

# Romantic Getaways

With the most romantic date in the calendar fast approaching, it's time to start thinking mushy thoughts and how you're going to spend that special day with your loved one. By Kate Marshall

## Paris

IN AT number one for the most passionate city in the world is Paris. Brimming with romance in every corner, fall in love all over again against a backdrop of candle-lit restaurants, picturesque bars, waterway vistas and boutique hotels.

Savour the atmosphere with a walk along the Champs-Élysées, stop for a coffee or pain au chocolat. Alternatively, swoon around Rue de Passy for a classical chic shopping experience or Rue Saint Honoré for a spot of glamorous designer boutiques.

For an aperitif before dinner wander into one of the many amorous wine bars that line the streets of this beautiful city. Considered one of the best bars for a romantic setting, Flute Bar, ideal for champagne or cocktails all from a red velour sofa.

No trip to Paris would be complete without a visit to the Eiffel Tower. Dress to impress for dinner at Le 58 Tour Eiffel (French cuisine) or at Le Jules Vernes Restaurant (one-star Michelin) that offers a gastronomic experience that is second to none. Take in the city views against the contemporary decor of this amazing city at night and celebrate in style.

Sign off your evening of lurve, with a romantic stroll along the Seine River and

meander along the Ile Saint-Louis; a truly romantic ending to a Valentine's Parisian evening, or cause a stir and steal a kiss under the Arc de Triomphe.

Created for the international romantic, look no further than La Belle Juliette for the night's stay where high end sophistication is completed with a spa, bar and Japanese-style garden.

## Prague

Celebrate the day of love in Prague, the city of spires and one of the most magical cities in the world. By day, allow time to pass you both by as you wander along cobblestone streets filled with artisan shops under a sprinkling of snow during February. Take a horse-drawn carriage ride around the city and marvel at the historical 12th century Old Town Square, St. Nicholas church and baroque architecture. Smooch your way around St. Vitus Cathedral and Prague castle founded in 880AD and the largest medieval castle in Europe for even historical romance.

For romancing on the water, take a charming Vltava River cruise or visit Prague markets to sample typical Czech delicacies

### MAIN IMAGE

The Eiffel tower in Paris seen from the Trocadero

### INSET

Prague has some of the finest examples of baroque architecture in Europe



such as bramborák (potato pancake) fried cheese and a glass of famous Czech beers.

The most romantic aspect of Prague is a night time walk across the gothic style Charles Bridge or take a dreamy walk together up to Petrin Hill for breathtaking views of the city lit up at night.

Finish with a drink and tapas style plates at Kozicka Bar (Little Goat) very near the Old Town Square. For unprecedented dining views of the city, Vltava River and the castle, opt for a table in the circular dining room at Celeste Restaurant.

Stumble into slumber at five-star Aria Hotel, a five minute walk from Charles Bridge, all with music-themed rooms and baroque fashioned gardens.

## Lille

Lille could be the perfect Valentine's Day interlude for you via the Eurostar as it can take as little as one hour and 22 minutes. Abundant with Flemish architecture, amazing shopping, a plethora of bars, patisseries and cafes, it also offers restaurants with Flemish cuisine and world foods. Lille, in short, is a gourmet food lovers' paradise.

Meert at 27 rue Esquermoise, is a renown and popular tearoom dating back to 1761 and is the ideal spot for morning or afternoon tea with gaufres (waffles) worth fighting over.

Couple up and rent a bike, and take a ride around the Citadel (city wall) before embarking on an art feast tour at one of



ABOVE Lille and Amsterdam

the first and largest museums in France, The Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille. View works ranging from the middle ages to 20th century with sculptures by Raphael, Rembrandt and Rubens.

Although Cupid's day falls in bitter February, don't let it stop you from wrapping up and paying a visit to The Jardin des Plantes de Lille (11 hectares and one of three botanical gardens in Lille). Containing more than 1,500 plants in total, explore the orangery with Mediterranean plants and tropical house, complete with bananas, ginger, coffee and frangipani.

For the treat of a Valentine's lifetime, quaff champers at the Divine Champagne Bar at The Alliance Couvent des Minimes. Set on the waterside Quai du Wault in the

heart of old Lille, this 4-star 17th century convent complete with lit up cloisters, is as romantic as it comes.

Rest easy at the distinguished Hotel Carlton, central to the Opera House, Lille Grand Square and Rihour Square.

## Amsterdam

Amsterdam is certainly a strong contender when it comes to aesthetically pleasing city views on the most romantic weekend of the year. Hold hands and walk over a choice of 1,753 bridges and gaze around 13th century buildings, eye-catching flower baskets and locals passing by in the city of bikes.

Start Cupid's day with a bunch of flowers from The Bloemenmarkt, the only floating flower market in the world. Why not secretly turn where you're staying into a room in bloom?

If diamonds are a girl's best friends then Amsterdam is the place to be for the winning ring and proposal combination. Famed as home to some of the world's best-cut diamonds (Coster Diamonds), take a tour at Gassan for a sparkling shopping trip that will elevate your relationship status forever.

Book a bike tour or horse and carriage trip, and learn about the city while you soak up the ambience of its water ways, cafes and canals, or wander along the Grachtengordel (canal belt) at night time.

For top European nosh and a superb view, try the Ciel Bleu restaurant situated on the 23rd floor of Hotel Okura.

## TOP TIPS

### PARIS

- ♥ Opt for a dinner cruise and drift down the Seine River at sun set
- ♥ Book tickets to see Moulin

Rouge, a firm favourite with theatre lovers around the globe.

- ♥ Get in the mood with a plate of huitres (oysters) at L'Ecaillier du Bistrot, 22 rue Paul Bert, quintessentially Parisian institution.
- ♥ Sample some of the finest cheeses Paris has to offer at Laurent Dubois, the fromagerie that's so good, it holds a Meilleur Ouvrier de France (best craftsman in France) award. 47 Ter Boulevard Saint-Germain, 75005 Paris.

### PRAGUE

- ♥ Don't forget to try a Czech classic - Makový závin (poppy seed roll).

- ♥ Take in the views of the city with a ride on the chair lift to the zoo.
- ♥ Watch the Astronomical clock's turning figurines that have kept accurate time for over six centuries.
- ♥ Head to Wenceslas Square, the entertainment and nightlife centre of the city.

### LILLE

- ♥ Don't leave Lille without a trip to Benjamin, the hat-maker at 45 rue de Béthune. Forget the roses, buy one another a signature hat as a warming loving pressie.
- ♥ Shop for an authentic Valentine's gift at Les Tanneurs, shopping centre extraordinaire.
- ♥ For more sweet tooth madness, pop along to Aux Merveilleux de Fred, 67 rue

de la Monnaie, where the meringue is taken to another level. Try it to find out.

- ♥ Tick off a visit to Le Furet du Nord, one of the largest bookshops in the world.

### AMSTERDAM

- ♥ Take a stroll through Vondelpark, famous in Amsterdam. With open fields it's stunning in winter.
- ♥ While away the lovers afternoon (by the fire place) at The Dylan Amsterdam where afternoon tea takes on a different meaning. Take part in a pairing of love, wine and savory snacks served from 3-6 pm daily.
- ♥ Hit the shops around The Nine Streets fashion district or de Bijenkorf for luxury shops like Hermes and Louis Vuitton.
- ♥ Couplodrom heaven is a pedalo treasure hunt – a fun way to see the city from its pretty waterways.