIVE IN ATHENS

Check into the design-forward **Periscope Hotel** (periscope.gr) in the **Kolonaki** area of Athens—if you can swing it, book the penthouse suite with its private outdoor jacuzzi—so nice after a long flight.... Spend the afternoon exploring the neighborhood's stores, restaurants, and quaint cafes.... Check out the traditional **Plaka** and **Monastiraki market** areas, or visit the new **Acropolis Museum**.... Then dinner at **Kuzina** restaurant, which has a stunning view of the **Acropolis** at night.

DAY 2 | OFF TO PATMOS

Catch a flight to Kos then connect by catamaran to Patmos, my home island; its beaches, quaint villages, and excellent culinary scene make it the perfect place for honeymooners.... Check into the **Petra Hotel** (petrahotel-patmos.com), a small (just 12 rooms), romantic spot close to the beach that remains undiscovered by the herds of international tourists.... Spend the afternoon wandering around **Chora** (the capital city) and check out the circa 1088 **Monastery of St. John**.... Have dinner at **Benetos** restaurant; you must try the cheese and spinach phyllo.... Take an after-dinner walk around Chora, followed by cocktails and dancing at **Café 1673**.

DAY 3 | PATMOS

Board a caique (traditional

Greek boat) for a private cruise to a series of nearby islands.... Try lunch at **Pantelis**, one of two restaurants on a beach with nothing else on it—they make incredible fish, among the best in Greece.... Enjoy some unstructured downtime.... Have dinner at **Veggheira** restaurant overlooking the marina in **Skala**.

DAY 4 | PATMOS

Visit **Psili Ammos**, arguably the island's most beautiful beach, or check out **Grikos**, a picturesque fishing village with a long beach.... Spend your last night dining and taking in the colors of the sunset at **Diakofti Taverna**.

DAY 5 | ON TO SANTORINI

Head back to Athens and connect by plane to Santorini.... Stay at the **Carpe Diem Hotel** (carpediemsantorini.com), in the up-and-coming village of **Pyrgos**—the rooms are modern and spacious, and each has a private pool.

DAY 6 | SANTORINI

Head to the capital city of **Fira** for some shopping, or spend the day relaxing on one of the black sand beaches.... Walk around the town of **Oia** in the evening and take in a world-renowned Santorini sunset.... Finish the day with dinner on the terrace at **Ambrosia** restaurant.

DAY 7 | SANTORINI

Start with a day trip to **Thirasia**, a tiny island that

has a really authentic, Old World vibe, or explore one of the Santorini wineries, like my favorite, **Domaine Sigalas**.... Eat dinner at the superromantic **1800** restaurant, housed in a restored mansion in Oia.

DAY 8 | SANTORINI

Enjoy your private pool and relax!

DAY 9 | BACK TO

ATHENS Return to Athens and check back

into the Periscope Hotel.... Sign up for a guided city tour to see the Acropolis and other major sites.... Have dinner at **Varoulko** restaurant, known for its creative seafood dishes fresh from the Aegean.

DAY 10 | FLY HOME



“...it's a romantic spot close to the beach that remains undiscovered by herds of tourists.”

PHOTOS: Courtesy of Greek National Tourism Organization (Santorini, Acropolis), courtesy of Small Luxury Hotels of the World (Carpe Diem)

ECUADOR & THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

DAY 1 | ARRIVE IN QUITO

Check into the **Hotel Patio Andaluz** (hotelpatioandaluz.com) in Quito's colonial Old Town and rest up from your flight.

DAYS 2 & 3 | ANDEAN LAKE REGION

Take a shuttle or a private car two hours north to the Lake District.... Stay at the **Hacienda Cusin** (haciendacusin.com), a fully restored 17th-century inn. It's at an elevation of 8,500 feet, so take an acclimatization walk through the gardens before dinner at the inn's restaurant.

Browse market towns like **Otavalo**, known for the intricate weavings and textiles created by local artists.... For lunch or dinner I like the colonial charm and crackling fireplace at **Hacienda Pinsaqui**.

DAY 4 | ANDEAN LAKE REGION TO THE TROPICAL RAINFOREST

Take in the scenery via horseback (arrange the ride through the hacienda's stable) or hike around **Lake Cuicocha**.... Lunch on fresh trout at **El Mirador**, overlooking the lake.... Drive about three hours down the western slope of the Andes, through forested mountain gorges, past waterfalls, crystalline streams, and snow-capped volcanoes.... Check into the **Arashá Tropical Rainforest Resort & Spa** (arasha-resort.com).

