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GETTY IMAGES

The 50 most romantic holidays in the world*

Chris Leadbeater picks escapes to make the heart sing, from a palazzo in Rome to a private island in the Seychelles. *And yes, a few are still available for Valentine's Day

Love will find a way through paths where wolves fear to prey," Lord Byron once wrote. "Love is a burning thing, and it makes a fiery ring," growled Johnny Cash. "Pour some sugar on me (in the name of love)," sang Eighties pop-metal stars Def Leppard. Different perspectives, perhaps – but they all ultimately boil down to the same thing. The tingles, the affection, the deep contentment, the stirred desires and essential twitchiness that come when you are sitting next to the right person – and you don't want anyone else to be there.

Of course, he or she might be sitting there because you are on holiday together. Travel is an inalienable part of romance – especially if you select a break that intrigues and entertains you both, while also ensuring that you spend time together. These 50 escapes are sure to do all these things – whether they involve a country walk in Dorset, a mini-break in Paris or a private island in the Seychelles. The majority are not Valentine's breaks (though some will work for late-booking lovers), nor are they specifically honeymoons (though plenty of them would work as such). These are getaways simply for those in love. And there's no time like now.

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European dreams

Catalonia calling

1 Decorated with endless Gaudi flourishes, Barcelona simply sings as a venue for romance. Its Mandarin Oriental hotel (0034 93 151 8888; mandarinoriental.com/barcelona) joins in with its Fall In Love With Barcelona package, serving up a chilled bottle of sparkling wine, breakfast in bed and late checkout, from €529 (£458) a night. The glitzy five-star also has a rooftop terrace for broad views and swimming pool dips.

Bed and bakery

2 Not to be outdone by its fierce rival, Madrid also knows how to call down Cupid. Perhaps at the Only You Hotel Atocha (0034 910 052 746; onlyyouhotels.com), a boutique retreat that opened in December. It's located at Paseo Infanta Isabel 13, ideal for a dash to the Prado for an art fix. But it also ends itself to mornings in bed by having its own bakery producing raspberry croissants (€2.50/£2.15) and puff-pastry "blueberry bretzels" (€3.75). Doubles cost from €152 a night in April (room only).

Romeo rules

3 Verona is the setting for *Romeo and Juliet* - and knows it. Its Casa di Giulietta, where a balcony has been added, is a tourist trap. Visit it, but pay better tribute to Shakespeare's tragic teenagers by exploring a city whose narrow streets and fine eateries are a joy. Kirker Holidays (020 7593 1899; kirkerholidays.com) offers three nights at Hotel Due Torri from £598 per person (flights, transfers and breakfast).

Split decision

4 Croatia has 1,104 miles of coastline speckled with pretty isles and ideal for a joyous seaborne trip with a significant other. Voyages Jules Verne (020 3811 6790; vjv.com) runs a regular seven-night Dalmatian Island Explorer small-ship cruise that visits not only Split and Dubrovnik, but also the outcrops of Hvar and Vis. From £1,845 per person with flights.

Mighty Aphrodite

5 Mythology has it that Ancient Greece's goddess of love was born not in Greece but in Cyprus. Aphrodite "emerged" from the sea at Paphos, the west-coast city that is one of the European Capitals of Culture for 2017 (pafos2017.eu). The Annabelle hotel (00357 26 885 000; annabelle.com.cy) occupies a waterside position and has a spa and six acres of gardens. A seven-night stay in April starts at £487 per person, including breakfast (but no flights).

Temple of Venus

6 In Rome, they called the same deity Venus and April was her sacred month (the Veneralia festival was celebrated on April 1). She is still there. The Temple of Venus Genetrix lingers in the Forum of Caesar. Less than a mile away, Palazzo Manfredi (0039 6 7759 1380; palazzomanfredi.com) is a five-star oasis in a 17th-century palace, with doubles from €320 a night (from €455 in April), room only.

