

the new **HOTSPOTS**

Bali, the Maldives, the Solomon Islands, Phuket and New York will always have a place in our hearts, but honeymooners who want to leave the crowds behind know these spots are so five minutes ago, darling! The hippest destinations are those yet to be overrun. Rachael Cakes-Ash gives you the inside track on where to go before everyone else. Think of the boasting rights!



SUMBA THE NEW BALI

TOP TO BOTTOM: Sumba, known for its sandalwood and surf, sits 400km east of Bali in the Indian Ocean. Follow enchanting stone paths through the Nihiwatu Resorts 177 hectares of rainforest (and be sure to take a dip in the pool and dance on the bar while you're there!)



Bali will always be a honeymooner's delight. The Indonesian island is known as much for romance as it is for its personal villas with private pools, intimate service and sunset cocktails. Bali's considerable charms still exist but the secret's out, so you have to search much harder for it.

Head east of Bali, however, and you hit Lombok, a quieter island with a handful of resorts. Devotees will tell you that Lombok is like the Bali of old before the "Golden Arches" moved in, but resorts now line its beaches too and it's only a matter of time before it reaches the same fever pitch of its big sister. Intrepid travellers will want to head still further east to Sumba, the ultimate destination for honeymoon couples. Why? Only a select few have heard of it. It's the new Bali. Shhhh.

Once the island's only visitors were dedicated surfers who were willing to trek 400km east of Bali but now others have started making the journey as well. (A direct flight to Sumba leaves Bali daily.) Sumba boasts just one resort worth talking about: the Nihiwatu Resort on the island's south east coast. (Best not to talk too loudly as once discovered you'll want to keep it secret.)

The beauty of Nihiwatu is its total remoteness. With no mobile coverage, no internet access, no television, no fax and only a blue satellite phone, couples soon relax without the disturbances of modern day life.

Guests who arrive at night peer out into the darkness, the sound of the waves and the smell of salt hint at the beauty below. Come sun up they marvel at the ocean view

now exposed before them from one of the six luxury bungalows that line the hill. Stone paths lead guests from the hilltop infinity pool and neighbouring open air spa pavilion down to the dining area and the bar that was designed for guests to dance on!

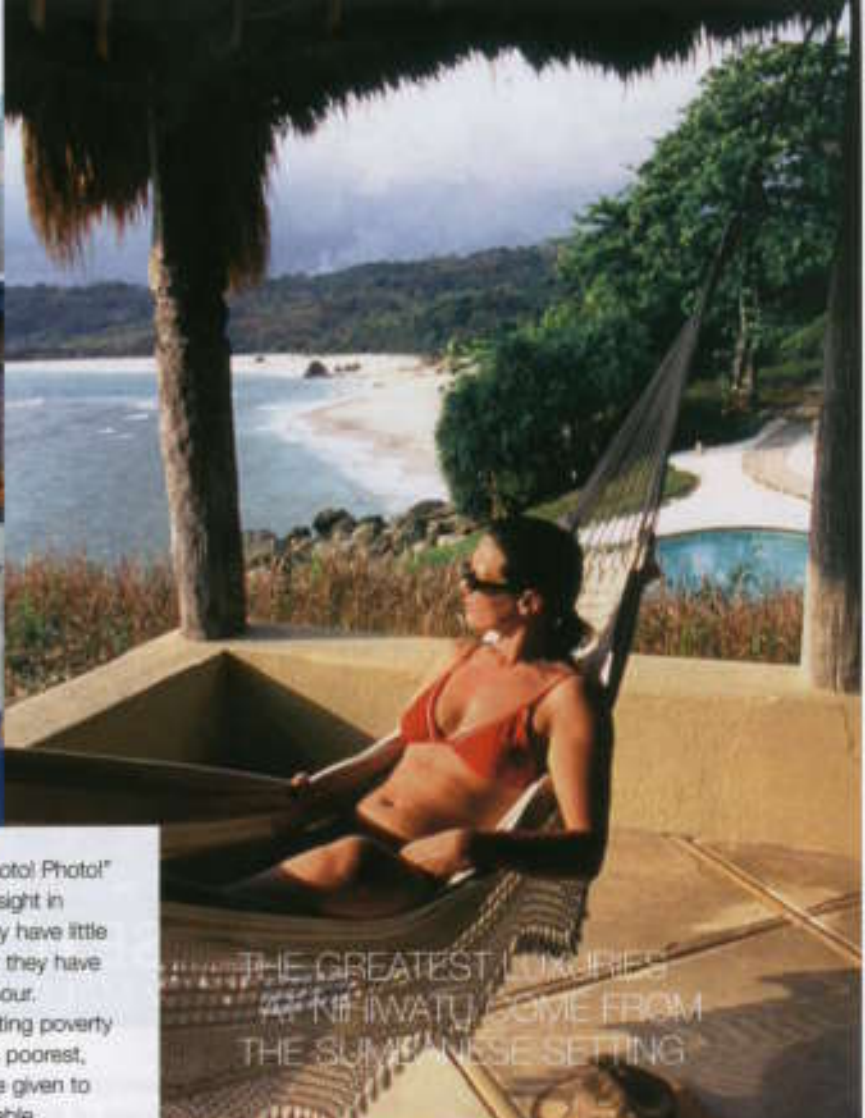
Life is basic here and guests easily slip into a routine, rising late or strolling the secluded two and a half kilometre stretch of beach before breakfast. Beachcombers may run across a herd of water buffalo bathing in the ocean, shepherd at their side, or see fishermen returning from an all night sojourn in their small outrigger canoes.

