

# THE ROMANCE LIST



## OUR TOP 25 *new* HOTELS & RESORTS FOR COUPLES



Planning an escape just for two? Well you've come to the right place. Welcome to our annual *Holidays for Couples* Romance List. We've scanned the globe to bring you our top 25 new romantic resorts and hotels to open in 2010\* ready for you to enjoy in 2011.

Finding the next big thing in the dizzying world of new hotels and resorts can be tricky so we enlisted the smarts of an independent panel of travel writers and authors who made the final tough calls from an outstanding shortlist. Decisions were based both on their professional judgement and a criteria to ensure that each chosen property is not only outstanding but offers a truly romantic getaway. Time to rewrite your travel wish list!

... meet our talented travel panel on page 6.

\* up to November 01, 2010

CT CRAIG TANSLEY MB MATTHEW BRACE GC GINNY CUMMING ROA RACHAEL OAKES-ASH JH JOANNA HALL

## MATAKAURI, QUEENSTOWN, NEW ZEALAND

As I arrive at Matakauri the sun is setting across Lake Wakatipu turning the Remarkables – the towering shell-shaped mountain range that dwarfs Queenstown – a shade of burnt mauve so vivid that I push by the welcome committee and stand open-mouthed on the deck staring. Just seven kilometres from Queenstown, this is surely New Zealand's tastiest piece of real estate. Entirely ensconced in pine forest and perched 50 metres above one of the world's most renowned glacier-fed lakes, it's the staggering views of Queenstown's most famous mountains – the Remarkables, Cecil Peak and Walter Peak – that make this one of the world's most spectacular romantic retreats. Home to just 11 suites – each boasting uninterrupted views, (even from bed and the bathtub) private porches and open fireplaces – the emphasis at Matakauri is on romance. Guests may choose to dine in private dining rooms with food prepared by the country's most celebrated chefs, or if you'd rather mingle, canapés and drinks are served each evening at seven; while dining under the stars is encouraged in summer when an open fireplace takes any chill out of the air. Matakauri also has a day spa, heated pool, jacuzzi, gym and steam room. **CT**

*Why you'll love it:* Matakauri creates such a complete feeling of romantic isolation it's hard to believe Queenstown - one of the world's action adventure capitals that's also home to some of the country's best restaurants and bars - is just a five minute drive away. [www.matakauri.co.nz](http://www.matakauri.co.nz)



## ANDARA RESORT AND VILLAS, THAILAND

The warmth of Thailand, the unspoiled exotic beauty of the Andaman Sea, and accommodations that create a seamless transition between indoor and outdoor living: this is Andara Resort and Villas in a nutshell. Perched on a hill overlooking the stunning Kamala Bay on Phuket, Andara's Thai-inspired villas and suites capture the natural surroundings and provide a level of comfort and sophistication which is tailor-made for a honeymoon or a romantic getaway. The Luxury Pool Villas, which range from three to six bedrooms each with a private pool, are perfect for weddings (they're more like individual mini-resorts) while those looking for just a honeymoon retreat will love the Residence Suites, most of which have a private pool overlooking the ocean. Dining is taken to a new level with the Silk Restaurant and Bar producing the finest Thai cuisine and a great wine list in a contemporary environment, and the beauty of Andara is that you can also wander down to the beach and try one of the local restaurants. Couples' massages are one of Andara's specialities, either at the spa or in the privacy of a villa or suite, and guests can also charter one of the two Italian designed yachts for a day trip to nearby islands. **JH**

*Why you'll love it:* The rooms capture both the essence of Thailand and a real sense of romance and within just a few hours you'll feel like the real world is a thing of the past. [www.andaraphuket.com](http://www.andaraphuket.com).

## ALILA DIWA GOA, INDIA

Flanked by bountiful, green rice plantations and fronted by coconut trees and the warm, clear waters of the Arabian Sea, Alila Diwa Goa epitomises Goa, one of India's richest and most picturesque provinces. The Portuguese invaded and controlled Goa for 450 years, now European-style central squares mix with Indian bazaars, and Portuguese churches share walls with Hindu temples, making the region one of the most striking architectural zones in Asia. It's also a biodiversity hotspot, located as it is beside the Western Ghat mountain ranges. The Alila Diwa captures the essence of Goa; from its design: steep pitched roofs, cool verandahs and rambling courtyards to its cuisine; served up on an elevated platform spread around a big old banyan (fig) tree in signature restaurant, Spice Studio. Honeymooners should sample the Alila Suite, with its beach and rice paddy views and huge bathtub for two in a bathroom measuring a whopping 44 square metres. **CT**

*Why you'll love it:* Sit in the resort bar in the sultry evenings with sundowners in hand watching the sun sink into the Arabian sea and spend your days exploring nearby bazaars and see how hard it is to remember that you're just 20 minutes from Goa's International Airport, reachable in under an hour from Mumbai with regular connections to Australia. [www.alilahotels.com](http://www.alilahotels.com)



