

100 Romantic Breaks

Hot and steamy



11 Migrante Guest House

Boa Vista, Cape Verde
On the wildly beautiful island of Boa Vista, in the sleepy little town of Sal Rei, is a gorgeously restored old mansion on the sea front. Inside, you'll find an unexpectedly arty-looking bar and a shady courtyard strung with Moorish lanterns. There are only four guest rooms (so book well in advance) with mosquito-netted four posters. The vibe is very Moroccan taid.
© 00238 251143, migrante-guesthouse.com. Doubles from around £50 B&B inc transfers. **Holiday Options** (0844 477 6452, holidayoptions.co.uk) offers Getwick's-Set nights from £330 with direct flights to Boa Vista from February.

12 Mumbo Island Malawi

Mumbo island, in the middle of Lake Malawi, is a sleepy, jungle hideaway alive with the sounds of wildlife and waves. You stay in tents – of the sturdy permanent variety with proper beds and uninterrupted views across the water. Your day goes something like this: coffee on the veranda, wander across the little wooden walkway to the beach, swim, sunbathe, have lunch, maybe a beer or two, probably a siesta, a putter round the island in kayaks if you can be bothered, dinner, early to bed. Repeat the following day.
© Mumbo Island costs from £5822pp pp full board (mumboidland.com), tanzaniatourism.com tailormakes holidays to Malawi.

13 Silks Hotel Dominica

Dominica is in the Caribbean but not like the Caribbean – or at least not the Caribbean you see in most holiday brochures. There are no all-inclusives or luxe resorts full of Michael Winner types. And there are hardly any white sandy beaches. What you do have in abundance is wild rainforest, peaceful rocky coves and fabulous mountain hideaways like Silks, a converted 17th century run distillery tucked between beach, river and forest. With its own pool, tropical gardens, restaurant with a good wine list and a beach five minutes away, you may not venture far.
© From £200 per double with breakfast, 001 767 445 88 46, silks-hotel.com.

14 Luang Say Lodge Laos

On the banks of the Mekong river, Pakbeng looks like a wild west gold rush town, with a couple of muddy streets and a few rickety little restaurants. The boats that bring you here from Luang Prabang tie up for the night alongside a wooden jetty. From here you walk to the edge of the village to the beautiful Luang Say Lodge whose large rooms on stilts have floor-to-ceiling shutters that fold back to give 180-degree river views.
© 00856 21 215958, openentry.com/luangsaylodge. Two-night packages (inc boat from Luang Prabang) from £500pp.

15 Saadani Game Reserve Tanzania

If wild and remote is your idea of romantic, you've hit the jackpot here. Tanzania's only seaside game lodge is made up of eight tented huts hidden in the trees bordering a massive emerald beach. Go for an early dip and you might spot elephant or even lion prints in the sand. Roam the game reserve by jeep, or chug upriver at dawn looking for hippos and crocodiles.
© 00255 22 277 3294, saadanilodge.com. From £121pp pp full board, inc game drives. A six-night trip to Saadani with cazemore + loyd (020-7384 2332, cazoyld.com), costs from £1,791 inc five nights full board, flights and transfers.

16 The FCC Angkor Siem Reap, Cambodia

Angkor Wat is one of the planet's must-sees, and if you're going somewhere this trip-of-a-lifetime-ish, you need a hotel to match. The old Foreign Correspondents' Club won't disappoint. Fifteen minutes from Angkor by rickshaw, on the banks of the Siem Reap river, it has a modern Indochina feel, with a mix of lovely French colonial architecture, 21st century technology and simple but very colonial.
© 00855 63 760 280, fccombodia.com. Doubles from £55.

17 Casa Morada Florida Keys

Three former Schragger employees created this stylish little hideaway, with 16 suites trickled out – sparingly – with Mexican antiques, Italian furniture and vintage finds. Suites are light and airy with outdoor terraces –
© 00932 226 8907, shanklams.com. Doubles from £90 full-board inc activities, or four day/three night packages from £600pp, inc transfers from Georgetown.