The greatest luxuries at Nihiwatu come from the setting: candlelit dinners in a field miles from home, a bed decorated each evening with frangipanis and tropical petals, sunsets that are personally designed for lovers (or so it seems) and the Sumbanese locals who serve up cocktails with a smile and a wink. It's almost surreal.

Few decisions need to be made. Lie by the pool, get a massage at the open air spa, dive the nearby 'Magic Mountain' site, snorkel the reef, wax up the board or doze on a day bed with a book.

Be sure to set aside some time to visit a local village to experience a completely foreign way of life to the average modern city dweller: 600,000 Sumbanese inhabit the island and it's estimated that over half of the island's residents are some of the world's last practising animists (a belief that all animals and objects have souls.) Ancient tribal rituals continue to this day.

Peruse the markets of Wakabubak, a village 45 minutes from Nihiwatu, and be



greeted with "Hello Mrs!" and "Photo! Photo!" – Westerners are not a common sight in these parts. The people here may have little in the way of material goods but they have vault loads of kindness and humour. (Nihiwatu is committed to alleviating poverty on the island, one of Indonesia's poorest, and part of each guest's fees are given to the Sumba Foundation, a charitable organisation set up by Nihiwatu owner, Claude Graves, to help build wells, medical clinics and schools for the local villages.)

Sumba is all about colour from the intense inks of ikat, the traditional textiles woven in secret by the Sumbanese women, to the bright red chillies, purple onions, green leaves and pink ginger hawked by traders. Leave your credit card at home, however – this is an island purely based on animal trade and unless you have three pigs, a buffalo and a herd of horses in your account, your plastic won't work here. Instead bring cash to trade for the island's renowned handicrafts.

The Sumbanese believe that Sumba came to be when the sky was so low that man bumped his head with heaven, a happy accident that created a pathway between heaven and earth. Spend more than a night at Nihiwatu and you'll be certain that you've climb the pathway yourself.

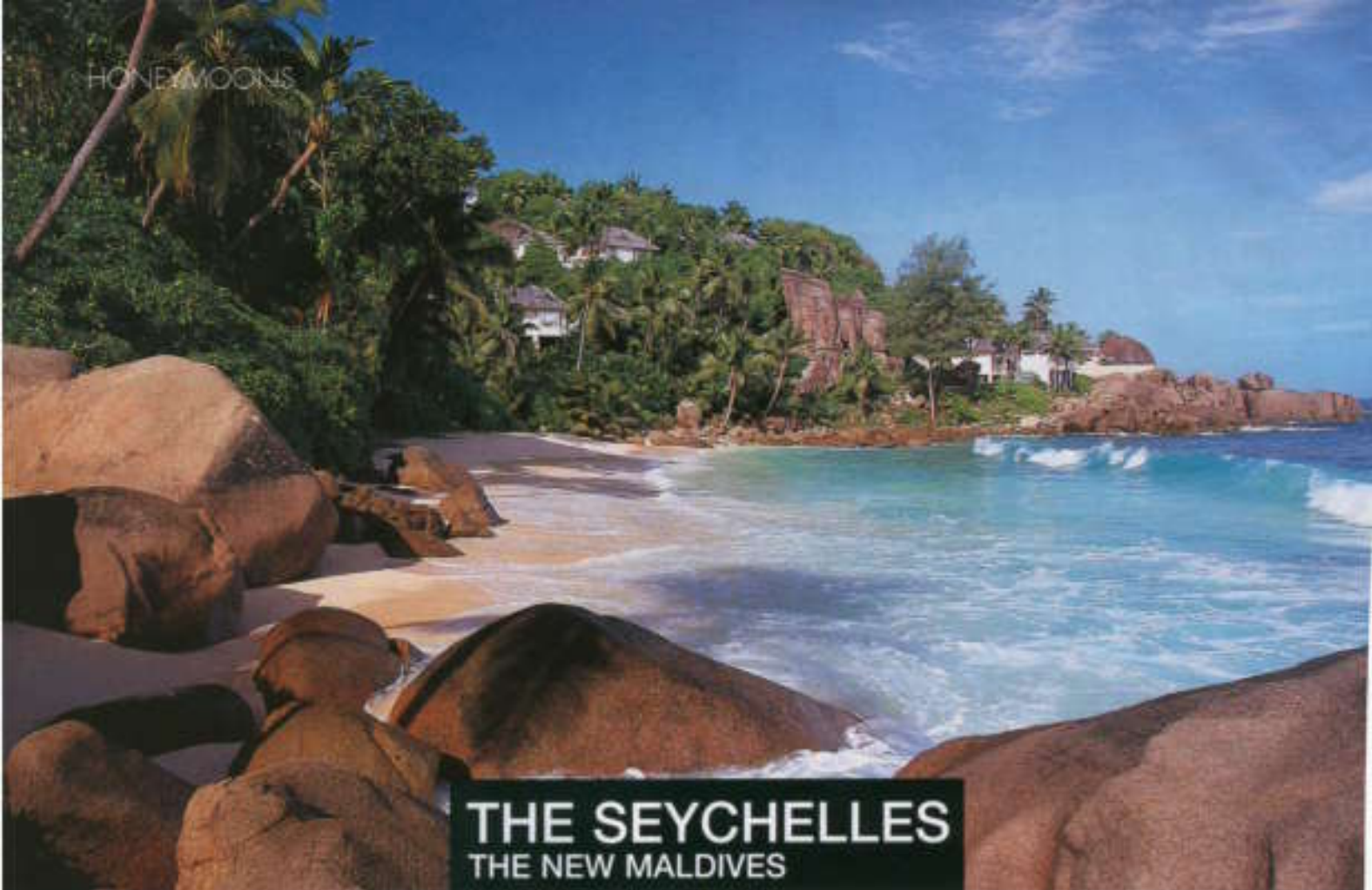
RATES: Nihiwatu Resort offers a 10-night honeymoon package in a cliff top luxury bungalow including all meals and non-alcoholic drinks, a sunset beach horse ride, village tour, a spa treatment, a poolside dinner for two with bubbly for about \$4200 plus taxes. **FOR BOOKINGS AND INFORMATION:** See www.nihiwatu.com or call 1300 368 925

THE GREATEST SUMMER
AT NIHIWATU COME FROM
THE SUMBANESE SETTING



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Street food in Walkabubak, a village on Sumba. Lazing in a hammock at Nihiwatu. Colour dominates the marketplace. Take a break from surfing, diving and fishing to drink in the view. The Sumbanese greet visitors with warmth and laughter.





THE SEYCHELLES THE NEW MALDIVES

TOP TO BOTTOM: Banyan Tree Seychelles sits on Mahé and the resort's luxury bungalows overlook the sublime glory of Intendance Bay. Each of the resort's 47 villas boasts its own plunge pool; Banyan Tree is world renowned for their spas and this resort is no exception: a kaffir lime body conditioning treatment and a Thai honey facial may be just what you need after many months of planning.

Seemingly lost in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Africa, sits the archipelago known as the Seychelles. Once the exclusive domain of locals and rich celebrities (both George Harrison and Peter Sellers owned land here) these islands have now opened their doors to the world.

With more than 100 islands scattered across 100 square kilometres, you can be as lost or found in the Seychelles as you want to be. Six distinct island groups feature granitic islands, sandy cays and atolls and all are surrounded by crystal clear water. A mix

of African, European and Malagasy culture characterises this nation which was once claimed by the French, then the British, and now stands independent.

For couples wanting a truly remote tropical honeymoon, private island resorts abound. Water lovers can also charter yachts with personal staff, and cruise from island to island, dropping anchor at whim. Purists will want to find a beach-side bungalow and listen to the waves lap against the shore and feel the sand and the shells beneath their feet.

Lovers of luxury will head straight for the Banyan Tree resort on the main island of Mahé. No keeping up with the Jones here, as each villa has its own pool (though you can only book the Presidential Villa if you're carrying the exclusive 'black' Amex.)

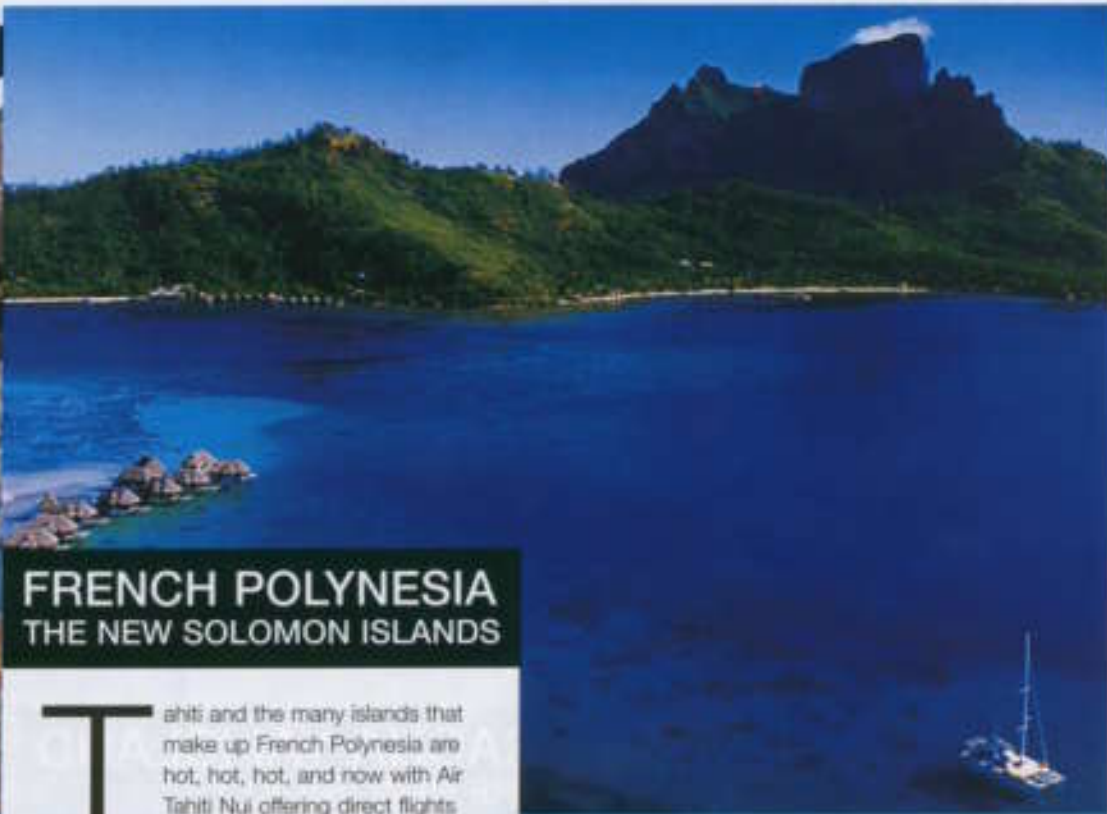
No matter where you stay, the island's combination of Creole cuisine, erotic traditional dance and balmy water temperatures is pure bliss. But be warned: you may well want to lose your return ticket.

RATES: Honeymoon packages at the Banyan Tree Seychelles include daily breakfast, a romantic moonlight dinner, afternoon tea in your villa, a spa treatment, "intimate moments" villa decoration, gift, daily fruit and a bottle of champagne plus transfers. Starting from \$1600 per night.

BOOKINGS: See sih.com or call 1800 251 958

INFORMATION: See seychelles.com





FRENCH POLYNESIA THE NEW SOLOMON ISLANDS

Tahiti and the many islands that make up French Polynesia are hot, hot, hot, and now with Air Tahiti Nui offering direct flights from Oz to Papeete there's no

reason to say no. A mere eight-hour flight from Australia's east coast and you'll find yourself on Tahiti, French Polynesia's main island (there are 118 in total) surrounded by island men with glowing biceps and Tahitian women who would still inspire Gauguin. No wonder Tahiti was and one of the late Marlon Brando's favoured destinations.

The island of Bora Bora is a honeymoon favourite. The island's natural crater lagoon is a milky blue and the fish life teems beneath the surface – don a snorkel or peruse from the privacy of your over-water bungalow. *Motus* (tiny islands) dot the lagoon and the Sofitel Motu Resort sits atop of one. Should you crave the shore, jump aboard the resort's boat and head to Bloody Mary's to dine on seafood with celebrities. Cameron Diaz, Rod Stewart and Sharon Stone have all dined here – spot your faves on the board out front.

RATES: Talpacific offers return flights, two nights at Sofitel Papeete and five nights at Sofitel Motu Bora Bora starting at \$2979 each ex Sydney until June 2006.

BOOKINGS: see talpacific.com or call 1300 137 727.

INFORMATION: see tahiti-tourisme.com.au

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Women in Bora Bora always seem to be smiling. The lagoon at Bora Bora is teeming with life and a great spot for sailing, swimming and snorkeling. Preparing for a feast on Bora Bora, a Polynesian man shows off his strength (and his muscles.) Approaching Bora Bora is the stuff of dreams. Bora Bora's beautiful Sofitel Motu Resort.



GET AWAY FROM IT ALL ON AN ISLAND
SURROUNDED BY CRYSTAL CLEAR
WATERS AND PRISTINE CORAL REEFS

RACHA YAI ISLAND THE NEW PHUKET

Before Leonardo and *The Beach* made Koh Phi Phi a household name, this Thai island surrounded by crystal waters was the undiscovered Phuket. Now, it's Racha Yai's turn. A small island 23km south of Phuket (an hour express boat ride), Racha Yai has no roads which gloriously also means no traffic.

Known by divers for its clear water and colourful coral, Racha Yai is a world away from the madness of frenetic Phuket – think barefoot walks on white sand and an island life committed to natural beauty.

The Racha, opened late last year, is the island's newest resort. Pristine decadence reigns and Racha's 70 villas seamlessly blend in with the natural surroundings. (The resort is committed to environmentally sustainable tourism.) Choose a pool villa with views overlooking the Andaman Sea and be sure to indulge in a spa treatment, yoga classes, sea kayaking or sailing at dusk.

RATES: Two nights in a deluxe villa including transfers, daily fruit, flowers and chocolate, daily breakfast, lunch with sparkling wine on a deserted island or at the hotel with private butler for \$885 plus tax. Extra nights at \$270.
BOOKINGS: call 1800 251 958
INFORMATION: see thailand.net.au, sfr.com or call (02) 9247 7549

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: No roads means that one of the best ways to get around Racha Yai Island in Thailand is by sea kayak. Grab your hubby, cocktails for two and a platter of fruit and lounge by the Racha's pristine swimming pool. Romantic candle lit dinners are only one of the Racha's many attractions – this eco-friendly luxury resort also boasts a spa, sailing and daily yoga classes.





HONG KONG THE NEW NEW YORK

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Star Ferry traverses Victoria Harbour. Stay in the city where the action is and then take a day trip to one of the sandy beaches nearby. A deep circular tub is at the centre of the Landmark's serene suites. The luxe Oriental Spa at the Landmark sprawls across two floors. Lounge at the Landmark's giant MO Bar designed by Adam Tihany who also designed Le Cirque in New York.

Hong Kong, like Manhattan, is on an island. Sure both cities have embraced the mainland nearby but the island is still where all the action is. Both cities are alive

24-seven and both attract the rich and famous. The difference is, Hong Kong is closer and it combines the culture of the Orient with big city lights. Anything you want in Hong Kong, you can get for a price.

For couples who enjoy big city travel, you can't beat Hong Kong. Bargain shopping to couture, street stalls to fine dining, old world charm to up-to-the-minute design, it's all here. Known as the home of five-star service, most of the big name hotels line the harbour with views across Victoria Harbour.

For newlyweds look no further than the newest bride in town - The Landmark Oriental Hotel. Brides will adore the Harvey Nichols store in the foyer while grooms will salivate over the moving glass drawbridge at the très glam MO Bar.

For style-meisters on a budget, hit JIA Boutique Hotel in Causeway Bay for Philippe Starck design, a complimentary Luxe City Guide to Hong Kong and automatic queue jumping authority to the VIP Kee Club and Dragon-I restaurant.

RATES: Rooms at the Landmark Mandarin Oriental in Central start at \$690. Rooms at the JIA Boutique Apartments in Causeway Bay start at \$310. Honeymoon in the penthouse starting at \$1030.

BOOKINGS: See mandarinoriental.com or jiahongkong.com.

INFORMATION: See hktb.com