## PHULAY BAY, THAILAND

A clear-cut winner across all categories, this five-star hideaway is the sort of place that features in most honeymoon dreams. It's the first property in the Ritz-Carlton's new Reserve label: 'a collection of exotic, one-of-a-kind boutique resorts positioned in unique settings'. More Reserves are planned for the Maldives, Turks and Caicos, Mauritius and Muscat, but for now, Phulay Bay is the star of the show. And what a star. Set on the shores of the Andaman Sea, it's a collection of 54 pavilions and villas (no two of which are the same in style or size), all featuring lavish amenities such as outdoor bathtubs, and the biggest beds you'll ever sleep in. For a special getaway, the six Royal Beach Villas are the ultimate option, with infinity plunge pools and glorious views providing that extra shot of romance. **GC**

*Why you'll love it:* Around the resort, a vast infinity pool, five restaurants and a destination spa tick all the right boxes, but best of all is the 24/7 personal butler service. They'll handle everything you need to do (unpacking, ironing, booking flights, arranging transfers etc), as well as everything you want to do: like Champagne picnics on a luxury-yacht or tiny nearby island, elephant trekking, meditation classes with local monks, Thai cooking classes, and other special experiences that are unique to Phulay Bay. [www.phulaybay.com](http://www.phulaybay.com)



## MANDARIN ORIENTAL, LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas is sexy. There's a sense of youthful abandon in the desert air and the omnipresent sparkling pulse of light and life is mesmerising and, in a way, romantic. Forget gambling; the real Vegas is about hiring a limo to cruise the Strip, pillow-fighting in a suite overlooking the city, and ordering oysters and Veuve Cliquot at 4am just because you can. The new Mandarin Oriental understands this and has delivered possibly the most romantic and stylish hotel that Sin City has yet seen. The hotel has brought to the desert the award-winning service and the rich and seductive colours that have made their Asian properties such standouts over the years. As a result, the hotel is awash with sunshine yellow, bright turquoise and fuchsia red. If money is no object, go for a Strip View Suite and we will bet big that you will never leave the room, apart, perhaps, from a visit to the Mandarin Bar on the 23rd floor for views and vodka martinis. In the bar there is not a gaming machine in sight, probably because even hard-core pokie players would find it difficult to tear themselves away from the multi-coloured cityscape vista twinkling on the other side of the floor-to-ceiling windows. **MB**

*Why you'll love it:* Vegas's hotels have been known for ostentation and opulence; the Mandarin Oriental now offers something new and much rarer: sheer class. [www.mandarinoriental.com/lasvegas](http://www.mandarinoriental.com/lasvegas)





### MANDARIN ORIENTAL, MACAU

You wake up and throw back the curtains, to be greeted with panoramic views of the South China Sea, and down below the city of Macau begins its day as the entertainment capital of Asia. The Mandarin Oriental Macau reflects the very essence of this former Portuguese colony and it blends stylish, chic modernity with subtle inspirations from the territory's European heritage. Quite simply, it's now the premier property on the Macau Peninsula and a luxurious base to explore this fascinating place. If you could sum up the Mandarin Oriental Macau in one word, it would be 'sexy'. All rooms are beautifully appointed with the best of everything, the bathrooms are simply fantastic and the Panorama Suites take hotel living to new heights. With floor to ceiling windows on the highest floors, the views out across the Macau sky reveals either Nam Van Lake or Macau Bay and at the end of a day you can soak in a decadent window-side tub and watch the lights of Macau illuminate the landscape. If you feel inclined to leave the hotel, it's only walking distance to the historical district, the major casinos and the ferry terminal to Hong Kong. **JH**

*Why you'll love it:* Impeccable service which goes way beyond a five star rating, stunning views and everything that's worth seeing in Macau is only a short walk away. [www.mandarinoriental.com/macau](http://www.mandarinoriental.com/macau)

### AMANFAYUN, CHINA

The Amans excel at harmonising their properties and their environments so accurately and intricately that guests are really not staying at a hotel at all but luxuriating in exquisitely furnished and impeccably serviced accommodation. The perfect example is the new Amanfayun in China, where you can live like a Tang dynasty Mandarin in a hidden valley. Wake at dawn for a bicycle ride around West Lake or a stroll through the green tea plantations and bamboo stands, spend an hour's silent vigil at the 1,685-year-old Lingyin Si Buddhist temple, and fall in love with your partner again in the Aman Spa with a couples' treatment inspired by the plants and climates of this region's four distinct seasons, followed by a peaceful hour in a traditional wooden soaking tub. The property is built on the site of an old Tan village and, with typical Aman panache, has been designed so each room and villa is unique. The art, the decor and the materials are all inspired by the blissful surroundings and to add to the overwhelming sense of tranquillity, TVs are on a request-only basis. For complete serenity choose one of the Village villas. **MB**

*Why you'll love it:* Perfect for couples looking for complete calm in a secluded and historic environment. [www.amanresorts.com](http://www.amanresorts.com)

