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Honeymoon in Hangzhou, China

Words by Judy Koutsky

You've probably heard of Beijing, home to the Great Wall of China, or Shanghai, the modern metropolis that rivals New York in terms of world-class shopping and top-notch restaurants, but Hangzhou is the sleepy little sister – she's beautiful, tranquil and flies under the radar. Until now. Recently ranked as one of the top destinations to visit, Hangzhou is the place for a true, off-the-beaten-path honeymoon. "Plus, compared to many other romantic destinations, the value cannot be beat," says Ken Pringle, Director of Reservations Sales at **Avanti Destinations**. Here is what you need to know to plan a honeymoon in Hangzhou.

Play: "Hangzhou is considered the 'Love Capital' of China, not only because of its natural beauty like the **UNESCO World Heritage Site West Lake**, but it is also steeped in history and legends of love," says Helen Clausen, Owner of **AsiaLuxe Holidays**. For the ultimate love story, make sure to see the evening performance of "Impression West Lake," which is a light, music, dance and theater extravaganza that takes place on the waters of West Lake. It's produced by the famed Zhang Yimou, who created the opening and closing ceremonies at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

Another must is a romantic boat ride on the Grand Canal, the world's oldest and longest canal that spreads 1,200 miles from Hangzhou to Beijing. You and your mate can snuggle up on your own private tour while viewing ancient pagodas in the distance and watching local Chinese life on the banks.

For the best honeymoon souvenir, head to Hangzhou's **Xiling Seal Engravers' Society**. China has a long tradition of calligraphy, dating back to ancient times, and you'll learn the craft by engraving your name (or symbol of love) on your own bronze tablet.

Of course, you can't come to China and not visit a pagoda, a true masterpiece of architecture. For one of the most magnificent, head to the Six Harmonies Pagoda, which towers at almost 200 feet tall. Not only will you get amazing exercise walking to the top, but you'll get the most gorgeous 360-degree views of the Qiantang River. Another beautiful architectural site worth seeing is the

Lingyin Temple, one of the oldest Buddhist temples in China.

“Hangzhou is a big city with lots to do, but it doesn’t feel crowded like many of the other big cities in China,” notes David Kartagener, President of Kartagener Associates Inc. Having said that, it’s still China, the most populous country in the world, so definitely expect lots of people wherever you go.

For an early-morning excursion, take part in one of the most cherished rituals in all of China – the tea ceremony. Head to **Longjing Imperial Tea Garden** in Hangzhou’s Longjing Village. You’ll walk through beautiful tea terraces, learn the history and sip various brews in a traditional teahouse.

To end your trip, take a leisurely boat ride through **Xixi National Wetland Park**, the only national wetland park in China. You’ll see the beauty of nature in the blanket of trees – plum, bamboo, hibiscus, and persimmon – that sweep through the area. Birdwatching is amazing there, and if you’re lucky enough to visit in June, the wetland is the site of one of the largest dragon boat festivals in China.

Go: There are direct flights to Shanghai from New York and L.A.. Once in Shanghai, take the high-speed train through beautiful scenery en route to Hangzhou.

Stay: If you’re looking for luxury (and who isn’t on their honeymoon?), it’s hard to beat the Four Seasons Hotel Hangzhou at West Lake (which offers an amazing spa, plus an infinity pool which overlooks West Lake). Another good option is the Shangri-La Hotel, Hangzhou, which offers great dining. Be sure to eat at the Shang Palace, which offers plenty of Hangzhou culinary specialties.

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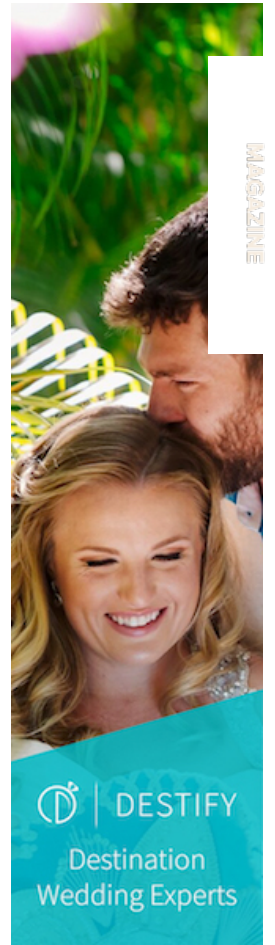
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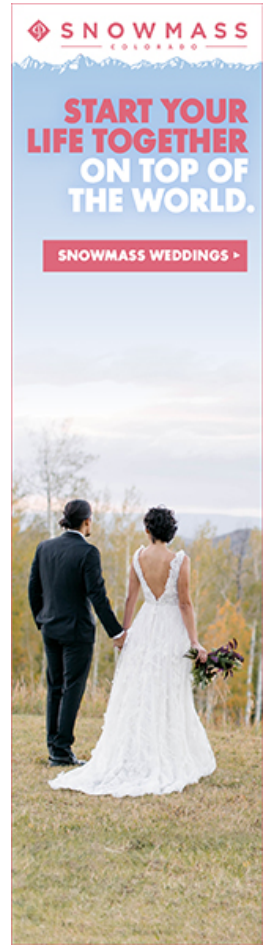
by Courtney Kellar

There are a few things in life which most people love unconditionally: good food, family and golf.



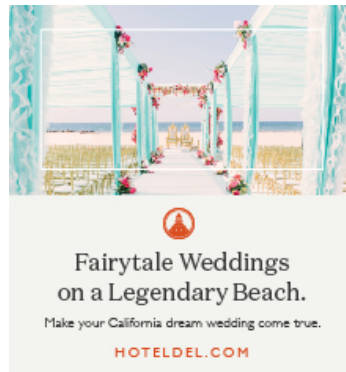
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