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**CHEFS' SECRETS**

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Florida Magazine Association  
**BEST OVERALL**  
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2008

**FOR LOVERS ONLY**  
10 GREAT ROMANTIC VACATIONS

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WAYS TO SAY  
**I LOVE YOU**

**ISLAND DIRT**  
SECRETS OF PALM BEACH REVEALED

**LOCO FOR COCOA**  
THE ULTIMATE CHOCOLATE MENU





Equator restaurant at Caneel Bay,  
St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

# for the Love of travel



Most amorous adventures do not require a passport, but sometimes it doesn't hurt to travel to the ends of the Earth with a loved one. So leave your worries behind and reconnect with that special someone at a romantic destination far, far away. Need a few suggestions? Let *Boca Raton* be your guide.

BY AMY LAUGHINGHOUSE



Kruger National Park is home to 147 mammal species, more than any other African game reserve. The largest national park in South Africa covers nearly 4.7 million untamed acres along the eastern border.



## KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA

**The allure:** For starters, how about the Big Five game animals: black rhinos, African buffaloes and elephants, leopards and lions. If that's not enough to get your heart racing, Kruger National Park ([krugerpark.co.za](http://krugerpark.co.za)) also is home to 147 mammal species, more than any other African game reserve. The largest national park in South Africa covers nearly 4.7 million untamed acres along the eastern border. Safaris amid the grassy savannas and twisting acacia trees invite an up-close-and-personal (but not too up close) look at these amazing animals in their natural habitat.

**Where to stay:** You may be in the middle of the African bush, but that doesn't mean you have to rough it. Singita Game Reserves boasts two luxurious Relais & Châteaux properties in the Lebombo Concession, an area within Kruger that is especially renowned for lions. Singita Lebombo Lodge features 15 contemporary air-conditioned suites along the banks of the N'wanetsi River. Amenities include lounge and dining areas, Internet access, gym and spa facilities, and a swimming pool. The Singita Sweni Lodge embraces

a similar aesthetic but comprises just six air-conditioned suites alongside the Sweni River. Rates include meals, drinks (excluding Champagne), guided safaris, laundry, and round-trip transfers between the airstrip and the lodge. From \$1,182 per person ([singita.com](http://singita.com)).

**Getting there:** From Miami, you're looking at approximately 20 hours in the air and another 15–20 hours (or more) between flights. Popular flight routes from Miami include stops in London or Paris, followed by Johannesburg and, finally, Hoedspruit, South Africa.

**General info:** [southafrica.net](http://southafrica.net)

## THE BIG ISLAND, HAWAII

**The allure:** Enjoy Mother Nature at her most primal. Inside Kilauea Iki Crater at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park ([nps.gov/havo](http://nps.gov/havo)), steam vents issue super-heated mist from the lunar-like surface, and deep fissures run like jagged scars across the crater's face. To the north, the switchbacks of Mauna Kea ([ifa.hawaii.edu/info/vis](http://ifa.hawaii.edu/info/vis)), which soars to approximately 14,000 feet, zigzag toward a peak as red and barren as Mars. Even a trip to the beach can be a pulse-pounding adventure as evidenced by the hunks of twisted metal swallowed by the forested slopes along the lush Waipio Valley—proof that only fools should try navigating the steep, slippery hike in a vehicle that isn't a guided van. However, the Big Island rewards explorers with drama

around every bend, from plummeting waterfalls to vast lava fields to thunderous surf beating back black sand beaches.

**Where to stay:** Continue to bask in the back-to-nature vibe at Kona Village Resort, which reclines along 82 oceanfront acres on the northwest Kohala Coast and features 125 thatched-roof bungalows. All meals are included, as are a variety of water sports, twice weekly luaus and a Thursday evening honeymooner's sunset Mai Tai reception. This "unplugged" resort, which relies on ocean breezes and ceiling fans instead of air-conditioning, eschews phones, televisions and radios, encouraging you to focus on the natural paradise—and each other. From \$660 per couple. ([konavillage.com](http://konavillage.com))

**Getting there:** American Airlines offers one-stop flights from Miami (connecting in Los Angeles) to Kona International Airport on the Big Island; total travel time, including layover, is anywhere from 11–15 hours.