### PALAZZINA GRASSI, VENICE, ITALY

A 16th-century former aristocrat's residence was the blank canvas for Philippe Starck's first foray into Italian hotel design. Emanuele Garosci, former rally driver and creator of Palazzina Grassi, chose the legendary French designer to create a five-star hotel that was 'more like a private club' and made guests feel 'temporarily Venetian'. The result is nothing short of spectacular: Full marks must go to the location: on the Grand Canal, in the heart of one of the most romantic cities on the planet. Inside the hotel there are just 26 rooms and suites, their white, super-glam design providing a beautiful contrast to the public areas, where unique artworks, antique pieces, rare books and vintage objects jostle for attention beside huge custom-made Murano glass sculptures by artist Aristide Najean. In addition to must-try PG's restaurant, which puts its own spin on the traditional Venetian *cicchetteria* or *osteria*, there's a special room at the very top of Palazzina Grassi that's traditionally reserved for honeymooners. It's generally considered to be the most romantic spot in the entire hotel: no mean feat when every part of this sublime property was inspired by poetry, passion and romance... **GC**

*Why you'll love it:* It's dazzling contemporary design on a grand, and yet somehow still intimate, scale. [www.palazzinagrassi.com](http://www.palazzinagrassi.com)

### AMANGIRI, UTAH

The clever designers at the über cool Aman Resorts have done it again, this time in the Utah desert. Picture a boutique resort in desert hues that blends into the dramatic rock canyon surroundings so well it's hard to tell where the mountains ends and the resort begins.

Flanked by terraces, the pool wraps around a spectacular rock escarpment that embraces the communal epicentre of the resort, The Pavilion, with a dramatic floor-to-ceiling wine cellar, casual to fine dining at the open kitchen at The Dining Room and lounging in The Library and The Gallery. The remote location already spells romance, once you add the super sexy desert suites prepare to extend your booking. Thirty four suites serve up private desert courtyard entrances, king size beds, desert watching bathtubs and living areas with concertina doors that fold back to reveal a desert vista complete with lounge for sunset, dusk and star lit nights. The Spa and Water Pavilion has both indoor and outdoor treatment rooms for massage and beauty therapy, hot tubs, plunge pools, dry sauna and steam room plus yoga studio and gym and that omnipresent desert view that seeps under the skin and fires the heart. If you want to leave the resort, which you won't, Aman offers some desert adventures to get the blood pumping and the face grinning. **ROA**

*Why you'll love it:* The remote location combined with the soothing Aman sandy colour tones and nature at every turn spells immediate relaxation. [www.amanresorts.com](http://www.amanresorts.com)

### THE SERAI, INDIA

You're sitting out on a deck as the sun drops low against the desert landscape and within minutes, the sky turns a bright yellow against the sand. For the next half hour the palette moves from yellow, to orange, red and purple, with some outrageous hues in between. The Serai, near Jaisalmer in Rajasthan is unique in that it's a luxury desert camp with just 21 large canvas tents set on one hundred acres in the Great Thar Desert. If you love being at one with the wilderness, in peaceful and sumptuous surroundings then this is the type of place that will completely change the way you think of luxurious getaways. An intimate dining tent serves the finest local delicacies and western offerings, and for that never-to-forget experience guests can arrange to dine anywhere on the estate – a romantic dinner for two under the bright desert stars is not something you get to do every day. For honeymooners and romantics, the luxury tented suites have plunge pools in a private courtyard and the Royal Suite has its own spa, plunge pool, day bed, dining areas and private butler. The service standards are impeccable at the Serai and it's an ideal base to explore the fabled tenth century desert kingdom of Jaisalmer, including the amazing Jaisalmer Fort with its intricately carved Jain temples. **JH**

*Why you'll love it:* This is a complete departure from the tropical island-type getaway that typifies many 'romantic' destinations – instead it's something of a throwback to the British Raj with gin and tonic instead of pina coladas. [www.the-serai.com](http://www.the-serai.com)