20 Casa Palopo Guatemala

Up in the highlands, overlooking the spectacular, volcano-ringed Lake Atitlan, is Casa Palopo. The A list fly in by helicopter, but for the less well-heeled it's a three-hour drive from pretty Antigua, slightly longer from Guatemala City. You'll be glad you made the effort: the 10 rooms have Frida Kahlo-esque art everywhere; bright, chalky-coloured walls, wrought iron furniture and private lake-view terraces for scenic evenings à la detox.
© 00502 7762 2270, casapalopo.com. Doubles from £65 through i-escape.com.

some with Jacuzzi. Start the day with yoga on the private island, breakfast on the veranda, then hang out by the pool, cycle along the coast, then return to your private terrace to siesta away the steamy afternoons.
© 00305 064 0044, casamorada.com. Doubles from £120 B&B.

18 Villa Mohotti Sri Lanka

This former Dutch merchant's house is tucked away among coconut palms on the western coast. Trains trundle occasionally along the single track at the end of the garden; cross this to reach a beautiful, deserted beach, where breakers crash on golden sand. Downstairs rooms open on to the lawns, but for more privacy, book upstairs, where shady terraces overlook the gardens, and you can doze away the afternoons on massive day beds.
© 0094 3 442 87 008, villamohotti.com or book through i-escape.com. Doubles from around £100. Sri Lankan Airlines (srilankan.aero) flies Heathrow to Colombo from around £500.

19 Shanklands Guyana

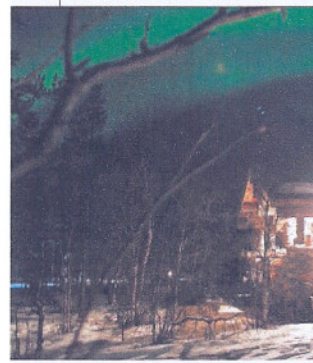
On the banks of the Essequibo is a large clearing in the middle of thick jungle, where you'll find the incongruously manicured lawns of Shanklands, a beautiful white, wooden mansion with cute little gingerbread cottages dotted around the grounds. The interiors are a little on the chintzy side – but the location is spectacularly romantic.
© 00952 226 8907, shanklands.com. Doubles from £90 full-board inc activities, or four day/three night packages from £600pp, inc transfers from Georgetown.

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Cold and cosy

21 Love in a cold climate by Marian Keyes in Finland



An adorably cosy log cabin in faraway Finnish Lapland with snow piled up at our windows. Within, our own private sauna, a crackling log fire, a furry rug and a four-poster bed. What could be more romantic? The cabin really was delightful. Much bigger than I'd expected and riddled with charming little touches, like a hardwood table carved into the shape of a heart and heart-shaped lights inset into the bathroom ceiling (less kitsch than it sounds). As well as a private sauna, we had our own outdoor hot-tub. Mind you, there wasn't a hope of us getting into it because the average daytime temperature was minus 15; astonishingly, nose-freezingly cold. (But it's nice cold: crisp, fresh and dry.)

Deliriously happy as we were in our little wooden home, there were times when we were obliged to wrestle with the elements because, alas, there was no room service. To be fed we had to put on 15 layers of clothes and tramp through the snow to the restaurant/bar/meeting area, which had the cheery feel of a youth hostel; luggage clattering the hallway. Ukrainians in the kitchen; a drinks menu featuring "Reindeer Piss". The food wasn't bad as such, although the set no-choice menu was not to the liking of the vegetarian. But the lovely staff, who surprisingly were mostly Thai, couldn't have been more helpful or obliging.

