



# VOGUE

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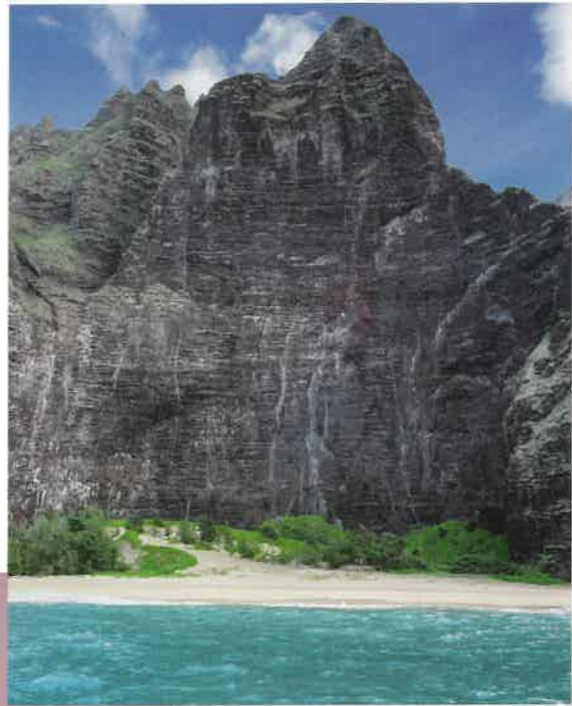
## Love rules

Rita Ora & Taika Waititi. The new power couple.

# Love island

Whether chosen as a wedding destination or for a dream honeymoon, the barefoot, breezy luxury of Hawaii has never been more popular, as Mandy Alex discovers.

PHOTOGRAPHS GRETA KENYON



**Above:** Kauai's hidden coves are explored during a sunset cruise with Holo Holo Charters. **Below:** Allerton and McBryde gardens, on the south shore of Kauai, offer guided tours of the famous Moreton Bay fig trees featured in *Jurassic Park*, plus lei-making workshops.



An oceanfront pool at Wailea Beach Resort - Marriott, on Maui island.



ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS: MANDY ALEX



**Above:** Swaying palms trees and a pastel-painted sky at sunrise at the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa. **Right:** Kauai island's rugged coastline viewed from above during a flight with Blue Hawaiian Helicopters.



Seats with a view at The Farm, a fruit orchard and organic vegetable garden at Timbers on Kauai.



**T**here's something about Hawaii. Maybe it's the palm trees, the scene-stealing sunsets, the daily rainbows ... Hawaii is made for love. No wonder it's become one of the most popular choices for both destination weddings – think magazine editor Laura Brown's star-studded nuptials last year, with a guest list that included Rose Byrne and Naomi Watts – and honeymooners alike. (Though preferably honeymoons with a better outcome than the one depicted on the first season of the smash-hit series *The White Lotus*.)

Love is one of the first things you notice when you touch down in Hawaii. Love is there in the carefully threaded leis of frangipani and tuberose handed to you at every resort. Love is there in the way Hawaiians talk about their island home with such pride and care. Every person you meet in Hawaii has a story of how they got there, and it's usually all about love. Like my driver Scott, who picks me up from the airport in Kauai. His tale is like many: he met someone from the island, fell in love, and never left.

As well as the landscape's beauty lending itself well to weddings, it also holds a spiritual allure. Late last year, pro American surfer "John John" Florence married his Australian wife Lauren Ashley at the foot of a waterfall in Oahu's Waimea Valley. "Within the valley is a *heiau* – a place of worship – which was dedicated to Lono, the Hawaiian god of peace, fertility and agriculture," says Ashley, who now lives in Hawaii with her husband. It was here, at the meeting point of land and spirit, that the couple said their vows.

Kauai is one of the furthest islands in the Hawaiian archipelago, called the "garden island" for its coastline carpeted in lush greenery. Kauai is stunning and has unsurprisingly served as the onscreen backdrop for everything from *Jurassic Park* to *The Descendants*.

A reverence for the land is at the heart of Kauai and something that all visitors – whether those coming for holidays, for destination weddings or for honeymoons – are encouraged to respect. In Hawaiian, it's called *kuleana*, or the privilege and responsibility that Kauaians feel for their homeland. "This *kuleana* is at the heart of our culture, and as guests in our home we ask that you share our *kuleana* during your stay," reads a recent tourism advertisement for the island.

