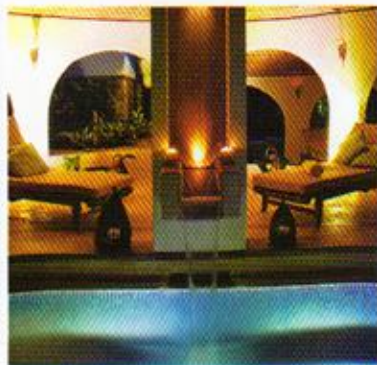


ALL-TERRAIN AMOUR

Three magical destinations that are truly the stuff of dreams

By Bekah Wright



spring romance Soak in a cascading spring (top), indulge in a relaxing treatment at the Grand Spa (middle), or enjoy an in-room jacuzzi (bottom) at the Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort.

Looking for a honeymoon filled with adventure, luxury, and romance? The world abounds with unique terrain just waiting to be discovered. Celebrate your union with a trip to a thermal resort where the two of you can sleep in a rainforest at the base of a volcano; an eco-park in “Middle-earth” where you’ll explore luminescent glowworm caves; or a smattering of coral islands from which you can sail into the sunset on a Dhoni boat.

AT THE HEART OF A VOLCANO

There’s something magnificent and mysterious about volcanoes that makes them seem like living, breathing beings. Which leads one to wonder—is it possible for a volcano to have a heart-beat? Perhaps the best place to find out is the Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort. Located at the base of a volcano in La Fortuna de San Carlos in Costa Rica’s Arenal region, the resort is set on 740 acres of rainforest. The 114 guest rooms/suites overlook the Arenal Volcano, tropical gardens, or the rainforest. Also on the property are two thermal rivers, a cold spring, and small waterfalls that feed 12 thermal spring pools and lagoons. This is nature at its best.

Drawing upon the resort’s natural gifts is The Grand Spa. Open to hotel guests and outside visitors, the area encompasses two thermal springs and a cold spring that beckon you to soak. Combine a soak with a spa treatment for ultimate relaxation. Start off with the spa’s pre-treatment footbath before retreating to one of 11 private open-air bungalows for a deep tissue massage. Taking the art of Mesoamerican healing a bit deeper is Tonatihu, a Yaqui shaman who leads guests through the Huey Temazcal Aahuatlan ritual. Performed in a womblike structure, this unique sweat-based blend of therapies aims for spiritual and physical cleansing.

When the mood for physical activity strikes, resident yogis are on hand to teach classes in an open-air pavilion. Also available for workouts is a fitness center with tropical garden views. Revved up and ready for adventure, pay a visit to nearby natural wonders at Arenal National

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HONEYMOON TRAVEL

Park, Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, and Arenal Lake. At Arenal National Park, ascend 5,436 feet above sea level aboard a sky tram for a bird's-eye view of the terrain, including volcanic ash columns and lava flows. Get a different perspective on a return trip by zipline through the park's canopy; keep an eye out for toucans and monkeys. A zipline tour is also a great way to explore the cloud forest. As for Arenal Lake, check it out while kayaking, windsurfing, or fishing. Tabacón will arrange other adrenaline-pumping activities such as whitewater rafting, exploring the jungle via special "hanging bridges," canyoning/rappelling down La Fortuna waterfall, and visiting wildlife refuges and private reserves.

As night falls, enjoy dinner at Los Tucanes, one of the resort's two restaurants and three bars. Here, chef Leopold Cortes cooks up gourmet fare such as lacquered duck maitre with mango sauce over sautéed mushrooms. The open-air restaurant offers views of the rainforest and lava flow from Arenal Volcano. A live jazz performance is accompanied by the sound of a thermal pool waterfall. Get closer to nature with a romantic, torchlight dinner in a private bungalow tucked away in the rainforest, just steps away from the hotel. Later, head back to the honeymoon suite to share a Jacuzzi amid the sounds of the jungle. Afterward, relax on the balcony, watching the glow of Arenal Volcano's lava flow, and listen to the thump, thump, thump of the volcano's heart.

For more details on Costa Rica, visit www.visitcostarica.com. For more on Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort, call 011-506-460-2020 or toll-free (877) 277-8291, or visit www.tabacon.com. Rates range from \$215 to \$439 per night.

SANCTUARY IN A MAGICAL FOREST

When it comes to unique landscapes, mystical "Middle-earth" has plenty. *The Lord of the Rings* films transported viewers to this world unlike any other. Although Middle-earth is fictitious, the location for the movies wasn't. All three were shot in the "Land of the Long White Cloud"—New Zealand. Plan a honeymoon to the ancient continent of Gondwanaland to discover the magic that's waiting there.

Visit New Zealand's North Island to experience the country's Thermal Region, also known as the Land of the Maori, the indigenous peoples who make up a third of the area's population. Located in the Lake District just beyond the Bay of Plenty is the quaint town of Rotorua. Geo-

thermal in nature, Rotorua is literally steamy with its many geysers and hot mud pools.