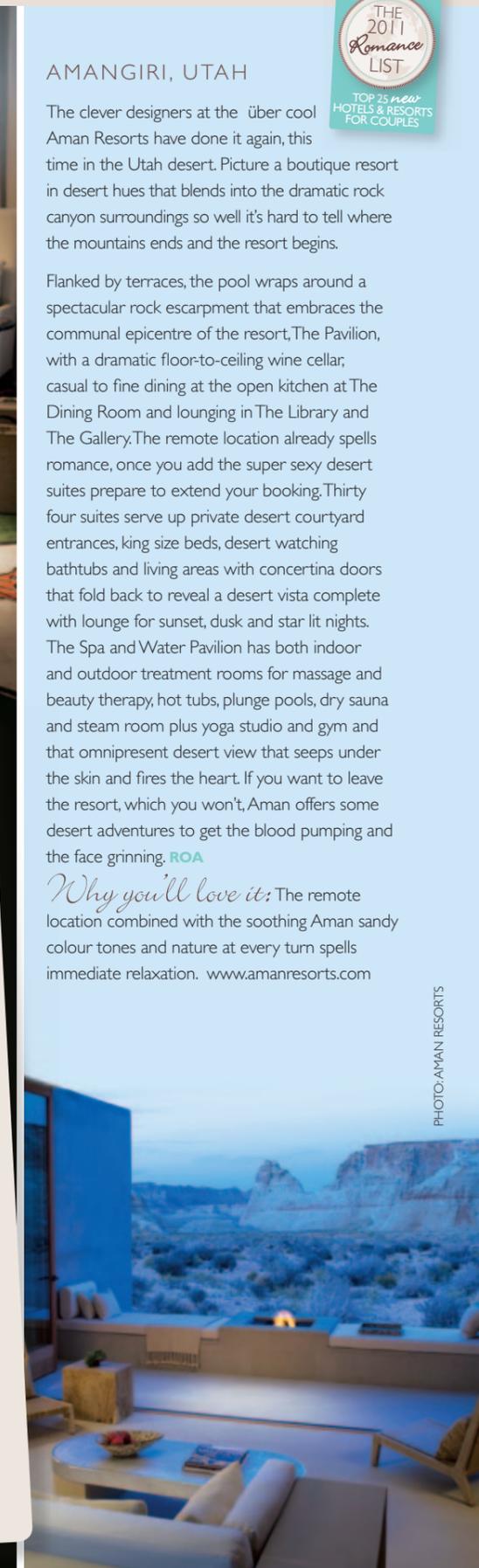
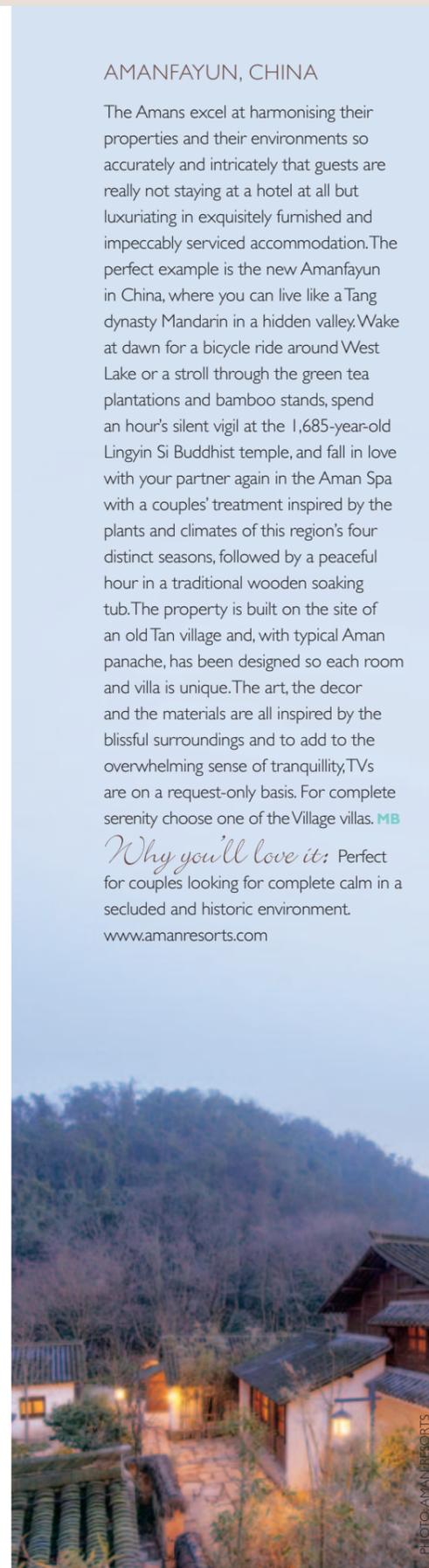
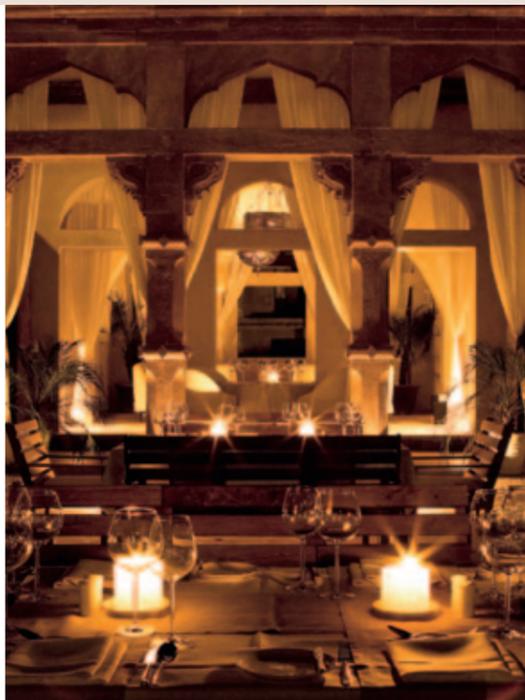