**General info:** [bigisland.org](http://bigisland.org), [gohawaii.com](http://gohawaii.com), [hawaii.com](http://hawaii.com)



## ANDAMAN COAST, THAILAND

**The allure:** Buoyed by a combination of otherworldly beauty and natural drama,

Kona Village Resort, Hawaii



the Andaman Coast is rebounding from the 2004 tsunami to reclaim its rightful place as one of Asia's most celebrated destinations. Tourists flock to Ao Phang-Nga National Park (Phang-Nga Bay) to see more than 40 limestone isles (including "James Bond Island," featured in "The Man with the Golden Gun"), which emerge like jagged teeth above the turquoise waters. Further north, the Similan and Surin islands draw scuba divers with colorful coral reefs and whale sharks that glide like silent submarines through the crystalline sea. Thailand's terrestrial attractions are equally spectacular, with white sand beaches, dense jungles, cascading waterfalls, and nature preserves like Khao Lak-Lam Ru National Park, populated by gibbons and monkeys and Asiatic black bears (oh my!). The bustling market at Phuket Town, featuring Chinese temples, also is a sight to behold.

**Where to stay:** The Sarojin, which nests on 10 acres between a lagoon and the Andaman Sea in Khao Lak, is less than an hour from Phuket Airport, the Similan and Surin islands, Phang-Nga Bay and three golf courses. Each of its 56 accommodations has a king-sized bed and a bathtub for two; many also feature a private plunge/relaxation pool. The resort employs "imagineers" to fulfill your requests—from a private cruise on the Sarojin's luxury boat to an elephant trek to a Champagne jungle safari. Couples can indulge in the two-hour Adventure Revival massage at the spa, sunbathe anywhere along the seven miles of beach or recline within a curtained pavilion that appears to float above the infinity edge pool. Rooms start at \$429 per night. (sarojin.com)



Phang-Nga Bay, Thailand

**Getting there:** Flights from South Florida that end at Phuket International Airport typically require at least three connections and anywhere from 30–40 hours of travel time.

**General info:** [dnp.go.th](http://dnp.go.th) (parks), [tourismthailand.org](http://tourismthailand.org), [phukettourism.org](http://phukettourism.org)

## TASMANIA

**The allure:** Some of the quirkiest critters on the planet live in Tasmania, such as the pint-sized pademelon (think of a kangaroo, but smaller and cuter), the wombat (with a face like a sea manatee grafted to the body of a little bear) and the feisty Tasmanian Devil, immortalized in Bugs Bunny cartoons as a toothsome whirling dervish. The land they inhabit—an isolated island south of mainland Australia—is no less remarkable, encompassing craggy peaks, isolated beaches and verdant vineyards. For an overview of Tasmania's curious charms, fly into Launceston and head west toward Cradle Mountain. Along the way, you can meet some of Tassie's improbable beasts at Trowunna Wildlife Park at Mole Creek ([trowunna.com.au](http://trowunna.com.au)) and Devils@Cradle ([devilsatcradle.com](http://devilsatcradle.com)), a sanctuary for the increasingly endangered Tasmanian Devils. Your final destination, Cradle Mountain/Lake St. Clair National Park ([parks.tas.gov.au](http://parks.tas.gov.au)), is a World Heritage site and hiker's paradise. Proclaim your love atop Tasmania's highest peak (Mount Ossa, topping 5,300 feet) or declare the depths of your affection beside its deepest natural freshwater lake (Lake St. Clair, plunging more than 600 feet).

**Where to stay:** Voyages Cradle Mountain Lodge is only about 300 feet from

the national park, and it's a wonderland in its own right, with 20 hiking trails that ramble through rainforests, past waterfalls and alongside dramatic cliffs and valleys. Wildlife is so plentiful that you can hardly step outside your cottage without tripping over a wombat or wallaby. Maximize couple-time with a King Billy suite, equipped with a private hot tub on an outside deck, a fireplace and a double shower. Rooms from \$93 per night. ([cradlemountainlodge.com.au](http://cradlemountainlodge.com.au))

**Getting there:** The closest airports to Cradle Mountain-Lake St. Clair National Park are Devonport, Burnie and Launceston. Check out the flights on Qantas Airways out of Miami. No matter the airport, expect at least 30–40 hours of travel time.

**General info:** [tasmania.com](http://tasmania.com)



## ST. JOHN, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

**The allure:** St. John is a wily Caribbean temptress, luring lovers with lush, undulating hills, creamy crescent shores and warm turquoise waters. More than half of its acreage is preserved as national parklands, meaning couples easily can find themselves on a beach where the only footprints in the sand are their own. Equally inviting are the rich coral beds, teeming with stingrays, sea turtles and brightly colored fish. Back on land, explore the romantic ruins of old sugar plantations—crumbling patchworks of brick and stone slowly succumbing to the unrelenting advance of the jungle. At night, after dinner at a hillside aerie like Asolare, Le Château de Boudeaux or Equator, set atop the sugar mill ruins at Caneel Bay (see below) kick back and enjoy the show in the sky as falling stars streak across the heavens.