Should the unthinkable happen and you tire of being pleasant to your companion, there are a huge number of other activities like husky driving or taking a trip through a stunningly beautiful snowy forest in a sleigh pulled by a reindeer. And – very popular with men – a car thing where you get to rally-drive through the forest or go karting on ice and no end of other dangerous macho things. Of course, saunas abound, followed by the optional opportunity of jumping through a hole cut into ice and being submerged in sub-zero water, if you'd like your heart to seize up in your chest cavity. (I confess that I adore the feel of a defibrillator upon my breast.)

But the undeniable highlight was a snowmobile trip to see the northern lights. Everyone was as pains to warn us that the chances of seeing them were slim. Because I'm an unlucky person I'd had my peace with the notion of going home empty handed. As we snowmobiled along beneath the most star-filled sky I've ever seen, I kept my disappointment at bay by thinking about the barbecue we'd been promised and speculating what flavour the sausages would be, when absent

I wondered why a green searchlight was cutting through the night. Then I thought, "Christ! It's not a laser-beam! It's a northern light."

Soon, great sheets of colour were surging over us, creating pale-green landscapes – huge mountain ranges and canyons – splitting into two then four then eight again until dripping to earth like sand through an hour-glass. A luminous saucer-shape hovered above us, with a single beam connecting to the ground. An arch like a green rainbow looked like a bridge to another world. Then came flashes of indescence, all the colours of the spectrum for a brilliant instant.

For our last night, we upped sticks and moved our luggage on sledges to a glass igloo, a tiny space-agey semi-globe, housing two single beds. Being made entirely of glass, everyone could see in, which put the moose on further romance. But it's great fun for one night, and if you're lucky enough to have aurora in action, nothing could beat lying in bed, staring out into the darkness at nature's light show.

Discover the World (01737 218800, discovertheworld.co.uk/finland) has a Classic Lapland Cabins and Igloos trip, with four nights' half-board at the Kakslautanen Holiday Village from £81pp, including flights and transfers, with departures until April 2008. Hotel Home (020 858 937811, hotelhome.fi) in Helsinki, doubles from £300 a night. SAS (0871 521 2772, flysas.co.uk) flies Heathrow-Helsinki from £166 return.

This Charming Man by Marian Keyes will be published by Penguin in May.

22 The Svalbard archipelago Norway

Currently staring alongside armoured bears and Nicole Kidman in The Golden Compass, Norway's magnificent Arctic wilderness has become one of this season's hits. Boats, snowmobiles, dog sleds and cross-country skis give up-close access to a pristine playground, where polar bears, walrus, reindeer and vast colonies of birds rule landscapes rich in fjords, glaciers and ice caverns, often surreally lit by the northern lights.
© Black Tomato (020-7610 9008, blacktomato.co.uk) offers five nights at the charming driftwood, svalskin and slate Basecamp Spitzbergen Hotel, with an optional night on a ship frozen into pack ice, from £99pp, inc return flights.

23 Quebec City Canada

This former fur-trading post on the majestic St Lawrence river, dominated by magnificent historic buildings and with the Appalachian mountains as a backdrop, drips cultured cosmopolitan elegance. What's more, being the cradle of French culture in North America, there's nothing much you can't do here. Encapsulating a little Italy, a Latin Quarter, a Chinatown and a gay village, Quebec's charming streets offer a home from home to just about everybody, never more than during the world's biggest winter carnival (February 1-17), the centrepiece this year for a calendar full of party celebrations for the city's 400th anniversary.
© Crystal Holidays (0870 160 6040, crystalholidays.co.uk) has a seven-night "ski and see" trip from £59pp.

24 Whitepod Switzerland

The alpine mini-empire of cute Igloo Villages (0041 41 612 2708, igloovillages.com) may have expanded this winter with a new branch in Davos-Klosters, but the most desirable temporary accommodation in the mountains is Whitepod. A huddle of nine hi-tech dome tents around a stone lodge where a fire blaze and organic meals are served, high above the Swiss village of Les Crans, the camp offers an intense immersion in nature. While the zero-impact pods' eco credentials are beyond reproach, hairshirts are eschewed in favour of toasty wood-burning stoves, shabby chic antiques and sheepskin-swaddled double beds to greet guests returning from a day's skiing or snowshoeing/ski treatments.
© Whitepod (0041 24 471 38 38, whitepod.com). A pod for two costs from £300 for a two-night (minimum) stay.