PHOTO: AMAN RESORTS

### ALILA VILLAS SOORI, BALI

What shall it be today? Private infinity pool, resort pool or beach? Best ask the butler. Such are life's pressures at Alila Villas Soori in a quiet south-west coast rice field corner of Bali, far far from the madding crowds of Seminyak and Legian. You can exhale now. Fifteen beach pool villas and fifteen ocean pool villas mix it up with eight three bedroom pool villas and one grande dame ten bedroom villa. All villas have direct access to the beach of volcanic black sand and all incorporate breezy indoor outdoor living. Activities in this private enclave of generous hospitality are called 'journeys' and are one of a kind excursions designed exclusively for you. Choose to stay within the Alila bubble or venture out into the Balinese island for some jungle love, temple tramping and mountain peaking. Expect seriously good cuisine with three dining outlets including the Izakaya Grill restaurant, skipping distance from the breaking waves. The real fun starts at the spa with heated rain shower beds and Asian inspired treatments. The good news is while all this seriously luscious down time is good for you it's also good for the community with Alila giving back to the local region. **ROA**

*Why you'll love it:* Dreamy Indian ocean sunsets, attention to detail and impeccable service. [www.alilavillasoori.com/](http://www.alilavillasoori.com/)



### RAAS, WALLED CITY, JODHPUR

Eschewing a traditional palace or 'Days of the Raj' sensibility in favour of pared back, contemporary European styling, this superb new hotel is a true oasis amidst the chaos of Jodhpur's labyrinthine streets. Combining 18th-century sandstone structures and modern blocks, the result is a harmonious blend of the old and the new. This was a key requirement in the restoration process and 26 design options were apparently presented before the final design was approved. And what a choice it was. The luxury rooms and suites, especially the Duplex Suite, are ideal for honeymooners, while the hotel's blue tuk-tuks provide guests with a quirky method of transportation. But above all, it's the hotel's proximity to the 15th century Mehrangarh Fort that sets Raas apart. All but four of the 39 rooms and suites boast jaw-dropping views of the fort, which stands a majestic sentinel above the resort. It's breathtaking and totally unique, and scores Raas massive bonus points. As *Tatler* put it: "No contest – this is the most spectacular view from any hotel in India, maybe actually the world." A hands-down winner. **GC**

*Why you'll love it:* Raas may lack one or two of the facilities that some honeymooners might deem essential (such as private pools or multiple dining options), but it more than makes up for it with its sublime design, infinity pool, deluxe spa and personal butler service on request. [www.raasjodhpur.com](http://www.raasjodhpur.com)



### CONSTANCE MOOFUSHI, MALDIVES

I have not had good experiences with overwater bungalows at tropical resorts. The formula when designing and fitting out such structures seems to be to under-equip and under-decorate and then over-charge in the hope that the novelty factor of sleeping inches above splashing waves will be enough to woo holidaying couples. Not so at the Constance Moofushi, which has broken the mould and gone to town on the interiors of their Water Villas and Senior Water Villas. This is real tropical romance: waking to the roar of the reef, munching on fresh papaya as you gaze at the gentle curve of the blue, blue horizon, and diving into the warm, turquoise lagoon beneath your feet. If you are beach-lovers and you are looking for the ultimate romantic barefoot-and-sarong destination, this is probably it. This is the one you'll remember for years to come and yearn to return to. Moofushi is one of the few spots in the Maldives to be surrounded by a spectacular reef and to have proximity to not one but three large lagoons, which means the snorkelling and diving really doesn't get much more varied and exciting than here. **MB**

*Why you'll love it:* Constance Moofushi combines luxury and location to create a memorable experience for beach-loving romantics. [www.moofushiresort.com](http://www.moofushiresort.com)

### MANDARIN ORIENTAL BARCELONA, SPAIN

From our private terrace looking down on Barcelona, we nibble on local tapas and admire the haphazard skyline of one of Europe's classiest cities. Below us, Gaudi's Casa Mila sits proudly on one of Spain's swankiest streets – Passeig de Gracia – with its Chanel, Armani, Cartier and Gucci outlets and its vibrant street scene. The most tantalising feature of this hotel is that all the action of Europe's liveliest city is just there, metres away, but we're content for now in our own private universe. But what a private universe this is. The Mandarin Oriental Barcelona, recreated with contemporary Spanish furnishings by local designer Patricia Urquiola, was made for people in love. It oozes sophistication, with private Mimosa Gardens offering a green oasis for al fresco dining, or try one of Barcelona's top restaurants, Moments, with traditional Catalan cuisine prepared by one of the world's most acclaimed female chefs, Carme Ruscalleda. Elsewhere there's a private roof terrace with dipping pool and 360 degree views of Barcelona or you can relax under the glass roofs of a gigantic atrium after a signature spa treatment. The hotel has two types of suites perfect for honeymooners – the Barcelona and Terrace Suites, each 90 square metres in size with 24-hour dedicated butler service. **CT**

