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Honeymoon Down Under

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Aussies versus Kiwis – it's a friendly rivalry between Australia and its neighbor to the south, New Zealand. Both countries boast beautiful cities, stunning scenery and nature galore. Here are but a few suggestions to get you dreaming about a honeymoon Down Under.

Sydney luxury: Tried and true plus something new

Award-winning **Four Seasons Sydney** is popular among honeymooners for its luxurious rooms. The Spa, Executive Floor, and the city's largest outdoor pool complete with cabanas. The 531 rooms include the most suites of any Sydney hotel. The location is perfect, too; guest rooms overlook Sydney Opera House, Harbour Bridge, Darling Harbour, the Botanical Gardens and more.

For the ultimate romance, book one of four newly refurbished signature suites, part of a \$1.6 million upgrade: the exquisite Presidential Suite, Deluxe Royal Suite and two Royal Suites that evoke the feel of a New York-style apartment circa 1930. Dramatic and theatrical, The Presidential Suite is one of Sydney's finest with the Opera House as its backdrop.

The concierge can arrange a backstage tour of Sydney Opera House, or the once-in-a-lifetime thrill of climbing Harbour Bridge, the world's largest steel arch bridge, called "The Coat Hanger" by locals for its shape. You can also walk across it.

For an action-packed honeymoon, try surfing lessons at world-famous Bondi Beach. For a quieter beach getaway, take the half-hour ferry ride from Circular Quay to Manly.

Unforgettable dining awaits inside one of the small "saills" at the iconic Sydney Opera House where Guillaume at Bennelong restaurant adds French flair to contemporary Australian cuisine. Finish your special evening with drinks at Orbit Lounge atop the Australia Square Building (oddly named since it's a tall, round tower). The 47th floor revolving restaurant and lounge offer a dazzling, 360-degree view of vibrant Sydney. Another great view is from Sydney Tower, 1,000 feet up.

Wander on your own through some of the many museums, galleries and shops. Jewelry store windows tout opals and Australian South Sea pearls.

Take the walking tour, hand in hand of course, of The Rocks area – there's also a Pub Tour – to see restored 19th-century buildings at Sydney Cove. Eleven British ships landed here in 1788 with convicts expelled from Great Britain, plus soldiers and a few settlers, hence founding Sydney. Convicts continued to be deported here until 1840. Sailors arrived at The Rocks from around the world in its 1950s heyday.



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Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens, a city oasis, has 140 different kinds of palms, plus massive Morton Bay Figs, also called Stranger Figs, and more than 22,000 fruit bats. The mammals weigh as much as 8 pounds with wings stretching nearly 10 feet. You'll hear them before you see them (and their mess).

Have the Four Seasons pack a picnic lunch for two and enjoy it at the point by Toronga Zoo for a waterfront view of Sydney across the way. At the zoo, get up close to kangaroos, koalas, wombats and more. Another great spot to see 300 animal species is Weatherdale Wildlife Park, outside of Sydney, with crocodiles, wallabies, dingoes, penguins and even Tasmanian Devils.

Also outside the city are the famous Blue Mountains with a steep, panoramic cable car ride and Three Sisters rock formation.

Newly opened in the heart of Sydney is Design Hotels' 200-guest-room QT Sydney (www.qtsydney.com.au) "for people who love art, design, fashion, music and food." The deluxe hotel was created from the former 1929 Gowings Department Store and adjacent State Theatre. In addition, there's spaQ with six treatment rooms, Sydney's first hammam, a nail salon and an old-fashioned men's barbershop.

Bungee jumping and Antarctic center

New Zealand is actually two islands – North Island and South Island. South Island terrain is amazing, from Fiordland and the Southern Alps to Canterbury Plains and sandy beaches. Vast, gorgeous scenery lies in between, some seen on the big screen in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Film site tours are available.

On North Island, Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, is also called the "City of Sails" for the many vessels in its popular harbors.