25 Ammendene Villa Estonia

Estonia's summer capital, the seaside city of Pärnu, has an altogether more intimate allure when deep snow covers the beach in the winter months, and never more than when you're staying in the restored Ammendene Villa. Recently restored, this 1905 art nouveau mansion (be sure to bag the palatial Mahogany Suite) in its own parkland has a whole programme of winter indulgence including private dining in the house's turret, or a fireside picnic in the gardens followed by a sauna and cocktails.
© Baltic Holidays (0845 070 5711, balticholidays.com) tailormakes stays at the Ammendene Villa from £359pp B&B inc return flights, private transfers and romantic welcome package.

26 Tatra mountains Slovakia

Bristling with quaint 14th-century town houses and boasting a surprisingly good range of restaurants (Hotel U Leva's is the best even extending to a veggie option), the Renaissance town of Levoča makes a convivial base for some gentle exploration. A cable car will put you on top of the world – or the 2,634m summit of Lomnický štít, to be more precise. In the valley, the best of the gentle attractions include the eco-friendly geothermal spa resort

Aquacity, and ice-skating along a frozen river.
© Explore (0870 333 4001, explore.co.uk) offers four nights' B&B from £399 inc flights.

27 Torres del Paine Chile

Nature doesn't come much more raw and imposing than in Chilean Patagonia. And while there's no substitute for thigh power if you're to get the best out of a spell in this trekker Mecca with its surreal skylines and legendary day-glo sunset skies, accommodations in the area are now such that you can easily rebalance your day with some divine indulgence before bedtime. Nor are you limited to day trips from your boutique hotel – thanks to the latest in luxury enroute yurts.
© Journey Latin America (020-8547 8215, journeylatinamerica.co.uk) has six-night treks in Torres del Paine from £840pp exc international flights.

28 Wrocław Poland

This stunning architectural mish-mash of grand gothic gems peppered with 20th-century modernism is the place to make your base for exploring Silesia. Evening is the time to be on the street, dipping into the buzzy cafe culture, and lingering over the day's choice from the burgeoning dining scene. By day, hire a car and take your pick from the embarrassment of romantic palaces and castles within an hour of town.
© Exciting Poland (0048 77 422 88 48, excitingpoland.com) has two nights' B&B with a five-hour city tour from £124pp, excluding flights.

29 Aspen Colorado, US

The spiritual home of the fairy light, apparently, America's most glamorous ski town is all about evenings wrapped up in winter wonderland atmosphere. You can pay through the nose to get it with bells on at high-end addresses like Little Nell or the St. Regis, but an altogether more authentic Rocky Mountain hospitality in the intimate Hotel Lenado. Whatever your address, a night-time snowcat ride up Aspen Highlands mountain to the tiny candlelit log cabin of the gourmet bistrot Clond 9 is tough to beat. Just try not to pout over the view from "it all" than in the room.
© Ski Independence (0845 303 3030, skile.com) has seven nights' B&B from £939pp inc flights and transfers.

30 Himalayas Bhutan

The Trip of a Lifetime option. You and your special someone can't get much further away from "it all" than in Bhutan, and thanks to its government's firm stance on controlling tourist numbers and thus foreign influence on its traditional culture, the Himalayan nation packs an awe-inspiring punch of mystery and excitement. Among its astounding temples, colourful crafts and largely unspoiled mountains, the scrapping of 7,000m car, expect mind- (and thigh-) blowing trekking, dignified and devout locals or tranquility like you've never known.
© Himalayan Kingdoms (01452 844 400, himalayankingdoms.com) has an 18-day itinerary from £2,459pp inc flights.

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