Outside of town and away from Rotorua's sulfuric aroma is Treetops Lodge & Estate. Set in the New Zealand bush, the 2,500-acre eco-park protects upland game and waterfowl habitat. A culmination of 800-year-old forests and valleys in a temperate rainforest, Treetops offers guests nature at every turn with seven trout streams, four lakes, waterfalls, and more than 200 varieties of fern. Wildlife making their home here include elk, deer, and water buffalo.

Treetops' main lodge artfully blends into its surroundings with elements of Rimu timber and local stone. Leading to the lodge's main doors is a bridge crossing a trout stream. Inside, the hunting lodge atmosphere is one of understated elegance, with the Great Room's high ceilings and vast fireplace. Other rooms in the main lodge that make for hours of relaxing are the timber-paneled library, the game room with an antique billiards table, and a dayroom akin to a winter garden. Guests gravitate to the aromatic, open kitchen. Also popular for lounging over breakfast is the conservatory with its sun-kissed skylight, or the main dining room for candlelight and company coupled with a gourmet feast. The main lodge houses four guest suites. Steps away in a sheltered valley are the estate's eight multi-level, private villas. Guests may be tempted to bypass the fireplace and Jacuzzi tub for the villas' biggest draw: large outdoor patios amid lush landscape.

Although in-villa spa treatments and yoga classes are available, daylight hours call for enjoying the outdoors. The region is known as a trout fishing paradise: seven trout streams and four lakes available for fishing on the estate attest to it. Other on-site activities include hiking to a nearby waterfall, mountain biking, horseback riding, clay

shooting, and archery. Adventures farther afield can also be planned, including abseiling, rock climbing, and zorbing. Or go on a helicopter or boat expedition to volcanic Mount Tarawera, Mokoia Island, and the volcanic White Island.

Particularly special is the estate's Maori Indigenous Food Trail: On a hike guided by ecology expert and Maori food specialist Charles Royal,

participants gather native herbs and ingredients. Later, guests feast on the fruits of their labor in dishes prepared by executive chef Bruce Thomason. If you're seeking romantic solace, dinner awaits in the library or fireside in your villa.

After dinner, guests can stroll to glowworm caves near the lodge to witness the luminescent beetles in action. When the moon signals it's



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Maori mystique Dawn at Treetops Lodge & Estate unveils a misty New Zealand forest that shelters a host of wildlife.

HONEYMOONTRAVEL

time to retire, head back to the villa, where a welcoming fire burns in the fireplace and a bottle of New Zealand wine is chilled and ready for toasts.

Visit www.newzealand.com for details on the country. Log on to www.treetops.co.nz or call 011-64-7-333-2066 for more on Treetops Lodge & Estate. Rates range from \$440 to \$740 per person per night and include breakfast, pre-dinner cocktails, dinner, and selected activities.

LUXURY ON A PRIVATE ISLAND

If the two of you want to get lost on a deserted island, The Republic of Maldives might be just the place for your honeymoon getaway. The Maldives has more than 1,000 coral islands, only 200 of which are inhabited. Eight miles from the capital of Malé is Veligandu Huraa, a private island in the South Malé Atoll. While not deserted, the island offers a haven (and perhaps a base camp from which to scout for one of its deserted neighbors) resplendent with luxurious trappings at the newly opened Naladhu Maldives resort.

A grove of coconut trees and powder-white beaches fronting the Indian Ocean are the setting for the six-acre Veligandu Huraa ("sand island"). The resort has 19 private guesthouses: six on the



beach; 13 on the water's edge. Designed to look like traditional Maldivian boathouses, the white-gabled buildings showcase the tropical environs with private plunge pools and indoor/outdoor bathrooms with sunken, infinity-edge terrazzo bathtubs. A House Master tends to guests' needs.

Experience the Indian Ocean by kayaking, scuba diving, snorkeling, windsurfing, and deep-sea fishing. A pool on the property is made for lounging. Tap into your chi in yoga and meditation classes, and succumb to utter relaxation with a spa treatment on the house deck or via a two-minute boat ride at the neighboring Anantara Spa. Adventure seekers can hop aboard a tra-

private paradise At the Naladhu Maldives resort, lounge on the powder-white beach of a private island in the Indian Ocean.

ditional Maldivian Dhoni sailboat and venture out to a sand bank, a local fisherman's island or, of course, a deserted island.

Set aside evening time to spend in The Living Room restaurant, tasting wine in its extensive wine cellar and enjoying chef Ashley Coleman's table d'hôte menu of Asian and Western-inspired cuisine in the al fresco dining area overlooking a turquoise lagoon. Many venues offer dining on the island, particularly for guests participating in the resort's culinary journey. By day, the culinary staff teaches Thai and fusion cooking. At night, four settings offer romantic dining ambience: above the lagoon on a platform, secluded in a palm tree grove, on the beach in a cabana, or adrift on a Dhoni boat. Back at the house, a feather mattress with 300-count sheets beckons, and the ocean laps at the beach—a sweet lullaby.

For details on the Maldives, visit www.visitmaldives.com. For more on Naladhu Maldives, call 011-960-664-1888 or visit www.naladhu.com. Rates start at \$2,000 per night.

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