*Why you'll love it:* Wander the romantic streets of Barcelona, with its world-renowned architecture and its 24 hour street-side action; but 'home' – with its sun-drenched terraces, Jacuzzis, atriums, landscaped gardens and Catalan-style restaurants and bars - is never more than a short walk away. [www.mandarinoriental.com](http://www.mandarinoriental.com)



### THE BANYAN TREE, CABO MARQUES, MEXICO

You'd be forgiven for thinking you were in Asia at Banyan Tree, Cabo Marques. The resort's individual hilltop bungalows with absolute ocean views along the Punte Diamante near Acapulco are inspired by the Banyan Tree's Asian destinations with typical eastern styled rooftops. Step inside the stone and wood lobby and take a load off your weary travelling feet on lounges that sit in the lush foliage of the hillside. The overall feeling here is 'tropical!' Each villa is built on stilts to maximize privacy and ocean views and features an infinity pool with designer lounges and glass walls that fold back. Sunsets simply melt onto the villa deck. Saffron restaurant is perched on a cliff with a breathtaking ocean backdrop for Thai cuisine while La Nao celebrates the historical trade routes of Acapulco and blends east with Mexican flavours. Or sip on a margarita at the Las Rocas Grill and Bar while dining on freshly grilled seafood. In the unlikely event you'll be bored by your private pool then the resort's pool extends out from the rocky hillside with dreamy lanterns hanging from the trees above for after dark dips. Massage? The spa features seven treatment rooms, with treatments again inspired by Asia. Couples who fancy leaving the haven for the day can choose from golf, cliff diving, horseback riding or surfing in the Pacific Ocean. **ROA**

*Why you'll love it:* It's Acapulco, what's not to love? [www.banyantree.com/en](http://www.banyantree.com/en)



### CROSBY ST HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY

The first Stateside venture by Brit hoteliers Tim and Kit Kemp, the über-cool Crosby Street Hotel has delivered hip British style to downtown New York. Celebrated for their kitsch-meets-classic boutique hotels in London (including the Covent Garden Hotel, Charlotte Street and Haymarket), the Kemps' signature style is an elegant blend of bold colours, sumptuous fabrics, antiques and bespoke contemporary furniture. Add wildly extravagant, humorous design flourishes, and the result is a totally unique New York property oozing style and whimsy: this is a hotel for (serious) design junkies. Further bonus points are scored for the floor-to-ceiling warehouse-style windows in the hotel's 86 rooms and suites, framing iconic views of the city (top tip for honeymooners: treat yourself to a room or suite on a higher floor for truly breathtaking panoramas). Coolest by far is the state-of-the-art private screening room in the basement. 'The Sunday Night Film Club' (dinner in the Crosby Bar, followed by the movie of the week in the luxurious 100-seat cinema). **GC**

*Why you'll love it:* The hotel is a Mecca for fashionistas, socialites and celebs, who flock to the oh-so-cool communal areas, such as The Crosby Bar (where you can get anything from a late night martini to the quintessential English afternoon tea) and the Drawing Room, a lush room in scarlet with fireplace and honour bar. [www.firmdalehotels.com](http://www.firmdalehotels.com), [www.crosbystreethotel.com](http://www.crosbystreethotel.com)



### QASR AL SARAB DESERT RESORT, ABU DHABI

The Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort sneaks up on the uninitiated just like a mirage, somehow appearing between the towering golden-red sand dunes in the middle of the world's largest stretch of uninterrupted desert. Dubbed the Mirage Palace, the Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort is the realisation of every Arabian fantasy you ever had as children; and it takes the concept of romantic isolation to a truly fantastical level. But that's not to say it's hard to get to, on the contrary it's just a 90-minute drive from Abu Dhabi International Airport, but it belongs in another age. For thousands of years Bedouin tribes lived in these hot sands and its their culture and heritage that sets the tone. Designed like an ancient Emirati fort, the resort is decorated with local artefacts creating an exotic romanticism unique to Arabia. There's jewel-embedded silver chandeliers in ultra-luxurious rooms and villas all with sweeping views of the never-ending desert. Sample fruit-soaked tajines and tender meats roasting in fragrant spices in rooftop restaurants or try a sand bath to exfoliate and refresh your skin in the resort's day spa. **CT**

*Why you'll love it:* Isn't there something ridiculously romantic about holing up in a luxurious palace surrounded by nothing but the sands of one of the world's largest deserts, where local transport revolves around camels? [www.anantara.com](http://www.anantara.com)



