

Winter, lovin'

Laura French rounds up the best winter-sun spots for couples seeking a romantic getaway

@laurafrench121

Think winter and you might think Santa, stockings and (sometimes) snow. But sunny days and warm, blue seas? Not so much – unless you're one of the lucky ones jetting off for some vitamin D, that is.

There's a growing number of couples doing exactly that.

Whether it's a honeymoon

in the Indian Ocean or a quick getaway to the Caribbean, an adventure in Africa or an island escape in Asia, there's plenty of choice for loved-up pairs wanting to pack in the chills for some sun-drenched beaches and sandy shores. We've compiled a few of the best to get you started.

▶ GOA

Golden-sand beaches, striking Portuguese architecture and exceptional cuisine, all whizzed up with a dose of spiritual energy – Goa is something of a dream for bohemian, culture-loving couples, and there's a string of luxury resorts on hand to cater to those after a higher-end experience.

The north might be best known thanks to its reams of yoga retreats, hippy markets and bustling bars, but for couples after a quieter escape, suggest the southern reaches. Spice farms, tumbling waterfalls and boat trips along the Zuari River – home to kingfishers, fish eagles, crocodiles and more – are among the natural charms here.

Olympic Holidays offers tours for those wanting to explore them all, alongside one-off experiences such as a night in a royal Rajasthani tent on the beach, a visit to a floating palace on a traditional Keralan rice boat, and a three-day tiger safari through the vast, rugged [→](#)

→ wilderness that makes up this diverse region.

Book it: Olympic Holidays offers seven nights' half-board in a Double Chalet at the five-star Bogmallo Beach Resort, South Goa from £919 per person, including flights from Gatwick and based on a November departure. olympicholidays.com

▶ THAILAND

The landscapes, the beaches, the food – Thailand ticks just about every box, and whether you've got couples looking to hike their way through a national park, volunteer at an elephant sanctuary or kick back and relax on a secluded, palm-fringed island, there's something here to suit.

The country isn't short on beaches but for some of the best look to Krabi, where limestone formations soar above snow-white sands, mangrove forests lace the landscapes and idyllic islands scatter the Andaman shoreline.

Accommodation ranges from the rustic to the mega-luxe. For somewhere in between, Gold Medal recommends the new, sleek Centra by Centara Phu Pano Resort, which is a short drive from resort town Ao Nang and set in idyllic tropical surroundings – all bright-green palms flanking imposing, craggy cliffs.

Book it: A week in a Centra Superior King costs from £869 with Travel 2, including return transfers and Qatar Airways flights from Heathrow, based on travel in February 2019. goldmedal.co.uk



White-sand shores, cerulean seas and fiery sunsets; when it comes to romance, the Maldives mean serious business

▶ THE MALDIVES

White-sand shores, cerulean seas and fiery sunsets burning pink-orange above the horizon; when it comes to romance, the Maldives mean serious business.

You're not hard-pressed to find romantic spots here, with everything from castaway picnics to candlelit beach dinners on hand, but for the ultimate in romance, Deborah Matthews, reservations manager for Carrier, recommends Milaidhoo Island. "It only allows children over nine years, so it's great for couples," she says.

Each private villa comes with its own infinity pool and terrace, meaning guests feel totally secluded, and there are three restaurants – including one serving Maldivian food on an atmospheric dhoni boat – alongside a sand-floor bar, diving centre, over-water spa and yoga pavilion, meaning plenty to please clients of every taste.

Book it: Carrier offers a week's half-board in a Water Pool View Villa at



PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK

ABOVE: Milaidhoo from £6,190 per person, based on two adults sharing. The price includes Emirates flights from Gatwick and seaplane transfers, and is valid from January 11 to April 30, 2019. carrier.co.uk

BELOW: Centra by Centara Phu Pano Resort, Thailand

ABOVE: Milaidhoo from £6,190 per person, based on two adults sharing. The price includes Emirates flights from Gatwick and seaplane transfers, and is valid from January 11 to April 30, 2019. carrier.co.uk

▶ SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is going from strength to strength, ranking second only to the Maldives on Kuoni's list of the most popular winter-sun destinations for couples this year. And with its mix of wildlife, beaches, culture and crystal-clear ocean, it's not hard to see why.

