



10
OF THE
Best
HOTELS FOR COUPLES
Maximise the romance
in idyllic Indochina
@JoBooth_travel



Indochina is famous for offering service with a smile. Thailand in particular has cemented a place in the honeymoon canon by offering couples sun, sea and excellent service – all hand in hand with some of the most competitive prices in the long-haul market.

The reputation for romance is spreading across the region, as Vietnam emerges from its backpacker cocoon as a fully-fledged destination with sophisticated hotels, with Cambodia following hot on its heels. Even relatively off-the-beaten-track corners such as Burma and Laos have properties tailored to those travelling *à deux*, and don't forget peninsular Malaysia, where Langkawi's beaches in particular attract lovers in droves. There's a wealth of choice, but here are 10 hotels tailored to romance to inspire you.

1 SONG SAA, CAMBODIA
This luxury eco-resort, recommended by Premier Holidays, is built across two neighbouring private islands in Cambodia's Koh Rong archipelago known locally as Song Saa, which is Khmer for The Sweethearts – and there is plenty here to suit loved-up guests. They could go for a private full moon picnic under the stars, be given a Buddhist blessing, take a sunrise yoga class or a sunset cruise on a long-tail boat, or cuddle up in their villa for a private movie screening. The design is inspired by

Cambodian fishing villages – think overwater villas, thatched roofs and driftwood furnishings, albeit very upmarket versions – and the restaurant serves local ingredients in dishes that fuse Western and Khmer cuisine. There is no spa centre – treatment villas are scattered all over the site – and wellness programmes can be tailored to guests, with special activities and menus as well as therapies.

Song Saa is a private island that takes sustainability seriously. The resort's conservation and community programmes have set up the country's first marine reserve and youth education initiative, so clients can feel good about themselves while staying somewhere uncompromisingly luxurious. songsaa.com

2 4 RIVERS FLOATING LODGE, CAMBODIA
Guests here aren't disturbed by the neighbours – the only way to access this floating lodge on Cambodia's Tatai river is a 20-minute boat ride. Despite the fact everything has to be boated in, this is definitely glamping not camping – tents have rattan furniture and flatscreen TVs. All are en suite, with rainshowers and wooden tubs, but after basking in the sun on their private sundeck couples can cool off by climbing down a ladder into the river itself. Many of the activities are water-based, from kayaking and fishing to swimming under the natural jets of the Tatai Waterfall.

Apart from the few other guests, couples will only be bothered by storks, eagles, butterflies and, if they stray further from the lodge, gibbons and deer. ecolodges.asia

3 KNAI BANG CHATT, CAMBODIA
Set on the Gulf of Thailand, Kep was once the beach destination of choice for Cambodia's high society, and Knai Bang Chatt is a throwback to a bygone era that will delight lovers of mid-century architecture. The 18 rooms in this boutique hotel, recommended by Inside Asia, are set across four restored modernist villas, and the look is tastefully retro. However, facilities are modern, with an infinity pool, free Wi-Fi and a sailing club with Hobie Cats, kayaks and a speedboat.

There are two restaurants, or couples can dine under the stars with a private table on the rooftop of one of the villas or at the end of the private jetty. There are many private excursions and activities on offer, from learning to fish with the locals and a Cambodian cookery course to a day on remote Rabbit Island, where a chef will set up a seafood barbecue on the deserted beach. knaibangchatt.com

4 THE DATAI LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA
Known for having some of Malaysia's most idyllic beaches, the Langkawi archipelago is often referred

to as a jewel – and once clients catch sight of its azure waters, lush jungle and pristine beaches they'll see why. Guests at The Datai Langkawi, where rooms and villas are nestled in virgin rainforest or on the powder-white beach in a very secluded bay, will feel a particular sense of leaving the world behind. Complimentary activities include nature walks, cycling and watersports, and couples keen to immerse themselves in local culture can sign up for Malay and Thai cooking classes and batik workshops too. If clients want to tie the knot, the hotel offers both beach and traditional Malay weddings, or honeymooners may want to take up the option of private champagne breakfasts on the beach or lobster dinners under the stars. thedatai.com

5 THE SAROJIN, THAILAND
Set on Thailand's west coast, this Khao Lak hotel is so dedicated to romance it even has its own downloadable romance brochure, detailing everything from the wide choice of wedding venues to the locations of private dining experiences – which can be set up on the beach, by a waterfall and in the wine cellar. There are all sorts of experiences-for-two, ranging from a picnic or private film screening on the beach to cooking or wine-tasting classes, and a sunset champagne and canapés cruise. For hopeless romantics, the hotel will even