### ALILA LUANG PRABANG, LAOS

Alila Hotels and Resorts already grace Thailand, India, Indonesia and the Maldives, and the brand scores major points for the location of its latest property: Laos, one of the most intriguing and unspoilt countries in south-east Asia. In the north lies the ancient royal town of Luang Prabang, surrounded by mountains in a spot where the Mekong and Khan Rivers meet. Renowned as the cultural and spiritual heart of the kingdom, it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, and is now home to the luxury all-suite resort Alila Luang Prabang, where existing colonial buildings blend with new, modern structures that respect traditional Lao architecture. A must for honeymooners is the corner Pool Suite: like all of the resort's 23 suites it features a private garden, and also a pool. It also boasts exclusive access to an historic tower that's the ideal setting for a romantic dinner; with panoramic views across Luang Prabang. Further bonus points come courtesy of cooking classes and culinary excursions with the resort's cooking school, and 'leisure concierges' who sort out anything from an elephant ride to a river kayaking adventure. **GC**

*Why you'll love it:* The resort is super-stylish and luxurious, but it's the feeling of peace, relaxation and absolute tranquillity that sets Alila Luang Prabang apart. [www.alilahotels.com](http://www.alilahotels.com)



### ARMANI HOTEL, DUBAI

Two words. Giorgio Armani. The doyenne of super sleek minimalist style has turned his fashion hands to hotels with his first launched in Dubai. The 160-room luxe hotel occupies the first eight floors and the 38th and 39th mega luxury floors of the world's tallest tower; the Burj Khalifa. Make no mistake, if you prefer your hotels opulent and plush this is not the place for you. The minimalist design with no door handles or art work borders on futuristic. Colours are kept to chocolate browns, polished black, charcoal grey and ivory with moments of deep red or metallic tones with lots of sexy curves from circular lounges and leather dining booths. Attention to detail includes African zebrawood and black Japanese tatami flooring. Bose stereos and rain showers. Hungry? Choose from eight restaurants and lounges including Indian and Mediterranean or try the reservation only Armani/Prive and rub shoulders with the see and be seen set who flock here for the world's largest LCD screen which broadcasts fashion footage. Shop up a storm at the 12.1 million square foot mall then slink into the Armani Spa for a personalised treatment and cool off in the pool. Did we mention Bentley pick up from the airport?

**ROA** [dubai.armanihotels.com/](http://dubai.armanihotels.com/)

*Why you'll love it:* The pure Armani factor.



### UPPER HOUSE, HONG KONG

Romantic holidays don't have to involve tropical islands; in fact, one of the world's most innovative romantic retreats is actually tucked away a few hundred metres above one of Asia's most hectic business and shopping districts. Obviously to create a romantic ambience in the middle of a frenetically paced Asian city takes careful planning, but from the moment you step inside Hong Kong's Upper House, the intensity of the city is a memory as you're transported to a modern-day love-nest, thanks to an ingenious design strategy. For starters, you don't have to check in; Guest Experience Assistants will lead you to your 114-square-metre suite with knock-out views over Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour. In fact, you'll see all the way over Hong Kong Island from rooms which begin on the 38th floor – the view never stops, even from your limestone-clad, freestanding bathtub. The bamboo and cream-oak colour scheme evokes ancient China, but the iPad touch system installed so honeymooners never need call staff is decadently modern. World-renowned chef Gray Kunz will fill your stomachs at Café Gray Deluxe, one of Hong Kong's finest restaurants, nestled on the 49th floor with a huge open kitchen and uninterrupted views. **CT**

*Why you'll love it:* You'll have everything literally on your doorstep: the stylish galleries, cafes and restaurants of Hong Kong's classy Star Street district and Asia's finest fashion houses outside at Pacific Place; yet all it takes is an elevator ride into the skies for a romantic retreat with a difference. [www.upperhouse.com](http://www.upperhouse.com)



### SAFFIRE FREYCINET, TASMANIA

Panoramic ocean views backed by a stunning mountain range that changes colour throughout the day, a pristine national park, and a beach that's regularly voted as the best in the world, Australia's newest luxury resort has all the ingredients for a romantic escape that truly captures Tasmania's unique wilderness.

Throw in just 20 private and luxurious suites appointed with the finest contemporary furnishings, all with views, and one of the country's most acclaimed chefs with the freshest Tasmanian produce at his disposal and you have the essence of Saffire Freycinet. Located on the Freycinet Peninsula, Saffire overlooks Great Oyster Bay with the Hazards Mountain Range as a backdrop and it's easily accessible to the stunning Wineglass Bay with its bright white sand and aqua blue ocean. All of Saffire's suites are perfect for romantic getaways but the Premium Suites take luxury to a new level with private courtyards and plunge pools, separate lounge/dining areas, private balconies and a kitchenette where chefs can prepare a private meal in your own home away from home. And with executive chef Hugh Whitehouse in charge of the Palate Restaurant preparing multi-course degustation menus, matched with an outstanding wine list including local classics, it poses the obvious dilemma - a private romantic dinner in-suite, or an intimate culinary experience in a sophisticated restaurant? **JH**

*Why you'll love it:* Saffire feels like it's connected to the natural surroundings thanks to its unique design, and it offers a level of privacy that very few accommodations can match. [www.saffire-freycinet.com.au](http://www.saffire-freycinet.com.au)