I'm staying at the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa, situated along a sprawling plot of land that hugs the southern shore of the island and a popular venue for both weddings and honeymooners. The hotel even has a dedicated wedding planning team who can help facilitate any requests. It's a bit of a walk through the long resort to reach my room, but I don't mind. The stroll is pleasant, fringed by palm trees overlooking the ocean and with the scent of coconut, pineapple and mango through the air. In the morning, the sky splits open into a pink and purple sunrise.

The natural world is seamlessly woven through every part of the resort. Dinner at Tidepools restaurant takes place in thatched bungalows perched in a lagoon; I have a life-changing massage at the Anara spa under an open thatched hut in a private garden *bale*. All I can hear is the breeze rippling through the trees. Side-by-side massages for couples are also popular, and focus on inducing deep relaxation and connection.

I feel the *kuleana* of Kauai as I explore the island from various viewpoints: land, sea and sky. On land, I take part in a lei-making workshop at Allerton and McBryde gardens, where Jayna – a hula student who had just received her coveted certification – shows me how to string flowers together to form a delicate loop. The lesson provides so much history and →

knowledge about Hawaiian culture it would be a perfect pre-wedding activity for a bridal party.

Afterwards, I walk through the gardens, passing ancient trees, creeks and flower beds. The Napali Sunset Cruise and a morning tour the next day with Blue Hawaiian Helicopters are opportunities to witness the hidden corners of Kauai, from the epic scale of the cliffs to the many waterfalls that zigzag through the island and are only visible from the air. For honeymooners looking for an unforgettable experience, both options fulfil the brief.

That night, I visit Timbers, a private community on the island that houses accommodation, restaurants and a once-overgrown golf course that is now an organic vegetable garden called the Farm at Hōkūala. I have farm-to-table dinner at Timbers' oceanside restaurant Hualani's, and under a sparkling full moon, dine on fruit and vegetables grown at the farm. It's a fitting farewell to an island that takes great pride in the beauty and bounty of its surroundings. I feel grateful to have experienced that *kuleana* first hand.

The next day, I move to Maui. It's the second biggest island in Hawaii and has a different feel to Kauai; its size makes it a more popular tourist destination and the resorts, including the Wailea Beach Resort – Marriott, feel buzzy than those on Kauai. (This is the island where Oprah lives in her beautifully restored holiday home for part of the year.) Take for example, the Olowalu Plantation House, one of the island's most popular wedding venues, located on the western shore. I head over for a quick tour and it's not hard to see why so many people marry here. The venue is situated right on the ocean, meaning that a reception dinner could be held on the shores of the beach. But the property is shaded by palm trees and greenery, so it still feels private. Unsurprisingly, the venue is booked out for weddings well in advance – and all of this year already. Also a popular spot for proposals and anniversaries for couples who love astronomy is the Maui Sunset and Stargazing Tour, hosted by a lovely lady named Jan. It's located at the top of the Haleakala Crater, an epic location offering out-of-this-world views – you feel as though you could touch the stars. For star lovers, it's worth the five-hour round trip.

Back at the Wailea Beach Resort, I head to one of the many pools. I opt for the child-free infinity pool for a quick swim and notice that staff are setting up an event right on the cliff face. There's an elegantly laid table underneath an open cabana, strung with lanterns and facing the water. It is such a gorgeous vista that I assume it must be for a wedding, but it is for me! It's being staged as an example of what the resort can do when it comes to special events, whether it's a small rehearsal dinner, a bigger wedding reception or even an intimate dinner between a couple on their honeymoon. Amanda Lindquist, the executive chef at the resort, along with her team, prepare an incredible feast of local cuisine: tuna crudo, pan-seared scallops as big as my fist and fresh fish, grilled simply. The food is exquisite, but the setting even more so. The location of the resort, and this particular corner, is such that the sun sets right in front of your eyes. It is heavenly, a reminder of all the natural beauty and hospitality of Hawaii that has made it so popular for couples searching for the backdrop to their special day, or even just a private dinner or a couple's massage. I leave Maui early in the morning and I say a quiet *mahalo* for everything I have seen. And dream of when I can return.

*Hawaiian Airlines flies nonstop from Sydney to Honolulu, with connecting flights to other islands including Kauai and Maui. For more information, visit [hawaiianairlines.com](http://hawaiianairlines.com).*



Luxury escapes on Maui island. **Above:** "Floating" cabanas at the Maluhia infinity pool, one of five pools at Wailea Beach Resort – Marriott. **Left and below:** At Wailea Beach Resort – Marriott, private candlelit dinners can be arranged for guests on the ocean's edge, where magical views are matched by exceptional food.



GRETA KENYON, MANDY ALEX.