DAYS 5 & 6 | TROPICAL RAINFOREST

Arashá is an eco-friendly resort with a full-service spa and natural spring-fed mineral pools; it's also located in the region with the largest variety of amphibians in the world. There's a lot going on here,

EXPERT: Tom Damon, president, Southwind Adventures

LENGTH OF TRIP: Two weeks **HIGHLIGHTS:** Exploring Quito's Old Town, the breathtaking Andean lake region and tropical rainforest, and the exotic wildlife of the Galápagos Islands

so create your own itinerary—my favorites include nature hikes through the rainforest to waterfalls, fishing (the resort will cook what you catch), and whitewater rafting.

DAY 7 | BACK TO QUITO

Leave the resort in the early afternoon and check back into the **Hotel Patio Andaluz**.... Head to dinner at Quito hot spot **Zazu**—the ceviche martini here is a must!

DAY 8 | THE GALAPAGOS

Fly to **Baltra Island**, in the Galápagos, where you'll then board the M/V *Eclipse* (eclipse.com.ec), a small cruise ship that will take you to **Las Bachas**, on **Santa Cruz Island**, a major egg-laying beach for sea turtles.... Look for marine iguanas and flamingos on shore, then return to the boat for dinner.

DAY 9 | THE GALAPAGOS

Wake up to the sunrise over **Puerto Egas** on **Santiago Island**, home to a black lava shoreline and intertidal wildlife like the Galápagos fur seal.... On **Bartolomé Island**, hike to a summit with a panoramic view of the nearby islands and **Pinnacle Rock**.... Back at the beach, snorkel among the 307 species of fish; a short walk then leads to a bay where you'll see white-tip reef sharks and marine turtle nests.

DAY 10 | THE GALAPAGOS

In the morning take a short walk up **Cerro Dragón** (Dragon Hill) for views of the bay and glimpses of iguanas.... During the afternoon disembark at **Rábida**, one of

the best snorkeling sites in the Galápagos.

DAY 11 | THE GALAPAGOS

Wake up to morning light shining on the summit of **Darwin Volcano**.... Later, take a boat ride and spot blue-footed boobies as well as penguins and marine iguanas.... In the channels between **Fernandina** and **Isabela Islands**, you might spot whales and dolphins.

DAY 12 | THE GALAPAGOS

Explore the black lava fields of **Punta Espinosa** on **Fernandina Island**, snorkel at **Punta Vicente Roca** on **Isabela Island**, or just relax aboard the M/V *Eclipse*.

DAY 13 | THE GALAPAGOS; BACK TO QUITO

Disembark

at the town of **Puerto Ayora** on **Santa Cruz Island** and tour the **Charles Darwin Research Station**, where you'll come face to face with some of the remaining 11 subspecies of giant tortoise found on the islands—honestly, a life-changing experience.... Stroll the shops in town before heading to the airport on **Baltra Island** for the return flight to Quito.... Finally, check back into the **Hotel Patio Andaluz** and have a romantic last dinner at **Mea Culpa** wine bar/restaurant.

DAY 14 | FLY HOME



A Galápagos iguana



Hotel Patio Andaluz



Hacienda Cusin

“Come face to face with some of the remaining 11 subspecies of giant tortoise found on the islands.”

Andean lake region

ROME, FLORENCE & VENICE

DAY 1 | ARRIVE IN ROME

Check into the **St. Regis Grand Hotel, Rome** (starwoodhotels.com), and spend the rest of your first day getting pampered at the hotel's spa and enjoying the opulent Old World elegance of the place. (Even the standard rooms have hand-painted frescoes!)

DAY 2 | ROME

Spend the first half of the day in **Vatican City**. See Raphael's *Transfiguration*, the Raphael Rooms, the **Belvedere Garden** featuring the famous *Laocoön and His Sons* sculpture, and, of course, the restored **Sistine Chapel**, famous for Michelangelo's ceiling and the *Last Judgment* fresco.... Walk to **St. Peter's Basilica** and take in Michelangelo's dome, his statue *Pietà*, Bernini's magnificent *Baldacchino*, and the tombs of the Popes.... Continue on to the **Colosseum** and get a taste of what it might have been like to be a gladiator doing combat in the Amphitheater Flavianum.... Stop for an al fresco lunch at **'Gusto**, which serves fantastic pizza.... Visit the city center, starting at **Piazza Navona** then heading to the **Pantheon**.... End the day at the **Spanish Steps**; take in a gorgeous view of the city and sample delicious cuisine on the terrace of nearby **Ristorante Mirabelle**.

