

Romantic retreats: 20 of the world's most seductive places to stay



Keemala, in Phuket, is pure fantasy: a retreat draped on a pretty hillside above Kamala beach where palm-fringed paths lead to dangling tree houses, a sensational spa and a chic rooftop restaurant.

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I have long believed the best and most cost effective form of relationship maintenance has nothing to do with the therapist's waiting room. No, it involves a very different form of close scrutiny in an enclosed space. I am talking, of course, about the exquisitely remedial benefits of a couple of nights away in a delightful hotel that – by virtue of its location, furnishings, fresh sheets and solicitous staff – sprinkles stardust on your spirits and libido. The sort of establishment that appears to have been created by Venus and the design team at Coco de Mer (London's finest erotic emporium) expressly as a sanctuary for the careworn lover. The place need not be luxurious or expensive to perform its voodoo, but it must have charm: that elusive quality that seduces the would-be guest without any crazed effort to do so. It should lull you into the sexiest version of yourself with the promise of one treat after another and the best post-coital breakfast in the entire known universe.

We will all have our own cherished examples of the ideal amorous retreat and they'll differ wildly. I am not, for example, a huge fan of spa hotels, which tend to talk of "pampering" as if it were a form of foreplay and insist on whisking your partner away for a mud wrap at inconvenient moments. But I suspect everyone will agree on certain factors that enhance the chance of romance. The first is simple: a room that's truly your own. If you have children or pets no domestic space is truly private. But the main problem with your own hearth is that you become a slave to its upkeep; you retreat to the bedroom only to tumble across laundry, bills or a broken tap. No one has plumped the pillows or scrubbed the surfaces in the en suite, or left rose-scented bath oil. By contrast, hotel rooms are smooch-ready within seconds of entering them and have minibars to put you in the mood. If you've chosen well, there's a bath big enough for two and views that makes you swoon. Perhaps even a Romeo and Juliet balcony. Such spaces slice away distractions and leave you with one clear option: mutual indulgence. And, just as importantly, the space to talk and rediscover the other. A good conversation is a better sex aid than the Rampant Rabbit.

The interiors that lurk outside the bedroom door are also an essential part of seduction. There's no finer place than a hotel bar to dig out your inner coquette or rake. The best ones are little theatres, with the barman as suave prompt and fellow drinkers as audience. The easiest erotic role-play known to lover-kind is to pretend you and your partner are strangers meeting for the first time as you happen to perch on adjacent barstools. Your thespian self feels compelled to order exotic cocktails, invent a lurid back-story and make meaningful eye contact. The dining room (if you venture there) is the National Theatre's Oliver auditorium to the bar's intimate Dorfman: a place for re-connecting couples to try their weekend personas out on the big stage and each other. When cares are stripped away and the chore of cooking removed, you can slip back to the banter of early courting days. If your hotel's top notch then there will be a third act: the maître d' will take you to a low-lit sitting room for some jewel-bright digestiv that whispers "kiss me".

But maybe you'll bypass downstairs altogether; because what sums up casual decadence better than room service? If there's one thing as delightful as the act of love itself, it's lifting a phone and ordering up... well, whatever the hotel's happy to furnish you with: champagne, oysters, fresh towels, or a mechanical nightingale with ruby eyes once owned by an Ottoman sultan (I once asked for the last, just to test them). This is so much the opposite of life as it's usually experienced – subjugated by bosses, PTA or offspring – that it makes you feel sexy by

dint of unaccustomed power: I want a steak sandwich, I get a steak sandwich! Everyone can be a dom in an excellent hotel.

If you want to submit, however, then you need a fabulous divan to be supine upon. The bed is at the very heart of a hotel's claim to aid and abet romance. It should be generous in size for proper romping, with the kind of five-star mattress that cradles lovers without squeaking. And, ideally, this couch should be clad in the sort of fine, white Egyptian cotton that's begging for a spot of vigorous dishevelment. Throw in a mound of soft pillows and a Cheval mirror for saucy angles and only the flint-hearted would remain unbuttoned.

14. Song Saa, Cambodia

This private island retreat is barefoot luxury for burnt-out couples who want to reconnect while also playing at Robinson Crusoe. Floating villas have four-poster beds, and portholes that gaze out to the coral reef. The hotel seems to have been designed for al fresco nakedness: private beach sundecks facilitate sunbathing in the buff, and showers are of the outdoor, ocean-fronting variety. Couples can enjoy massages in secluded alcoves across the island. 'Night spa' treatments under a star-speckled sky are a popular prelude to midnight hand-in-hand strolls – and the frantic, semi-robed scramble for the 'do not disturb' sign back in the suite.

Read the full review: [Song Saa Private Island, Cambodia](#)



Song Saa is a remote private island resort off the coast of Cambodia, offering ultra-luxurious villas built into the jungle or perched on stilts over the sea.