### MUSE, FRANCE

This is possibly the most stylish European hotel to open in 2010. It's in sun-kissed and über-fabulous St Tropez yet it has escaped the Euro-bling and flamboyance that often accompanies hotels here. Instead it has adopted a low-key approach, big on chic and sophisticated design elements. Neither the simplicity of Provençal gardens nor the understated cool of the exquisite rooms is typical of local hotels so they combine to bring a breath of fresh air to the Côte d'Azur. If there was a separate category for attention to detail then Muse would be a clear winner because it has expertly sourced and integrated natural materials to create the most peaceful and attractive ambience, perfect for a Mediterranean sojourn with your partner. It's impossible to suggest a suite to pick because they are all superb: it's really like inhabiting a private apartment which gives on to a pool and the sweep of the herb-scented gardens beyond. If the view isn't enough, the suites also offer an iPhone, iPad, wi-fi and PlayStation for your use. If you can drag yourselves away from the pool, a small but perfectly formed beach is nearby. **MB**

*Why you'll love it:* An example of all-modern Côte d'Azur design with old-school attitude: style, panache and an exquisite Provençal garden setting. [www.muse-hotels.com](http://www.muse-hotels.com)

## LAUCALA ISLAND, FIJI

There's nothing quite like being on a private island to inspire a feeling of exclusivity, and the luxury Laucala Island is one of those places that typifies the tropical South Seas idyll. With just 25 luxurious villas spread out over the 12 square kilometres of Laucala, at times it really feels like this island belongs to you with its icing sugar sand, set against a backdrop of turquoise lagoons and beautiful tropical forest. What to do on a typical day on Laucala? Maybe start with breakfast on your balcony served by your waiter overlooking the lagoon, before boarding one of the many water craft for a spot of fishing and snorkelling around the beautiful reef with lunch served on board, and then a round of golf or a tropical bush walk with a visit to a traditional village, and then finish the day with a sunset horse ride on the beach. In the evening you can begin with a Sundowner cocktail in the beachfront Rock Lounge, and enjoy an intimate candlelight dinner on a private beach. Laucala is the ultimate romantic destination where you can spend the day being active, or just sit in your private pool and look out over the blue ocean. **JH**

*Why you'll love it:* As a private island, there are no day trippers here and the feeling of space and tranquillity, coupled with world class facilities and attentive service, makes this one of those places you must experience - even if only once. [www.laucala.com](http://www.laucala.com)



## THE FULLERTON BAY HOTEL, SINGAPORE

Enter the Fullerton Bay Hotel and prepare to pick your jaw up from the floor. A look-at-me sixteen foot cylindrical chandelier suspends thirty three feet above the ground in all its elegant glory. There is no doubt the new kid on the waterfront block at Marina Bay has made serious waves in the luxury world with its discreet blend of contemporary and colonial classic design. A mere 100 rooms of polished rosewood, leather, chrome and lattice host international guests who are drawn to the stunning city and waterfront vistas. The hotel's six suites on the top three floors feature marina views, balconies and sun decks with Chinese, Malay, Indian, Peranakan and Colonial design influences. The rooftop pool is an oasis in the city with the Lantern bar providing on-trend cocktails and 360 degree vistas. Wine snobs will be elated at the sight of the 800 bottle library at Clifford and the massive floor-to-ceiling windows ensure the world knows what you are drinking. Better still, step onto the Landing Point's mammoth terrace on the pier side and lounge at the bar. Work it all off in the state-of-the-art gym with outdoor deck for yoga stretching. **ROA**

*Why you'll love it:* Location, location, location. Pull up in your motor yacht and check in. [www.fullertonbayhotel.com](http://www.fullertonbayhotel.com), [www.preferredhotels.com](http://www.preferredhotels.com)



## ARGOS IN CAPPADOCIA, TURKEY

Maybe it's an ancient Neanderthal gene in me but I find something highly attractive about the thought of living in a cave, at least temporarily. It's the security of the stone surrounding you, the solid silence inside, and the graceful curve of the walls. Of course, if the cave also includes a sublimely comfortable bed, 24-hour room service and a breathtaking view of the surrounding countryside, then so much the better. All this can be had at the romantic and magical Argos in Cappadocia, a hotel built on the site of an ancient monastery and village in this geologically famous area of Turkey. The hotel has carefully preserved the old cave dwellings and tunnels that connected them and turned many into fascinating rooms. Ormate rugs grace the stone floors and the designers have had fun using rock crevices and ledges as shelves on which to place candles and ornaments. There's an attention to detail which is rare among all but the very finest and most exclusive hotels of the world. If you are a more private couple whose idea of a honeymoon or romantic holiday does not involve pashing by the pool but expressing your love more subtly, then the four Splendid Suites at Argos are ideal: you do not just get your own love-cave, you get your own love-cave pool too. **MB**

*Why you'll love it:* Embrace your inner cave-person and snuggle down under the covers in a cosy rock suite. [www.argosincappadocia.com](http://www.argosincappadocia.com)