DAYS 3-5 | FLORENCE

Take a two-hour train ride to Florence and check into the **Villa La Vedetta** (www.villalavedettahotel.com), a boutique hotel housed in a neo-Renaissance villa that has a gorgeous view of the city.... It's easy to self-navigate the art and architecture Florence is known for: Start the day at the **Uffizi Gallery**,

EXPERT: Harlan and Kara deBell, "Travel Siblings," Valerie Wilson Travel

LENGTH OF TRIP: Eight days **HIGHLIGHTS:** The art and architecture of three Italian cities, plus shopping, eating, and of course, a gondola ride in Venice

where you'll see masterpieces by Giotto, Botticelli, Raphael, da Vinci, and Michelangelo, among others.... Walk to the **Piazza della Signoria**, home to an outdoor sculpture gallery. Nearby, you can see impressive works of art like the gold "Gates of Paradise" doors of the **Baptistry**, **Giotto's bell tower**, and the famous **Basilica di Santa Maria** dome, by Brunelleschi.... Visit **Accademia**, where you'll see Michelangelo's *David*.... If your tastes lean more toward wearable art, window shopping at the famous jewelry stores lining the **Ponte Vecchio** is a must—we particularly like the **Orlando Orlandini Atelier**.... If you're into shopping, make the 40-minute trip to countryside outlet **The Mall** for big savings on designers like Gucci, Giorgio Armani, and Bottega Veneta.... We love riverside restaurant **Borgo San Jacopo** for dinner, or, for an exceptional view of the city, try the Tuscan fare (like the superrich warm blue-lobster fillet with goose liver and herb sauce) at **La Loggia** restaurant at the **Villa San Michele**, a former monastery.

DAYS 6 & 7 | VENICE

Travel by train to Venice and check into the **Hotel Danieli**, formerly a 14th-century palace (starwoodhotels.com)—the rooms are gorgeous and so Italian, with details like silk-covered walls and Murano glass chandeliers.... Wander narrow side streets that snake along the canals,

and take time to pop in and out of shops and cafés along the way.... Enjoy a private tour (booked through iditravel.com) of Venice's most famous islands, **Murano**, **Burano**, and **Torcello**. In Murano, tour the **Museo Vetrario** for a century-by-century tour of the history of glassmaking. Burano is a fisherman's island known for its brightly colored houses and lace-making school. In Torcello, the last stop, see the island's beautiful cathedral, with its magnificent mosaics.... Stay in Torcello and enjoy dinner in the garden at **Locanda Cipriani**.

On your second day here, be sure to see **La Fenice** opera house and the modern art at the **Peggy Guggenheim Collection**, located in the heiress's former home....

End the day with a private gondola ride on the canals—sure, it's touristy, but a visit to Venice is simply not complete without a ride in a gondola.... Sample traditional Venetian recipes at **Ristorante Antico Pignolo**, a hidden gem just a few yards off **Piazza San Marco**—the seafood risotto here is superb! Finish your trip the way café society would have back in the day: with the signature bellini at the world-famous **Harry's Bar**.

DAY 8 | FLY HOME



St. Regis Grand Hotel, Rome



"...even the standard rooms have hand-painted frescoes...."



Ponte Vecchio, Florence



Venice

THAILAND & LAOS

DAYS 1 & 2 | IN TRANSIT TO BANGKOK, THAILAND

Once you've arrived in Bangkok, check into the new **Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel** (novotel.com) located within the new airport complex; because of the US/Bangkok time difference (12 hours), you'll likely sleep only a few hours.... Wake up early the next morning for your connecting flight.

DAY 3 | ARRIVE IN CHIANG MAI Take a short (one-hour) flight north and check into the **Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi** (mandarinoriental.com), and relax and enjoy the hotel's pool and gorgeous grounds.... Spend a few hours strolling through the **Night Bazaar** in the center of the city, where you can sample some of the best Thai street food available.

