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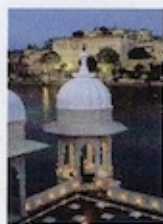
Dream it > see it > book it



THE *honeymoon* SPECIAL

1
AMANGALLA,
SRI LANKA
Remote romanticism

Your first trip as smug marrieds needs to tick all the boxes - for both of you - which is harder than you might think. Turn the page to see where three of Team ELLE took their new husbands: Fancy remote and romantic? Try two of Sri Lanka's most magical hideaways, 1 Amangalla and 4 Amanwella (amanresorts.com); or if cities are more your thing, Hong Kong (2 & 3) hits the spot for foodies and shoppers.



Above: Terrace dining at Taj Lake Palace. Right: Emma and James. Below: Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra

INDIA & SRI LANKA



The couple

Former ELLE Beauty Director Emma Smith and James Strenner, Marketing Director for GlaxoSmithKline.

The brief

Adventure, ancient cities, yoga, luxury, tigers and elephants, and delicious food – plus beautiful beaches and luxury hideaways. India and Sri Lanka tick all the honeymoon boxes.

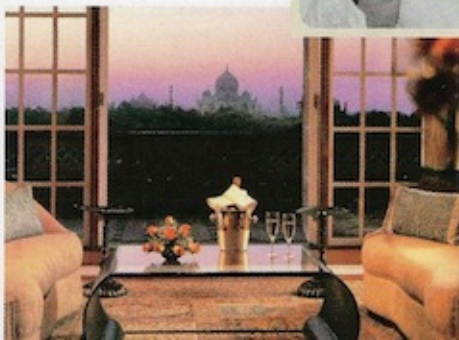
The trip

After landing in Delhi, we head to Agra, with our lovely driver, Mr Ashok, swerving between buses going the wrong way and camel-drawn carts crossing at their own pace. 'In India, you need good brakes, good horn and good luck,' Mr Ashok laughs.

Zippering through Agra – a hot, dusty city – we arrive at the cool marble lobby of the Oberoi Amarvilas. The ceilings are high,

the decor opulent and the pool inviting, so we dive straight in. The hotel overlooks the spectacular Taj Mahal – built by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal – and, given the crowds of tourists, we decide it is best appreciated from our shady balcony, just 600 metres away.

At 7am the next morning, we set off on the 144-mile drive to Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan, where we spend two days at Oberoi Rajvilas. Here, we see the Amber Fort by elephant – the two of us lurching around on the carpeted saddle – before hitting the shops. Emeralds, rubies, sapphires, diamonds... pick your stone and setting, and the final product is delivered to your hotel in just four hours. I buy a four-carat aquamarine and gold ring for a fraction of the price it would be in Europe, before heading back to the hotel for the 5pm kundalini yoga class on

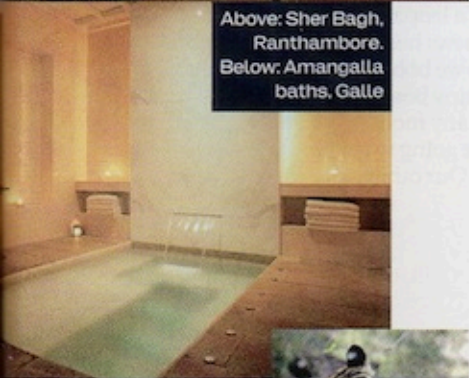




*'We are woken, not
by the butler who
brings our tea, but
by a noisy peacock
on top of our tent'*



Above: Sher Bagh,
Ranthambore.
Below: Amangalla
baths, Galle



Above and right:
Amanwella villa and
pool. Left: Taj Lake
Palace suite

the lawn. Supper is spicy curries in the hotel's magical moonlit courtyard.

