

Room FOR *romance*

If you're looking to rev up the romance in your relationship, there's no better way than jetting off to a secluded beachfront destination for a little quality time, where you can fall in love all over again... Words by Yi-Hwa Hanna



Sunset on the beach

PHUKET, THAILAND

Despite having a reputation for being a great place to party, there's more to Phuket than nightlife. Set in the balmy azure waters of the Andaman sea, there's no bad time to visit (even during monsoon season from May to October, the rains tend to be

fast and heavy and you're usually still left with at least half a day of beautiful sunshine) and there's plenty to do and see on a romantic getaway. Just a quick flight away from bustling Bangkok, the busy Patong area of Phuket is a buzzing nightlife hub for everyone from young singles and groups of friends to couples and families. But as you head a little further out, you'll find The Pavilions Phuket, a sexy hideaway for the ultimate in privacy. You'll want to leave the kids behind for this one—this is an adults-only resort (only admitting children 16 years of age or older), and everything is designed with your bliss in mind, be that relaxation, dining, pampering or, of course, romance.

The spa and pool pavilions boast private infinity pools, courtyards, steam rooms and outdoor salas—with a separate

side entrance for staff to preserve guests' privacy at all times. Meanwhile the resort's six penthouses offer every indulgence from unparalleled view from the top of a lush hill, spacious rooms with all the amenities, a Jacuzzi tub and even a private spa. Alternately, there are also ocean view pool villas, tropical pool villas and three-bedroom pool villas.

With this much decadence at hand, prying yourself from your boudoir won't be easy (especially with temptations like chocolate wraps, champagne breakfasts and high-walled private pools to enjoy at your every whim) but when you do, beautiful Bang Tao Bay beckons. The resort lays claim to its own private section of Layan beach, complete with luxurious sun loungers and everything else you'll need for the ultimate in beachside comfort



It's hard not to feel romantic when you've got a view like this—and all to yourself, too!

Phuket, Thailand

just five minutes away from the resort, while if you're craving a visit to the lively city it's just a 20-minute drive away. The nearby islands (including Phi Phi Island, made famous by *The Beach*, and Khai Island) are also well worth a visit.

Still, with some seriously pampering spa treatments to hand, along with free unlimited WiFi access and gourmet restaurants (not to mention a bar that even serves a "love potion" cocktail) it's not surprising that this is a go-to for couples looking to get away from it all and spend some serious quality time together. As you take in the glorious warm-hued sunsets that light up the sky each evening (a daily activity not to be missed) to help light the fires of passion, it'll be a vacation you—or your husband—won't ever forget.



The gorgeous coastline of Capri

CAPRI, ITALY With sun, sand and glamour, the beautiful island of Capri captures the best of the Italian, Mediterranean lifestyle—and as a long-time favourite of celebrities, artists and writers (the island has played host to many well-heeled guests since the 19th century), finding an abode that won't cost the moon can be a challenge. Which is why La Minerva, a charming boutique hotel set in the heart of the city is the perfect place to stay: Despite being just steps from the fashionable shopping district, the hotel still boasts a fantastic sea view from its many balconies, a verdant garden, and a fabulous swimming pool and rooftop terrace—all starting from just Dhs685 a night for a double room. La Minerva only has 18 rooms, so you're ensured an intimate experience where service is focused and attentive, and its interior is modern, stylish and filled with light.

If you're not planning to spend all of your time in your hotel room (as tempting as that may be), there's plenty to experience on the island. Nearby Faraglioni beach is a must-see within

walking distance of the hotel, with the three iconic rocks making for a stunning view as you swim in the beautiful blue waters, relax in the sunshine and dine by the sea. Meanwhile, no visitor to Capri should leave without supping on a famous Caprese salad packed with silky buffalo mozzarella and juicy tomatoes, totano (molluscs stuffed with cheese and risotto

“Walk the Sentiero dei Fortini hand in hand, stop for a smooch and a bite, and soak in the view... oh, l'amore!”

and tomatoes fried in olive oil with garlic), lemon linguine and plenty of wonderfully fresh seafood and fine wine.

For a slice of history, make your way to Capri's Piazzetta where you can explore passageways that have existed since medieval times, then the Charterhouse of San Giacomo with its atmospheric 16th century cloisters and precious artworks.

Meanwhile, over in Anacapri, taking the Monte Solaro chairlift will take you to the highest point of the island so you can marvel at the view, while the Blue Grotto or *Grotta Azzura* is another must-see—the light flickering against the cave walls is a mesmerising sight.

After visiting the grotto, lovebirds can stroll the Sentiero dei Fortini, a two to three hour walk covering various different types of terrain including everything from beautiful countryside panoramas, ancient pathways and even a hanging bridge. Do it hand in hand, stopping for a smooch, a bite (pick up some fresh bread and produce at a local supermarket to make your own delicious, picnic-perfect sandwiches) and to soak in the view... oh l'amore! →



Caprese salad

BAROS ISLAND, MALDIVES

It's not every day that you can step straight off your back porch and swim with sharks, but at Baros Maldives you get to do exactly that. One of the oldest resorts in the Maldives, Baros's greatest asset is the incredible 300 metre-long house reef that encircles the private island. The multi-award winning resort is just a 20-minute speedboat ride from the capital, Male, and boasts one of the best house reefs in the Maldives, which can be accessed quite literally by stepping out of the back door of your villa and swimming 5-20 metres out to sea. To say it's convenient would be an understatement—guests can simply borrow snorkelling equipment from the resort's marine centre for the duration of their stay and head out as they please (provided conditions are safe), and when you're ready to explore more, you can head out on a snorkelling safari trip with one of the marine biologists. You can even go night snorkelling should you dare—but have no fear, it's perfectly safe.