Bet on Bacchus

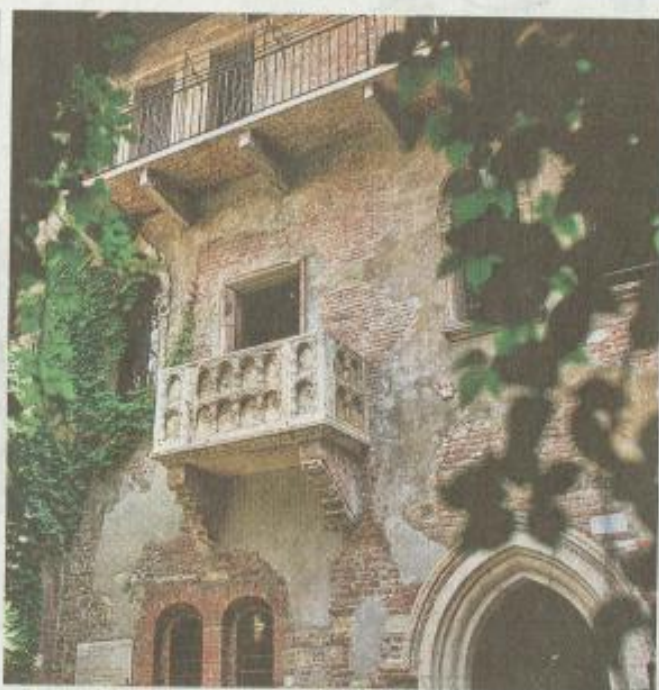
7 Nothing kindles a weekend like a bottle of something softly red or white. All the more reason to visit Chateau Les Carrasses (0845 686 8067; lescarrasses.com), a 19th-century winery near Narbonne in Languedoc. Abandoned from 1998 to 2011, but now back to full health, it produces its own vintages, has regular tastings and a restaurant, and charges €140 per night for doubles, room only. BA (ba.com) flies to Montpellier in summer.

A vine romance

8 Wine Tourism Spain (0034 91 014 5375; winetourismspain.com) is a viticultural specialist that allows its guests to drink while someone else drives. It sells a Ribeiro del Duero & Rioja Private Tour that explores two of Spain's most vineyard-laced areas. This three-day trip from Madrid starts at €880 per person, including hotels with breakfast, gourmet lunches and the services of a guide-chauffeur. No flights.

Paris match

9 The inclusion of Paris in this feature needs no explanation. Nor does the prospect of a sojourn at the Castille hotel (00800 0022 0011; castille.com), a boutique five-star in the



Pay tribute to Shakespeare at Casa di Giulietta, in Verona, above; and Palazzo Manfredi in Rome, below

1st arrondissement. Its Romantic Getaway In Paris package includes double room with breakfast, sparkling wine and strawberries, is available until the end of the year and costs from €405 per night.

Balearic bliss

10 Ibiza is perhaps best known for dance floor thrills, but also does refined breaks for grown-ups. Cas Gasi (0034 971 197 700; casgasi.com), a rustic hideaway near Santa Gertrudis, comes with a spa and first-rate restaurant serving. Doubles in April for €365 per night, with breakfast.

Go that little bit further

Angelic behaviour

11 Trace the choreographed footsteps of Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone in the Oscar-nominated film *La La Land* by twirling together at Griffith Observatory - and chase your happy ending at the nearby W Hollywood, with its rooftop pool and spa. A one-week stay, leaving Heathrow for Los Angeles on April 15, costs £2,035 per person through Virgin Holidays (0344 739 8347; virginholidays.co.uk).

Star-crossed

12 Absent from the Academy Awards list, but arguably just as affecting, *A United*

Kingdom tells a tale of love across the racial divide in the prim Forties. Skip the division and focus on the love with a holiday in the movie's prime setting, Botswana. Rainbow Tours (020 3131 4845; rainbowtours.co.uk) has an eight-day Botswana by Sanctuary Retreats private trip that provides a deluxe take on the wildlife of Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta. From £4,040 per person, with flights and transfers.

Seaside sizzle

13 Now into its third series, *The Affair* has proved compelling viewing with its portrayal of unbridled passions in the sleepy context of Long Island. Steer clear of the infidelity and the messy divorces, but trap the spark in Montauk, the photogenic end-of-the-highway New York seaside town that acts as the show's centrepoint. It features in the one-week NYC & The Hampshire break offered by The American Road Trip Company (01244 342 099; theamericanroadtripcompany.co.uk). From £1,199 per person, with flights.

Novel New York

14 For some New York is forever associated with F Scott Fitzgerald's hopeless romantic, Jay Gatsby. Of course, *The Great Gatsby* does not end well for its titular dreamer. But you can make a better fist of a stay at the Plaza Hotel on Fifth Avenue, spurning the apocalyptic row but keeping the mint juleps flowing in the Rose Club bar. A one-week room-only stay, leaving Heathrow on May 14, costs £2,043 per person with British Airways (0344 493 0787; ba.com/holidays).

Fifty reasons

15 On the opposite coast of the United States, the biggest city in Washington state is another emblem of enamourment, through the feelgood factor of *Sleepless in Seattle* and the feel-naughty factor of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Whichever is your bag, Seattle is a city for intimate chatter at some hip restaurant and a stop on the 14-night Best Of Oregon & Washington road trip with America As You Like It (020 8742 8299; americaasyoulikeit.com). From £1,988 per person including flights, car and hotels.

Ever after

16 Often mistaken for a temple, the Taj Mahal is a tearful love letter, a mausoleum built in 1632 by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for his wife Mumtaz Mahal, who had died giving birth to