→ print a love note on parchment and leave it in a bottle where their partner will find it. Couples who prefer a little more action can sign up for white-water rafting, sea-canoeing, jungle treks and temple visits; others may want to just kick back and make the most of the seven-mile beach. Many of the 56 rooms and suites come with private pools, and all have either private terraces or gardens with shaded pavilions. Even the sun loungers around the infinity pool come in pairs, under white-canopied pavilions. sarojin.com

and dinner can be prepared on their own terrace by the executive chef who has worked in Michelin-starred restaurants. Alternatively, the hotel offers dinner at a table on the rocks themselves, where the couple will be surrounded by flowers and candles and will dine on oysters, lobster, strawberries and chocolate to the sound of the waves. The hotel also offers a Stay and Sail package, with three nights at the hotel followed by three nights cruising the Andaman Islands on the seven-suite, 200ft superyacht *Lamima*. katarocks.com

6 KATA ROCKS, THAILAND
Phuket doesn't have to be all about dancing till dawn at a Full Moon party – at least, not if couples stay at Kata Rocks. Here, they'll be too busy making the most of their villas, which all have seven-metre private infinity pools and panoramic views over the Andaman Sea. Couples' in-villa spa treatments include a traditional Thai water blessing,

7 FUSION MAIA, VIETNAM
This sleek seaside spot in Da Nang, Vietnam, is perfect for those who like pampering – it's an all-pool-villa hotel, and all-inclusive, but when it comes to spa treatments, not food. At least two treatments are guaranteed per guest per day at no extra charge, and the list to choose from is long, with



ABOVE: Topas Ecolodge, Vietnam
LEFT: Fusion Maia, Vietnam
BELOW: Kata Rocks, Thailand



LEFT: The Sarojin, Thailand

“**Couples can visit the 'love market', where locals reprise the old songs sung by those seeking a partner**

massages, scrubs, facials and even a selection of treatments for pregnant women, making this ideal for couples on a baby moon. The hotel's Natural Living programme includes activities too, from yoga and tai chi to a lantern ceremony. Breakfast is served anytime, anywhere in the resort, and then guests can choose to eat in the restaurant or take the hotel shuttle bus into the pretty town of Hoi An to get a dose of local flavour and culture. fusion-resorts.com

8 TOPAS ECOLODGE, VIETNAM
Forget sex on the beach, Insider Journeys recommends that romance can be found at the top of a mountain, as this remote lodge in Vietnam's north near Sapa can prove. All 25 bungalows, built in a rustic style from local white granite, give breathtaking panoramic views that will leave couples feeling on top of the world, but recommend they book one of the 19 executive options, as they come with air conditioning and a minibar. The hotel has no Wi-Fi, so this is one for couples keen to escape the rat race.

The restaurant is made from two traditional stilt houses carefully relocated and reassembled, and the hotel offers private hilltop dinners for couples. Activities focus on hiking, biking and learning about

the culture of local hill tribes, and can be booked on a private basis too. Couples might be interested to head to the Saturday evening 'love market' in Sapa, where locals reprise the old songs that used to be sung when this was the way young men and women found a partner. topasecolodge.com



9 BELMOND LA RESIDENCE PHOU VAO, LAOS
Laos may not be the most obvious choice in Indochina but its reputation for a slow, sleepy pace of life can make it a relaxing retreat – particularly if clients choose Belmond La Residence Phou Vao. Couples can soak in the hotel's cliff-edge

infinity pool overlooking the former royal capital Luang Prabang before heading back to their suites – all parquet flooring, teak and silk. Local dishes have a French influence, and the hotel's restaurant is famed as one of the best in town. For a special occasion, they can book the 500-candle dinner, where they'll dine served by their own waiter at a private, candlelit table in the heritage gardens to the sound of live traditional music, before ending the evening by releasing floating lanterns and watching them sail off into the night sky.

The hotel can organise plenty of low-key activities to suit couples, from cooking classes to sunset cruises. Couples can even have a traditional Baci blessing ceremony from a village shaman, and the hotel will prepare picnics for those who'd rather explore under their own steam. belmond.com

10 SANCTUARY ANANDA, BURMA
River cruising isn't synonymous with romance, but a sail on the Burmese waterways on the all-suite *Sanctuary Ananda* could change all that. All suites have balconies, and the ship has both the largest entry-level cabins on the river and the largest suite itself – the Owner's Suite, which has its own veranda with sun loungers, butler service and private excursions included – so couples will have private space to spare. With itineraries on both the Ayeyarwady and the Chindwin, guests get to see iconic sights and lesser-known treasures, with a full programme of activities included. There's also an open-air pool on the sun deck for lazier days, plus a small onboard spa offering a range of treatments. sanctuaryretreats.com