Its five-star SKYCITY Grand Hotel features sleek, comfortable suites, an indoor lap pool, state-of-the-art gym and East Day Spa. Ask about the hotel's Grand Extravagance package.

You can't miss 1,076-foot Sky Tower, the tallest freestanding structure in the Southern Hemisphere and known for world-class bungee jumping. Watch from SkyWalk or take the plunge yourself from SkyJump, a 630-foot drop.

Kelly Tarlton's Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World with its pelagic sharks and rays and Gentoo and King penguins is a popular attraction.

Two hours south of Auckland are the Waitomo Glowworm Caves. Boat tours glide through silent darkness to the glowworm grotto, a 100-year-old attraction where the delicate incandescence of thousands of tiny glowworms is magical.

At Rotorua, about three and a half hours from Auckland, is Te Puia. New Zealand's largest Maori cultural and geothermal attraction. There's a Maori village reproduction with carvers, weavers and performances, and a tram ride through the thermal valley to reach Pohutu Geyser, the Maori equivalent of Old Faithful. The same heated waters are found in nearby lakes, where ancient Maori warriors once bathed to heal their battle wounds.

On South Island, experience the Scottish heritage of Dunedin – the city's name means Edinburgh in Gaelic. The lavish 1906 Dunedin Railway Station has mosaic floors and stained glass windows. Our Taieri Gorge Railway trek to Pukerangi ("Hill of Heaven") elicited audible gasps when we reached Taieri Gorge with expansive, jaw-dropping views.

Near Port Chalmers, a bagpiper greets visitors at New Zealand's only castle, the 1871 Larnach Castle – it's small as castles go, but it does offer overnight lodging and a reported ghost.

South Island might be best known for spectacular Milford Sound, "gateway to Fiordland." Allow a full day to explore. The mountains here reach 6,000-7,000 feet, the waterfalls are dramatic, and there's great hiking, too. A flight tour is another option.

A lodge near Christchurch

Also on South Island, [Otaguna Lodge](#), built in 1895 featuring Queen Anne architecture, is an intimate 30-acre retreat giving honeymooners the quintessential New Zealand lodge experience and the chance to marvel at nature from air, land and sea.

There are sheep station tours; helicopter rides over glaciers, pristine lakes and New Zealand's highest peak, and harbor cruises showcasing the world's rarest dolphins, Hector's Dolphins.

Otaguna, with sprawling 110-year-old gardens, sits on a hill between the rocky outcrops of the Banks Peninsula, providing commanding views of the Southern Alps and the Canterbury Plains. Intimate and private, there are seven themed guest suites and common areas on three separate levels. Five-course tasting menus are paired by course with New Zealand wines.

Golf, horseback riding, massages, cooking classes, fly-fishing and vineyard visits are some of the other honeymoon experiences that await.



Christchurch, 20 minutes from the Otaguna, is known as "The Garden City," though it's still rebuilding from the devastating 2011 earthquake that severely damaged its namesake Gothic cathedral. The town earned its other moniker, "Little England," for its weeping-willow-lined Avon River, tidy garden cottages and streets named after English counterparts.

The International Antarctic Centre, near Christchurch Airport, is one of the most popular tourist attractions in all New Zealand – it's where actual Antarctic explorers make preparations. Visitors don boots, jumpsuits and parkas to sample the "cold room" that simulates a snow blizzard whitenout and can ride a Hagglund all-terrain amphibian vehicle, the kind researchers use to explore the Great White Continent.

Can't decide between Australia and New Zealand? You won't have to play favorites if you honeymoon at both. After all, what's another 900 miles after you've flown 20 hours to Sydney?

Want to go? Check package deals at [Qantas.com](#), [AirNewZealand.com](#) and [VirginAustralia.com](#), or with travel wholesaler Down Under Answers at www.duatravel.com. Several cruise lines combine Australia and New Zealand on the same itinerary.

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