You could easily spend a week at an ultra-luxury resort on the south coast – Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle, Shangri-La's Hambantota Resort & Spa and Amanwella to name a few – without budging an inch, but there's plenty more to see, so suggest couples combine a beach stay with a week's tour of the island to get the most out of it. Must-sees include the Sigiriya rock fortress, Dambulla cave temple, Temple of the Tooth and Udawalawe National Park, where safaris take visitors to glimpse the wild elephants, leopards and other creatures that roam its vast plains.

Book it: Travel Gallery offers a 14-night trip to Sri Lanka including three nights at Hotel Sigiriya, three nights at the Rosyth Estate tea plantation and a week's half-board in a superior room at the four-star Avani hotel in Bentota from £2,120 per person. The price includes a 4x4 safari through Minneriya National Park and visits to key sights, and is based on travel in November or early December. travel-gallery.co.uk



▶ **ANTIGUA**

Offering up a beach for every day of the year, Antigua is a no-brainer for couples looking to tune out in peaceful, secluded surroundings. And from sailing specialist Galley Bay Resort & Spa to honeymoon favourite Hermitage Bay – via Blue Waters Antigua, Jumby Bay Island and a myriad of other couple-friendly retreats – the island is well set up for those looking to get loved up.

Those wanting some added extras should look to Sandals Grande Antigua. Named the Caribbean’s most romantic resort in the World Travel Awards several years in a row, it boasts standout rooms including Butler Villas, plus couples’ treatments at the Red Lane Spa and various optional excursions for those wanting to explore, from kayaking round the island to a romantic seafood lunch cruise. **Book it:** Seven nights’ all-inclusive in a Caribbean Deluxe Room at Sandals Grande Antigua costs from £1,789 per person, including flights from Gatwick and resort transfers, based on travel up to October 12. sellingsandals.co.uk

▶ **THE GAMBIA**

Wildlife safaris, river cruises, culture-rich villages and idyllic beaches are among The Gambia’s draws, and with a flight time of less than six hours from the UK, plus zero change in time zone, it’s easily accessible and doable in a

short space of time.

For a good-value stay, Karen Durham, product manager for The Gambia Experience, recommends Lemon Creek, set right by the beach in a peaceful location with a tranquil setting. Or for those looking to shell out a little more, suggest Ngala Lodge, an adult-only, luxury boutique perched on the cliffside. “It’s renowned for its excellent cuisine and high-level service, and offers the perfect base for a romantic holiday away from it all, with a stunning setting,” she says.

Book it: Seven nights’ B&B at Ngala Lodge starts at £984 per person including flights and transfers, departing November 24. gambia.co.uk

▶ **BERMUDA**

For couples after a familiar island with a British feel, but with an added dose of exotica, Prestige Holidays recommends Bermuda. Standout resorts include Grotto Bay – whose USP is a candlelit spa tucked away in an ancient cave – and the adult-only Cambridge Beaches Resort & Spa, which boasts four private beaches and secluded coves, all set on its own peninsula surrounded by the glistening blue sea.

Golf, sailing and other water sports are available in abundance on the island, making it a good option for those after an active break, while pastel-coloured architecture, idyllic nature walks and breathtaking views give it

RIGHT: Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle, Sri Lanka

BELOW: Cambridge Beaches Resort & Spa, Bermuda



Offering up a beach for every day of the year, Antigua is a no-brainer for couples looking to tune out

oomph for those wanting to stroll hand-in-hand in picturesque surroundings.

Book it: A week’s B&B at Cambridge Beaches Resort & Spa costs from £1,799 per person with Prestige Holidays. The price is based on a December 4 departure and includes British Airways flights from Gatwick and private transfers.

prestigeholidays.co.uk **tw**

✓ **Best of the rest**

Cape Verde: Direct couples in search of adventure to this archipelago off the Atlantic coast of Africa. Here you’ll find mountain hikes, world-renowned windsurfing and blinding white beaches, plus Portuguese influences and an average temperature of 24°C in January.

Dubai: For couples after no-holds-barred luxury and guaranteed winter sun, Dubai takes the crown. Travel 2 recommends couples head to One&Only Royal Mirage for its star-strewn rooftop terrace, atmospheric courtyard and opulent high teas.

Tabiti: Suggest French Polynesia to clients with more time. Snorkelling, diving and sailing in turquoise waters are all on the agenda here, and from October 30, United Airlines is introducing flights to capital Papeete from San Francisco – an alternative stopover to Los Angeles.



Hotel Morabeza, Cape Verde



PICTURE: CHRIS BURVILLE/LOOKBERMUDA 2011

PICTURE: CAPE VERDE EXPERIENCE