It's another early start for the scenic, 260-mile drive cross-country to Udaipur, famous for its beautiful Lake Pichola, and, at its centre, the spectacular Taj Lake Palace hotel - which James is thrilled to learn featured in James Bond film *Octopussy*. In our suite, the setting sun through the stained-glass windows casts flickering colours on the walls. Another piece of heaven is the hotel's Jiva Spa, housed in a small boat on the lake.

After a dawn yoga session on the roof terrace, we meet Sonny, our guide, who leads us through Udaipur's maze of markets during our three-day stay.

Our next destination is Ranthambore, 250 miles away, home to most of India's dwindling tiger population. We arrive by train at nightfall and make our way to our new home, Sher Bagh, a resort with 12 luxury tents, each with a bathroom and surprisingly comfy bed. We are woken before sunrise, not by the polite butler who brings our morning tea, but by a raucous peacock on top of our tent. At 5.30am we clamber into an open-top Jeep and bump around the wildlife park, where we see deer, monkeys, peacocks, crocodiles and even an owl. In the afternoon, we hit the jackpot - a huge male tiger by the cliffs, followed by more tiger sightings and, finally, a very old tigress surveying her domain from a shady rock, her throne. We watch her as the sun sets, feeling we are in the presence of greatness.

The next day, it's time to leave India and fly to Colombo, Sri Lanka's largest city, before driving to Galle, a fort city an hour south along the coast. We arrive at our hotel, Amangalla, to find the four-poster bed in our room decorated with banana leaves (a local honeymoon tradition, we learn). After a dip in the hotel baths, we go for a wander around the town, where we watch a crowd help a local fisherman pull in his massive catch. Our last stop is Amanwella in Tangalle, a 90-minute drive away. Here, we have

a villa with our own pool, right on a beach lined with palm trees and old fishing boats. We eat barbecued snapper on the sand before heading to Udawalawe National Park, where we are greeted by the sight of a young bull elephant enjoying a mud bath - before being mock-charged by a protective elephant mother. In the adjacent elephant orphanage, meanwhile, around 60 babies charge up to their carers for a feed of milk from giant bottles.

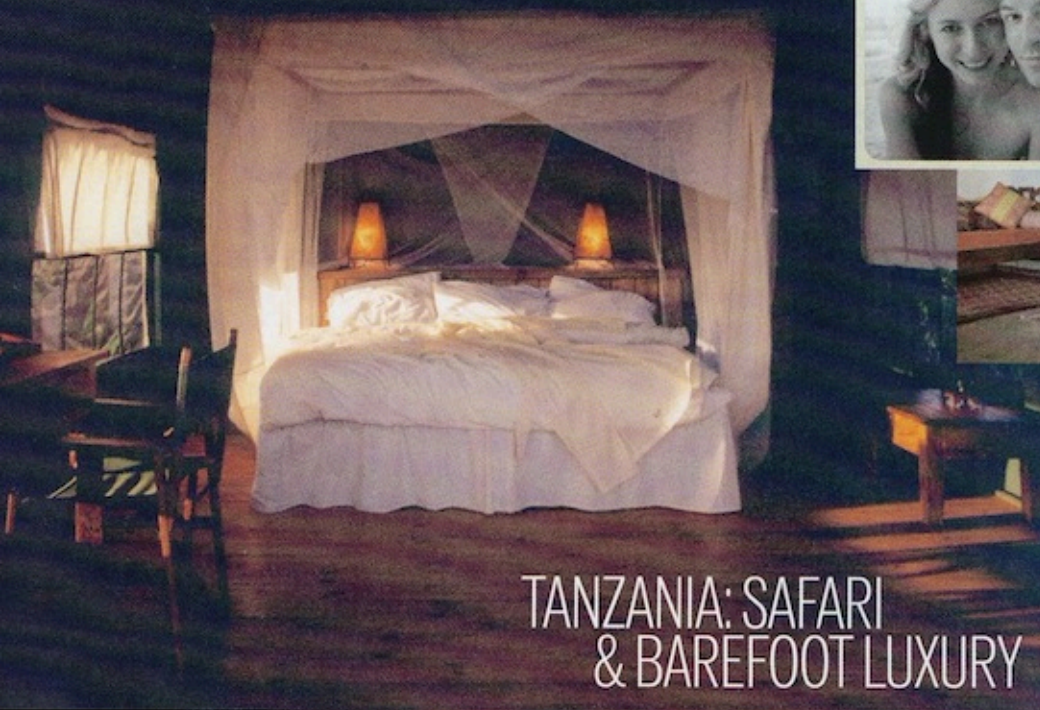
As we enjoy our last evening with a Sri Lankan curry back at our villa, we're interrupted by the resident black Labrador, Nero, jumping into our pool for a swim. After 10 glorious days of people welcoming us into their world, it seems only fitting we do the same for him.

Getting there

Greaves Travel (greavesindia.co.uk) offers tailor-made India trips, with 10 nights in the Rajasthan region from £3,150pp, including return British Airways flights from London to Delhi, internal flights and travel, excursions, full board at Sher Bagh, Ranthambore (sherbagh.com), plus stays at Oberoi Rajvillas, Amarvilas and Gurgaon (oberoihotels.com) and Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur (tajhotels.com). The Ultimate Travel Company (theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk) arranges bespoke stays in Sri Lanka, including transfers, excursions and stays at Aman resorts, price on request. Amanwella, Tangalle, has doubles from £365, and Amangalla, Galle, has doubles from £340 (amanresorts.com).



Left: Patricia and Seb.
Below: Beho Beho,
Selous Game Reserve



TANZANIA: SAFARI & BAREFOOT LUXURY



wildebeest, elephants and giraffes. At night, more of Selous' inhabitants wander down to the camp's floodlit drinking pool - lions, waterbuck, impala, hyenas - all less than 10m away from our dinner table.

We're staying in a traditional stone banda - one of eight - with a king-sized, mosquito-curtained bed, hand-carved furniture and Moorish rugs the colour of hot spices. One side of the room is open, save for a zip-up canvas façade, offering an incredible 180-degree view over the savannah, so you can watch game from the comfort of your bed. The bathroom curves around to an outdoor shower and roll-top bath.

For an extra £216pp, and for the ultimate wilderness experience, you can spend a night in the secluded Beho Beho treehouse. A two-hour walk from the main camp, it's perched on a giant, ancient leadwood tree and has a big bed and bathroom. You can sleep out under the stars (you're high up enough to be safe from predators), or zip up your canvas pavilion.

Mornings start pre-dawn, with a soft knock at the door and cups of strong local coffee served by a member of your personal staff. Twenty minutes later, wrapped in light layers against the early July morning chill, we're tearing down a bumpy track in our 4x4 as the sun rises, breakfasting in the bush on a picnic of egg and bacon bakes, fruit skewers and papaya and ginger jam pastries.

There are two safaris a day, with alternating guides. Godlisten is driving today and, even at speed, he spots the tail of a leopard curled around a branch as she chews her kill. Later, he keeps us calm as we bob along between the crocodiles in a tiny boat on Lake Tagalala: one of the many moments when we exchange 'Are we going to get mauled today?' looks.

Our other guide, Walter, takes us on

The couple

Patricia Campbell, ELLE Commercial Editor, and Seb Underhill, co-founder of 33Seconds, a social media, marketing and PR agency.

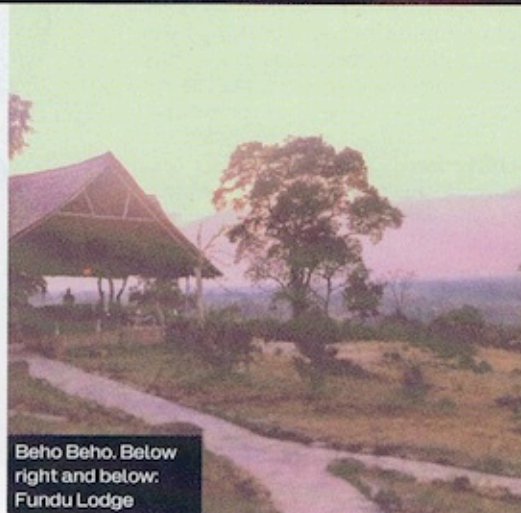
The brief

I love inspiring, design-led spaces, with plenty to discover nearby. Seb is as happy doing nothing as he is tearing about on a quad bike. So we need a compromise: an adventure steeped in luxury. The plan takes shape: a safari in the wilds of Tanzania, coupled with a blow-the-budget beach break in Zanzibar.

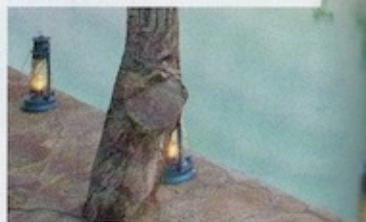
The remote Selous Game Reserve, at 55,000 sq km, is one of Africa's largest conservation areas, with more than a million large animals. Of the high-end safari camps, it's the luxe Beho Beho that stands out most for us. For the beach resort, we want both luxe and laid-back: fashion designer Ellis Flyte's chic shack hideaway on Pemba Island, north-east of Zanzibar, sounds perfect.

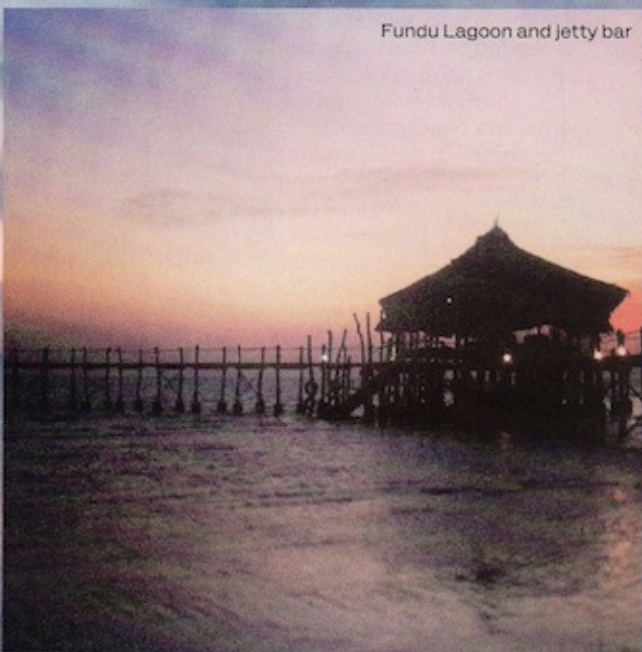
The trip

Touching down on a makeshift airstrip in the Selous Game Reserve, we send a herd of zebra running. We're the only passengers getting off the eight-seater plane, and waiting for us in a 4x4 is our chatty Beho Beho guide Godlisten, who we learn is one of many Kilimanjaro locals with religion-inspired names. As the camp comes into view, we're struck by the theatre of its location: the still, wide savannah and the game grazing beyond:



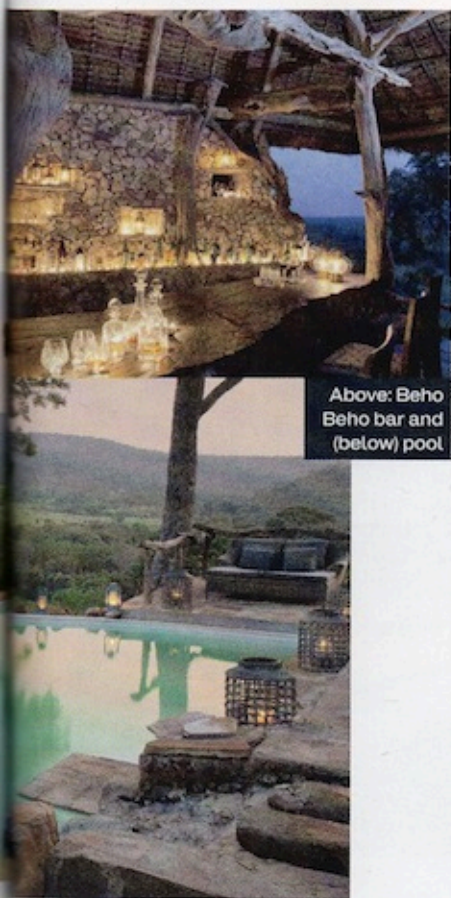
Beho Beho. Below right and below: Fundu Lodge





Fundu Lagoon and jetty bar

'Our guide keeps us both calm as we bob along between the crocodiles in a tiny boat'



Above: Beho bar and (below) pool

an afternoon walking safari: our only protection is his loaded rifle. He points to vultures circling and, just 20m away, lions sharing their impala kill. Then, a growl. I imagine us being torn to shreds, but it's not a lion, it's elephants - even more of a threat on account of their size. Hearts racing, we power walk in the other direction, but once back at camp, feel nothing but pure elation.

In the Selous, sightings are hard-earned but all the richer for it: baboons racing across the plains, and willowy giraffes running as if in slow motion. We're still digesting the sheer beauty of it all when it's time to head to Zanzibar.

Reassuringly remote, on Pemba Island's western inlet of Wambaa, Fundu Lagoon is accessible by private boat from Chake Chake. After a 20-minute sea-sprayed ride, we draw up to a beautiful jetty and 18 bijou huts with makuti roofs overlooking the white beach. Dotted around the forest are hillside rooms and jungle suites, but we've got a (palatial) beach suite, with sea view decking, a plunge pool and a bedroom and bathroom under canvas.

Fundu Lagoon is all-inclusive, and the seafood-led menu is one of the big draws. Locally caught kingfish is a staple, alongside traditional Swahili dishes and

grilled lobsters. At the jetty bar - rising out of the sea on wooden stilts - we forge friendships over rum cocktails with other guests, who tell us about the local trips: a dhow sunset cruise, or a village trek past tiny farms where women dry cloves (the island's biggest export) on rugs. These trips are included, but you have to pay a bit extra for some activities, like dolphin safaris, and diving and snorkeling jaunts to neighbouring Misali Island, a castaway gem of deserted beaches.

By the infinity pool and bar, set in a clearing in the forest canopy, I manage to sit still for the first time in the trip and take it all in. They say that once Africa gets in your blood, you'll yearn to go back. We're already planning our next visit.

Getting there

Fundu Lagoon, Pemba, Zanzibar (fundulagoon.com), has doubles from £230pp, full board.

Expert Africa (expertafrica.com) has five-night trips to Pemba, including three nights at Fundu Lagoon, full board, return flights from London to Dar es Salaam, and transfers, from £1,835pp. British Airways (ba.com) flies to Dar es Salaam from Heathrow, from £600 return. Coastal Aviation (coastal.co.tz) flies from Dar es Salaam to Pemba Chake Chake, from £185 return.

Expert Africa also has five nights in the Selous Game Reserve, including three nights at Beho Beho, return flights from London to Dar es Salaam, all transfers, game drives and full board, from £2,652pp.



Left inset:
Alice and Ian. Main
image: Rayavadee
beach, Krabi

HONG KONG & THAILAND

The couple

Alice Wignall, ELLE's Content Director, and Ian Leslie, author.

The brief

We had one word in mind when planning our honeymoon: Big. It had to be epic, luxurious, far-flung. We wanted a mix of city sophistication, cultural interest and tropical beach lounging, somewhere that felt exotic and a bit adventurous, but where air-con and poolside cocktails are still freely available. Oh, and somewhere a five-month pregnant woman could travel. (This is what happens when you delay your honeymoon for 18 months...) Having friends living in Hong Kong helped us decide on Asia as our destination; we'd visit them, then travel on to Thailand for world-famous beaches, amazing food and fantastic hotels.

The trip

We fly to Hong Kong, where it is a balmy 25°C in November, treating ourselves to Cathay Pacific business class and a great hotel. Between the flat beds, pillow menu (really) and limo service, which takes us direct to the Mandarin Oriental hotel on arrival, we decide that this is the kind of lifestyle we could get used to. In Hong

Kong, we have a whistle-stop few days of Chinese food - from skyscraper fine dining to backstreet canteens - tower blocks and temples and window shopping at the many designer stores. Then it's on to Bangkok, and the Thai capital's Mandarin Oriental. This hotel has played host to glamorous guests from every era, with a particular literary leaning. The Authors' Wing, part of the original 19th-century hotel, has suites named after former residents including Gore Vidal, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Noël Coward. Sitting right beside the river, it's an elegant, cool sanctuary in the steamy heat of Bangkok.

We explore the palaces and temples by day, and track down delicious street food - super-fresh fish at heaving pavement cafes in Chinatown, and tasty cured pork at the massive daily food market at Or Tor Kor, as well as smart restaurants. We loved Bo.lan (bolan.co.th) - an up-market 'slow food' Thai restaurant started by two chefs from Nahm, the legendary Thai restaurant in London. The set menu is sophisticated, surprising and delicious.

After three days, we fly north to Sukhothai to see the remains of the 14th-century city, Thailand's first capital. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, it

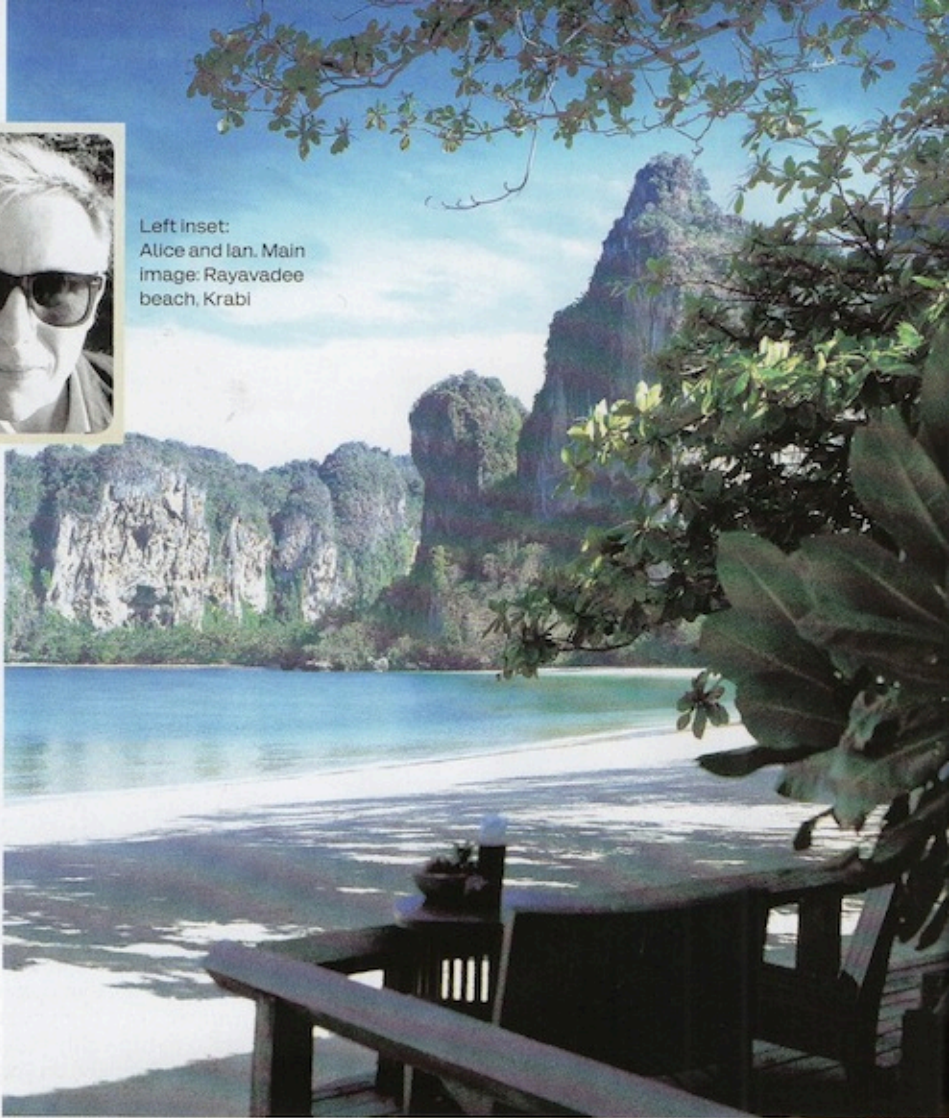
*'Sitting right beside
the river, the hotel
is an elegant, cool
sanctuary in the
steamy heat of Bangkok'*



temple, Hong Kong



Mandarin Oriental suite
bathroom, Hong Kong



Rayavadee, Krabi



Bangkok, Thailand



Rayavadee pool pavilion, Krabi

is huge – 70 sq km – so even with the crowds that come to admire the Buddha statues and lotus ponds, it's still a peaceful place to spend a day cycling or trekking from ruin to ruin.

Our final journey is south, to Krabi province and then, via boat from the tourist centre of Ao Nang to the beaches of Railay on the Phra Nang peninsula. Our resort, Rayavadee, is so huge that if you're heading for a restaurant, you're advised to call one of the hotel's golf buggy taxis. The grounds are like well tended jungle (complete with monkeys and lizards), and guests stay in their own separate two-storey luxury huts hidden among the trees.

Rayavadee has access to beaches on three sides, including Railay West, often described as one of the most beautiful in the world, with its sweeping sands and jagged limestone cliffs. Being able to gaze at it while pool boys bring you drinks and ice creams makes it even more attractive.

In fact, 'never again' became our catchphrase during our honeymoon – as in, never again are we likely to enjoy such a luxurious, indulgent trip – although if you can't go for broke (literally) on your honeymoon, when can you?

But for all the air-conditioned, five-star comfort, it was moments such as an elephant ride through the forest in Krabi, stumbling across the incense-filled Man Mo temple in Hong Kong, eating the best Thai curry we've ever tasted in a little one-room café (Poj Spa Kar) in Bangkok, as well as an epic tropical thunderstorm,

that stood out the most for us. While lounging by the pool/ambulating on the beach/drinking in the bar on repeat at Rayavadee was bliss for me, Railay is ultimately a beach resort, so options for eating and excursions, apart from the (excellent) offerings inside the hotel are limited. I think my husband preferred the endless possibilities of Bangkok. Still, marriage is all about the art of compromise, isn't it?

Getting there

Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong (mandarinoriental.com/hongkong) has doubles from £350, room only. Mandarin Oriental Bangkok (mandarinoriental.com/bangkok) has doubles from £250, room only. Rayavadee Krabi (rayavadee.com) has deluxe pavilions, with B&B and airport transfers included, from £260. Cathay Pacific (cathaypacific.com) flies to Bangkok via Hong Kong from London Heathrow, from £670 return. Bangkok Airways (bangkokair.com) flies from Bangkok to Krabi, from £75 return, and Bangkok to Sukhothai, from £105 return ●

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Above: Rayavadee bedroom. Below: Railay beach, Thailand

