

BRIDES

HONEYMOONS

How to Have A Hot, Steamy Cartagena Honeymoon

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It's THE place for fun-loving couples

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The Caribbean is a big, beautiful sea, full of dream honeymoon destinations with unique character, cuisine and coastline to spare. But it's not only islands that offer the total package to newlyweds dreaming of a sexy, exciting

vacation to top all others. Cartagena, Colombia, has gained a reputation, and rightly so, as the place for fun-loving couples who consider music, dancing, cocktails and incredible food the perfect recipe for seduction. Oh, and don't forget the sandy white beaches and gentle aquamarine water trimming it all.

The city has become wildly popular for many reasons, one of which is its technicolor tendencies. In many ways it represents a vibrant rainbow—buildings throughout, often historic, Spanish-inflected, and absolutely gorgeous, are painted vivid colors that are synonymous with its proximity to the equator, while skin colors represent as much diversity as the many festive restaurants. Speaking of which, romantic dinners can be had at the mainstay *la vitrola*—plan ahead to make a reservation, and make sure to wear your dancing shoes—as well as *maría*, where the design eye candy is as tasty as the dishes. Alma's transportive open-air courtyard features live music some nights. Wander around up-and-coming *getsemaní* for the most authentic flavor as well as cute b&bs and the most iconic salsa club: *cafe havana*.

Walking tours are a big thing here, and are highly recommended for the opportunities they give to learn a bit of history—don't even think of it as learning, it's more like storytelling, and it's fascinating—and try the mouthwatering array of street food in a way that's safely endorsed. They're also a sure way to scope out the many shops and vendors selling rainbow-hued accessories and souvenirs.

After you've exhausted yourselves with hot, colorful days and equally sultry nights, there are excellent places to sleep it all off and recover. Small properties in the old walled city are the way to go for romantics. Casa San Agustina is an idyllic luxury boutique hotel comprising a trio of whitewashed colonial-era houses that were restored and combined, united by a central pool. Tile flooring, Juliet balconies, soaring exposed-wood ceilings and lush landscaping make for a truly magical setting.

The Sofitel Legend Santa Clara Cartagena, in a former convent dating to 1621 and celebrated as a World Heritage Site, is also a dream environment in which to celebrate your love. The spa alone is enough to make you never want to leave the grounds, which boast original details like crypts, confessionals and hidden windows. Then there's the Conrad Cartagena, which is out of town a bit and offers lovers packages including golf sessions at their Nicklaus Design TPC course bordering the Caribbean Sea, suites with private pools, and nature-inspired couples' treatments at the spa. Watch out for Convento Obra Pia Viceroy Cartagena, a massive restoration in *Getsemaní* that will be the area's newest luxury hotel.

Another appealing thing about Cartagena is its proximity to glorious tropical islands, which are the ideal compliment to a stay at one of those properties. Hotel Las Islas on Barú Island is the newest arrival, which Big Five Tours & Expeditions president Ashish Sanghrajka calls "barefoot luxury, think Robinson Crusoe meets the beach." Its environmentally conscious environs include treehouse-like towers that seem to float above the jungle canopy, as well as ground-floor suites with private pools. The food served is locally sourced and caught, and the cocktails as intoxicating as the fine white sand surrounding it all.

Even without overnighting on the isles it's possible to enjoy a day trip with snorkeling or diving, or a relaxing boozy day at a local beach nearby, like *playa blanca*, where pineapples and coconuts are filled with rum and delivered to your *palapa*, and banana boats provide fun interludes to sunbathing and swimming.

As one might imagine in a city so alive and pulsing, nightlife is big. The cocktail culture is strong, and places like *la perla* (the house made limoncello a 10) is are fantastic for pre- and/or post-dinner sips. Sanghrajka recommends rum tastings at *el arsenal* with *abe*, the owner. Meals, by the way, should be balanced out with plenty of dancing, and the travel expert advises newbies to follow the "salsa trail" during their honeymoon—it's a fun way to interact with locals and travelers alike while learning the steamy dance in community centers around town. After all, a honeymoon in Cartagena is sure to produce a few things: a deeper tan, a slightly fuller belly and a few new moves that will kill on the next dance floor you hit.