**Where to stay:** Guests who want to get away from it all opt for the rustic elegance of Caneel Bay Resort, which has no in-room phones or televisions. This 170-acre seaside retreat, which is nestled within Virgin Islands National Park, encompasses seven beaches, including intimate Honeymoon Beach. The 166 guest rooms feature either a patio or a balcony. Cottage 7, once the home of resort founder Laurance Rockefeller, has attracted celebs and politicians searching for peace and solitude. Those looking for a little rejuvenation will find it at The Self Centre, where guests can receive massage treatments, and practice yoga and meditate atop a quiet bluff. Rooms from \$395 per night. ([caneelbay.com](http://caneelbay.com))

The town of Capri, reigning over the eastern part of the isle, is a warren of winding lanes where gelaterias and fashionable cafés keep company with designer icons like Dolce & Gabbana, Louis Vuitton and Versace.



**Getting there:** American Airlines offers nonstop flights from Miami into St. Thomas (approximately two hours, 30 minutes). From there, take a taxi to either Red Hook or Charlotte Amalie, which both offer ferry service to Cruz Bay, St. John.

**General info:** [usvitourism.vi.usvi.net](http://usvitourism.vi.usvi.net), [st-john.com](http://st-john.com).

### CAPRI, ITALY

**The allure:** With her sheer, rocky cliffs, mysterious marine grottos, postcard panoramas and a clutch of Roman ruins, the isle of Capri is a captivating siren rising above the Bay of Naples, three miles off of Italy's Sorrentine Peninsula. The town of Capri, reigning over the east, is a warren of winding lanes where gelaterias and fashionable cafés keep company with designer icons like Dolce & Gabbana, Louis Vuitton and Versace. A romantic—albeit rugged—walk along the Pizzolungo provides opportunities for canoodling, as well as spectacular views of the Faraglioni, an array of massive rocks just off the coast. The east also boasts the 2,000-year-old Villa Jovis,

once home to emperors, and the Arco Naturale, a huge stone arch framing the bay. At night, seemingly all of Capri turns out to see and be seen (and to enjoy an aperitif) at Piazza Umberto I. Anacapri, the other major town, lies to the west at the foot of Monte Solaro. You could hike to the top, but take the chairlift instead and save your strength for a challenging two-to-three hour scramble along the craggy coastline from Faro to the Grotta Azzurra (also accessible by bus). At the grotto, when the water is calm, you can hire a boat to ferry you into a cave filled with ethereal blue light reflected by the sea.

**Where to stay:** Perched atop a cliff 1,000 feet above the Bay of Naples, the **Hotel Caesar Augustus** in Anacapri features spacious terraces where guests can drink in fiery sunsets and misty vistas of Mount Vesuvius' purple silhouette across the water. This Relais & Châteaux property features 55 rooms and suites, an elegant bar and lounge with a fireplace, a candlelit restaurant alongside a two-tiered infinity pool, and an al fresco fitness area. The resort offers a Royal Honeymoon package (\$3,330 for two

nights), which includes Champagne, flowers and gift upon arrival, in-room breakfast, gourmet dinners, a private tour of the island and round-trip transfer between the hotel and the port of Capri. Otherwise, rooms start at \$577 per night. ([caesar-augustus.com](http://caesar-augustus.com))

**Getting there:** Alitalia, Air France and Delta offer flights from Miami to Naples, Italy that connect in Paris and require about 12 hours of travel time. From Naples, hop on a hydrofoil or ferry to reach Capri.

**General info:** [capritourism.com](http://capritourism.com), [capri.com](http://capri.com).



### PARIS

**The allure:** Do you really need to ask? Paris is synonymous with l'amour. Couples instinctively embrace along the banks of the Seine, share passionate kisses atop the Eiffel Tower and exchange declarations of love along the



Ashford Castle in Western Ireland is exactly the kind of fortress you might have imagined as a child, with looming stone walls and crenellated towers from which Rapunzel could unfurl her golden braids.

Champs-Élysées. Nothing enhances an evening of romance like fine dining, especially when that meal is served at the Hotel Le Bristol's two-Michelin-starred restaurant. Dinners can stretch to 12 courses, including a cheese cart brimming with a dozen selections and chocolate truffles as sweet as your lover's lips ([lebristolparis.com](http://lebristolparis.com)). After touring the city's classic sites, take a sunset cruise of the Seine aboard a private yacht, with Champagne and nibbles catered by Lenôtre ([apoteosurprise.com](http://apoteosurprise.com)). For a personal (and permanent) expression of love, make an appointment at Des Pieds et Des Mains ("The Feet and the Hands"), where artist Brigitte Massoutier will immortalize your body in marble.

**Where to stay:** The famed Four Seasons George V Paris—within shouting distance of the Champs-Élysées, Arc de Triomphe and Eiffel Tower—deserves every accolade it receives. The Honeymoon Suite, with its private terrace overlooking the Eiffel Tower, and the Presidential Suite, with its own fireplace, steam room, sauna, gym, and a draped canopy bed, has made its share of couples weak in the knees. Le Cinq does its part to drop jaws with cuisine worthy of two Michelin stars and a wine cellar that boasts more than 50,000 bottles, including a Romanée-Conti 1983 (approximately \$48,300) for those very special occasions. The three-hour Romance Forever spa treatment, which includes his/her massages and

facials in a VIP room, goes for \$939. Rooms start at \$1,033 per night. ([fourseasons.com/paris](http://fourseasons.com/paris))

**Getting there:** American Airlines offers nonstop flights (about nine hours) from Miami to Paris, but you should be able to score cheaper tickets from West Palm Beach or Fort Lauderdale. The drawback? You'll make at least one stop, and your travel time will be longer.

**General info:** [parisinfo.com](http://parisinfo.com), [franceguide.com](http://franceguide.com)



## WESTERN IRELAND

**The allure:** So, you think you know the Emerald Isle and her gentle, rolling green hills? Well, take a drive up the wave-battered western coast, and you'll see that Ireland can be unpredictable and fiercely passionate. The Cliffs of Moher in County Clare thrust 700 feet out of the frothing Atlantic Ocean and claw at the island's edge for five miles, as if desperate to escape the cold, swirling ocean currents. To the north, a spare 115-square-mile limestone plateau dubbed The Burren stretches on longer than a lovers' quarrel. Break the tension with a visit to a lively pub in Clifden, which roosts upon an escarp-

ment overlooking a bay in Connemara. As in relationships, western Ireland has its peaks and valleys, beautifully evoked by the Kylemore Valley, just north of the Twelve Bens (or Pins). Kylemore Abbey—built as a private castle in the 19th century—now serves as home to Benedictine nuns, with a cafeteria-style restaurant and a shop stocked with pottery, soap and puddings made on-site ([kylemoreabbey.com](http://kylemoreabbey.com)). Nearby, a Victorian garden invites a stroll, and a gray stone chapel with soaring gothic arches proves a romantic setting for a whispered renewal of wedding vows.

**Where to stay:** A commanding presence upon the shores of County Mayo's Lough Corrib, Ashford Castle is exactly the kind of fortress you might have imagined as a child, with looming stone walls and crenellated towers from which Rapunzel could unfurl her golden braids. The former home of the Guinness family (yes, as in the beer) was the site of a lavish bash for Pierce Brosnan and Keely Shaye Smith, who held their wedding reception here in 2001. Now a luxurious 83-room hotel, Ashford Castle governs 350 acres and offers activities like fly-fishing, clay target shooting, golf, and boat tours. Knights in shining armor can buff up their skills with classes in archery, falconry and horseback riding. Meanwhile, damsels who wish to de-stress can book a massage, facial or body polish at the spa, which also provides tanning, manicures



and waxing. About the only service they don't offer is hair extensions, so remember to BYOB (bring your own braids). Check out [ashford.ie](http://ashford.ie) for special Internet deals. Otherwise, rooms start at approximately \$315 per night.

**Getting there:** Delta offers one-stop trips from Miami to Shannon Airport (connecting in New York) that require 14 hours of travel time.

**General info:** [discoverireland.com](http://discoverireland.com)

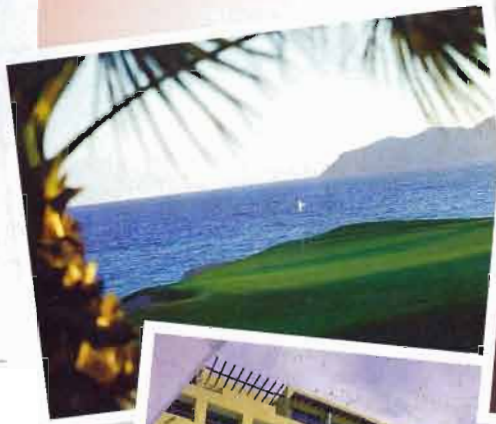
## PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

**The allure:** Those in search of a fairytale romance will feel equally at home strolling Prague's labyrinthine cobblestone lanes. A hilltop castle dominates this beautifully preserved city, which grew up along the Vltava River in the Middle Ages. Within the castle compound, rows of brightly colored cottages, with their diminutive doors and playhouse-like proportions, seem ideally suited to Snow White's dwarves. Horse-drawn carriages that might have transported Cinderella stand at the ready in front of Tyn Church, which, with its vaguely menacing multipronged spires, calls to mind Maleficent's stronghold from *Sleeping Beauty*. After you've toured Prague Castle, explore the river on a pleasure cruise ([prazskebenatky.cz](http://prazskebenatky.cz)). You also can enjoy a view of the Vltava from the Charles Bridge, where artists hawk paintings and sepia-toned photographs of the city. At night, settle in for a performance at the Estates Theater (where Mozart premiered "Don Giovanni" in 1787), the National Theater ([nd.cz](http://nd.cz)) or the Prague State Opera house, where the elaborate architecture is as much a part of the entertainment as the opera itself ([opera.cz](http://opera.cz)).

**Where to stay:** The Aria Hotel salutes Prague's passion for music with 52 rooms and suites devoted to different genres and musicians, from Billie Holiday to Beethoven. Its CODA restaurant, a bijou red bistro outfitted with plush sofas and mirrored walls, has a rooftop terrace overlooking Prague Castle. Among the for-lovers-only offerings is an Enchanted Fairytale Honeymoon package, which includes Champagne, strawberries, roses, an upgrade to a suite, breakfast, massages and a three-course dinner at CODA (from \$2,113 for three nights). Rooms from \$416 per night. ([ariahotel.net](http://ariahotel.net))

**Getting there:** Fly into Praha Ruzyně airport, about 12 miles outside the center of Prague.

**General info:** [czechtourism.com](http://czechtourism.com), [prague-info.cz](http://prague-info.cz)



## LOS CABOS, MEXICO

**The allure:** Given the hard-driving reputation of its party capital, Cabo San Lucas, you might think that the only romance found

in this region along the southern-most tip of Baja California is the kind that occurs after last call. Think again.

Lovers of hand-crafted creations will delight in the quaint galleries that line the art district of downtown San José del Cabo; lovers of adventure will thrill at the chance to race across the world's fastest and longest zip-line course—nine cables suspended between canyon walls, some as high as 400 feet off the ground—at Desertica Multi-Adventure Park; and lovers of golf will find several challenging desert courses, designed by the likes of Jack Nicklaus and Robert Trent Jones, that border the Pacific Ocean and Sea of Cortez. No love,

however, is complete in Los Cabos without the right resort as a home base.

**Where to stay:** The problem with the Marquis Los Cabos has nothing to do with not enjoying your stay. It's about never wanting to leave. That sensation begins to rush over you upon walking through the arches of the dramatic open-air lobby, which overlooks the Sea of Cortez. The resort features 237 suites, all with spectacular views, but true romantics should consider one of the 28 casitas—each with more than 1,600 square feet of space (decorated in contemporary Mexican decor) and private patios within earshot of the pounding surf. Second-floor casitas have rooftop pools. The world-class Spa Marquis, covering 15,000 square feet, works indigenous ingredients (cactus oils, agave) into its soothing facial and body treatments. On the dining front, the intimate and

elegant 20-seat Canto del Mar features course after course of exquisite French fare specially prepared by renowned chef Thierry Dufour. At night, the resort is known to invite a local astronomer to set up his high-powered telescope right on the beach so that guests can enjoy jaw-dropping views of the planets and stars within range. Daytime activities, however, are equally inspiring—including trips aboard the *Novia Mia*, an 80-foot Turkish schooner available to guests of the Marquis Los Cabos (for a separate fee) that sails in and around Cabo San Lucas Bay and stops for snorkeling. ([marquisloscabos.com](http://marquisloscabos.com))

**Getting there:** Several airlines—including Delta, Continental and Aeromexico—offer one-stop flights from Miami to Los Cabos International Airport. Travel time is roughly eight hours.

**General info:** [loscabosguide.com](http://loscabosguide.com) 