DAYS 4 & 5 | CHIANG MAI Take a pre-dawn walk to the nearby *wat* (temple), where you'll be able to observe the monks preparing for the day.... After breakfast at the hotel, visit **Wat Phra Singh**, a large 14th-century temple located in the heart of the old walled city.... Visit **Chiang Mai National Museum**, which has an impressive collection of bronze and gold jewelry, among other artifacts.... Grab lunch and take in Thai-style street entertainment from musicians and dancers along **Ratchadamnoen Road**.... Visit **Wat Phra Borommathat Doi Suthep**, a temple at the base of a 4,900-foot mountain that looks over the Chiang Mai valley.... Return to the hotel for some downtime and dinner.

The next day, hire a local trekking guide to accompany

EXPERT: G.W. "Sandy" Ferguson, Asia Desk
LENGTH: Two weeks **HIGHLIGHTS:** Ancient temples, elephant rides, night bazaars, and white sand beaches

you on a hike into the mountains of the **Chiang Mai Province**. Along the way you'll be able to visit some of the region's small tribal villages, like **Akha**, **Lahu**, and **Lisu**. Get to know the wonderful people in this part of Thailand—you'll be in great hands.... Return to the hotel and relax at the spa. Try the traditional Thai massage—a 2,500-year-old treatment that combines stretching and pressing techniques.

DAY 6 | LUANG PRABANG, LAOS Fly into the royal Laos city (and Unesco World Heritage site) **Luang Prabang**.... Check into the **Maison Souvannaphoum Hotel** (angsana.com), a small but posh inn that was once home to a Laotian prince.... Explore the ancient palaces, temples, and French colonial architecture of the city.... Have a leisurely dinner poolside at the hotel's French-Laotian-Indochinese restaurant, **Elephant Blanc**.

DAY 7 | LUANG PRABANG, LAOS Spend the morning on a boat ride up the **Mekong River**. You'll see the caves at **Pak Ou**, where locals and visiting Buddhists have been worshipping for thousands of years. The result: more than 4,000 images of Buddha that have been placed or drawn there over the years.... Also, stop at the village of **Ban Xang Hai**, known for its production of *lao-lao*, a clear, moonshine-like whiskey brewed from rice that will knock your socks off.... You can also shop for handicrafts and souvenirs in the **village of the Leu tribe**.... At night, visit the **Old Palace**



Phuket

"...splurge on a room with an outdoor jacuzzi where you can watch the sunset."

to enjoy traditional Lao dancing and music. Then stroll through the city's historic section and end the day with a three-course dinner at French-Lao restaurant **L'Elephant**.

DAY 8 | LAO ELEPHANT SAFARI Head to **Elephant Village**, where you'll ride elephants through the jungle, swim, and eat lunch at **Elephant View** restaurant, which overlooks the **Nam Khan River**.... Return to town for more sightseeing, including a stop at the **National Museum**, a former palace that houses sacred artifacts. Around 4 p.m., head to the front of the Old Palace and walk up **Mount Phousi** (really more of a hill) for a bird's-eye view of the city.

DAY 9 | FLY TO PHUKET Fly back to Thailand, to the resort town of **Phuket**.... My favorite spot (and it's also a great value) is the **Andaman White Beach Resort** (andamanwhitebeach.com), located on a private beach. Splurge on a room with an outdoor jacuzzi where you can watch the sunset.

DAYS 10 & 11 | PHUKET Relax and enjoy the beach!

DAY 12 | BANGKOK Fly to Bangkok and check into the **Rembrandt Hotel & Towers**

(rembrandtbkk.com), located in the fashionable **Sukhumvit district**.... Take the Skytrain to the **Suan Lum Night Bazaar**. The nearby **Joe Louis Puppet Theatre** is also a must-see tonight. For dinner, I like **Spice Market** for fine dining or **Harmonique** for simple, home-style Thai cooking.

DAY 13 | BANGKOK Have a local guide give you a city tour, during which you'll visit **Pak Khlong Talat**, the biggest and most important wholesale market in the city—buy a chain of "love flowers" that smell wonderful and will last the rest of the day.... Board a "long-tail" boat for a trip down the river and along the canals of Bangkok's sister city, **Thonburi**, where you'll pass the **Wat Arun** (a.k.a. Temple of Dawn), a gorgeous example of Khmer architecture.... Back on land, visit the **Grand Palace**, and later, **Vimanmek Palace**. Enjoy a buffet lunch at the **Royal Princess Hotel**, then visit the **Jim Thompson House**, a must for lovers of Oriental art and antiques. For a culture-rich last dinner, dine with the locals at **Soo Khek** temple.

DAY 14 | FLY HOME



Bangkok



Luang Prabang, Laos



Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi