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ON THE HORIZON

Parts of the Middle East may be off limits for now but there are still plenty of optimistic reasons to head to the region, including a flurry of new hotels to come

Plus: Adventurous honeymoons, agent views and trends from the Maldives, inside Lux Resorts & Hotels, Phuket, Singapore and the chance of a dream trip to South Africa

Made for romance



The days of fly-and-flop weddings and honeymoons are fast becoming a thing of the past, as high-end couples look for much more creative and adventurous options

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The overseas wedding and honeymoon has come of age, with simple beach ceremonies now being replaced by more complex affairs and newlyweds as likely to request a multi-centre as a fly-and-flop for their honeymoon. "Couples are moving more towards private island options, where they can take over the whole place with their guests. The most popular are Jumbay Bay in Antigua and Necker Island in the British Virgin Islands," says Caribours product manager Katherine Hobbs. November will see the reopening of the main colonial house at Antigua's Jumbay Bay which can host lavish receptions. "There's also been a rise in foodie weddings with couples looking for properties with great restaurants and often their own wine cellars, such as Belmond Maroma Riviera Maya," adds Hobbs. Kuoni is also arranging more 'full-service' weddings. "It's not so much about going to a great hotel and having a wedding on the beach. Italy's doing well for us because it has historic buildings and unusual venues," explains Sheena Paton, commercial and product manager for beach. For 2017, Kuoni will be introducing courtyard ceremonies at Ostuni town hall in Puglia with receptions in local

Need to know

If your clients are in the market for some wedding or honeymoon planning, we round up some of the hottest options and ideas



Wilderness Collection's North Island (pictured above) in the Seychelles has introduced a "Stay 7 & Pay 6" offer for wedding and honeymoon guests, with one spouse receiving a further 25% off. Newlyweds are also upgraded to villa North Island when possible.

Aruba has become the first Caribbean country to legalise same-sex civil partnerships. More than 1,400 of last year's 12,300 UK arrivals visited to marry or honeymoon on the Dutch island.

Claridge's now has its first "choreographer in residence" (below), to help couples marrying at the hotel create an impressive first dance. They'll be taught to waltz, foxtrot, tango or rumba by award-winning professional ballroom and Latin dancer, Marius Caluser.



Newly opened Anantara Kalutara (pictured above) on Sri Lanka's south-west coast boasts pool villas with "hosts" on call and in-room wine humidors. The resort offers weddings and can arrange scenic helicopter flights.

UltraVilla, a consortium that connects consumers and the trade with selected villa operators, now also offers to source experts and venues for lavish weddings – from singers to caterers, puppet theatres to private islands.

A restored family mansion in Tamil Nadu in southern India has reopened as the SVATMA hotel, with 38 rooms and suites and a spa. Hall or tented weddings can be arranged.

Perfect for a house party wedding or "buddymoon" is The Mansion, just opened at Dalos Cove in Crete. The three-bedroom contemporary hillside property has a dedicated concierge and also offers event catering.





restaurants or the Ostuni Palace Hotel grounds. With many booking earlier to secure their preferred venue and a good deal, the operator's already working on 2018 nuptials and planning a "more tailor-made" approach.

The LGBT romance sector has taken off, thanks in part to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the US. Excelle Travel owner Alison Wood arranged a civic hall wedding in San Francisco for two brides, followed by a three-week California to Vegas driving honeymoon. With the Caribbean's less progressive stand on same-sex relationships, Caribtours also favours the US. "We'd recommend a California fly-drive, exploring the coastline from cultural San Francisco to San Diego," says Hobbs.

"Same-sex honeymoons are considered the norm nowadays," adds Premier Holidays product manager Nikki Hain. "Lots of hotels now offer the same deals, such as partner discounts, particularly in Mauritius, where, for instance, the Lux properties offer 70 per cent off."

Kuoni finds the Maldives surprisingly popular for same-sex honeymoons. "It's a Muslim country, so it's not the first place you'd think of, but lots of resorts are really gay-friendly and welcoming," explains Paton.

Twin or multi-centres are a big luxury honeymoon trend and can be great value. "Clients flying with Emirates can have a triple-centre including Dubai, Sri Lanka and the Maldives for almost the same flight cost of a Maldives holiday," Premier's Hain points out.

South Africa and Mauritius twins have boomed this year, she adds. "I think it's the excellent value of the rand combined with the ability to mix safari and beach. We've noticed some prefer a beach stay first because they need a relaxing break after the madness of the wedding plans."

The extra mile

Improvements in transport options have created a "huge trend" in honeymoon island-hopping for Caribtours, with Hobbs particularly