While the seas are as peaceful as can be upon the surface, underneath lies a veritable marine jungle heaving with thousands of colourful, exotic fish, friendly black-tipped reef sharks, turtles, eagle rays and more. The dive centre is a PADI 5-Star Gold Palm Diving Center with 30 excellent dive sites within easy reach, and we loved



Baros's private sandbank



The coral reef

the fact that guests can rent an underwater camera from the centre.

Over-the-water activities aren't forgotten, with a whole host of exciting, environment-friendly water sports available too: here, you can glide over the surface in a Seajet water scooter, see the sights on a clear-bottom kayak or canoe, or even go windsurfing, and waterskiing beyond the lagoon. We recommend taking

a private dolphin cruise, where you can watch the slippery creatures in the wild as you sip on champagne and nibble canapés.

After all that activity you'll inevitably work up an appetite, and The Lighthouse restaurant is the perfect place for a romantic evening. Begin with drinks in the panoramic-view bar upstairs, then head down to the main restaurant for gourmet cuisine by candlelight. If you're looking for something even more intimate, the resort can arrange for you and your beloved to dine under the stars on a private sandbank a short boat ride from the main island: aside from your own personal chef and waiter for the evening, you'll quite literally feel like you're the only people in the world. Meanwhile, at Sails lounge, you can kick back on a couple's sunbed and drink in the sunset, before wandering over to Cayenne restaurant for one of their fantastic themed meals right by the water.

When you're ready to tear yourself away from the idyllic landscape, the Baros Spa is a wonderful place to unwind. If you're still not ready to be separated from your other half even while you enjoy a soothing massage, you can opt for a spacious couples' room complete with a rose petal-strewn outdoor bath. Come bedtime, whether you're in one of the iconic water villas perched serenely atop the azure waters (complete with your own private infinity pool), or the beach villas nestled into the island's lush foliage, you'll find a haven complete impressive bathrooms (including a cheeky outdoor rainfall shower), cushy king-size beds and plenty of room to lounge around in, both indoors and outdoors. If there's anything missing, the exceptionally friendly staff—who are some of the most genuinely warm and amicable we've encountered, anywhere—will go out of their way to make sure you have everything you need to be at your most comfortable. It's no wonder Baros was recently voted the "World's Most Romantic Resort."





goodescapes

Sunset in Los Cabos

LOS CABOS, MEXICO

Encompassing more than 30 miles of beautiful powdery sand beaches, azure waters as far as the eye can see and a plethora of seriously hedonistic places to wile the days away, Mexico's Los Cabos area—which includes Cabo del Este, San Jose del Cabo, and Cabo San Lucas—is an ideal place to get away for some quality time with your other half. With a warm, tropical coastline, plenty of charming and rustic haunts to spend time in, and delicious Mexican food to tempt you, it's hard not to fall in love with this stunning part of the Baja California peninsula.

A perfect destination for surf bums, if you've never tried your hand at surfing before, this would be a great place to start—with gentle surf breaks suitable for beginners and more challenging ones to please the more experienced folk, there's something to suit everyone. But if you don't fancy getting into a wetsuit, there are plenty more water-based activities to keep your days busy such as fishing (you can catch everything from Marlin and tuna to sailfish and Dorado), kayaking, diving and snorkelling, and even whale watching. The area is richly populated with a diverse range of whales and dolphins, including orcas, sperm whales and humpbacks, just to name a few.

When you're ready to explore dry land (and by this we don't mean just kicking back on a sun lounger, though that is a perfectly reasonable way to spend your days here), there are plenty of caves, cultural and historic sights to see. Don't miss the Church of San Lucas in Cabo San

Lucas, or the chance to soak in the sunset at Playa del Amanta (Lover's Beach).

At night, the award-winning One and Only Palmilla in San Jose Del Cabo is a delightful place to call home—and we're clearly not the only ones that think so, since it's played host to many celebrity

“Ship your husband off to practice his swing while you get pampered at the spa, then meet up later for a romantic stroll under the stars”



guests. Rich with tropical flora, colourful gardens, fountains and quiet places to relax, the resort's beautiful grounds include tennis courts, various gourmet restaurants serving up dishes like ceviche, sushi, and of course authentic dishes using the finest Mexican ingredients, an infinity pool and even a kids-only club that'll keep the little ones occupied all day should you choose to bring them along. If you'd like to do something unique together, the resort can also organise horseback riding trips, as well as activities at the Jack Nicklaus golf course next door. Not a golfer? Ship your husband there alone to practice his swing while you get pampered at the expansive spa, then meet up later for a romantic stroll under the stars. Bliss. ■