



Nail the perfect proposal with our guide to the best places to get down on one knee, writes Katie McGonagle

@katie_mcgonagle

If there was no little blue box on Valentine's Day last week, fear not – Christmas Eve has overtaken the February festival as the most popular day to get engaged, so there's still time.

But did you know more than a third of couples decide to tie the knot on holiday, according to a survey of more than 2,000 readers of *You & Your Wedding*? So what better way to make sure you win that wedding booking or get a head start on crafting the honeymoon, than by showing your skill in making sure the proposal goes to plan?

Discretion is key here – there's no point putting the perfect proposal in place if you let the cat out of the bag with a confirmation email or follow-up call. But why not draw your customers'

attention to the fact you can book romantic extras, and see where it might lead?

We've worked out some of the best places to propose, so you can concentrate on getting the details right.

▶ ON THE BEACH

Writing the words 'will you marry me' in the soft Caribbean sand is about the surest way to get the answer you're after, so a romantic beach proposal will be many people's idea of the ultimate engagement.

That's why it's the central part of the 'pop the question' package at Secrets Maroma Beach Riviera Cancun, free to guests booked into a Preferred Club Junior Suite Ocean View or higher room category (\$299 otherwise).

Staff will scatter rose petals and candles in a path to the beach, where the couple will find those magic words written in the sand, with a bouquet of roses and bottle of sparkling wine to toast the occasion, and an engagement photoshoot to bring back happy memories.

Book it: A week in a Double Junior Suite Ocean View starts at £2,140 with Funway Holidays, including flights from Gatwick with Tui Airways, departing November 15.

funway4agents.co.uk

Or try: Overwater villas are often reserved for the honeymoon, but those sea views and seclusion work as well for wooing. Book a bure (wood and straw hut) at secluded Likuliku Lagoon Resort in Fiji and there'll be plenty of ➔

→ quiet spots on the beach to get down on one knee. Carrier offers five nights' full-board in an overwater bure with flights from Heathrow via Hong Kong, and road and boat transfers, from £5,100, departing November 6. carrier.co.uk

IN THE AIR

Book an experience so special in a spot so iconic they just can't say no, and you'll earn your clients' lifelong loyalty – and give them a cracking tale to tell their friends and family.

A hot-air balloon flight over the spectacular salt pans of Sossusvlei certainly fits the bill – faced by the broad, sweeping sand dunes of the Namibian desert, how could anyone not respond with a resounding yes?

The flight is an optional extra on Cox & Kings' Namibia self-drive. After warming up with Windhoek and a drive to the Namib Desert, the couple will be perfectly poised for a proposal. Then they've got the rest of the trip – via seaside Swakopmund, elephant spotting in Damaraland and a wildlife drive through Etosha National Park – to celebrate before sharing the news back home.

Book it: Cox & Kings' Namibia: Untouched Wilderness private tour starts at £2,595, including flights, accommodation in luxury camps and lodges, and some meals. The early-morning balloon safari is £435. coxandkings.co.uk

Or try: Soaring over the scattered islands and narrow channels that



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lie between Vancouver Island and mainland Canada – all rugged scenery and water sparkling in the sunshine, with the chance of a humpback or orca whale sighting – should have them feeling inspired. Pop the question up in the air, or extend the high by asking as soon as they touch back down to earth. The helicopter flight costs £228 plus tax, booked through wilderness retreat Painter's Lodge. Travel 2 offers two nights at the lodge, bookended with three nights in Vancouver and two at the five-star Victoria Fairmont Empress, from £1,399 in May, including flights, car hire and ferry crossings. travel2.com

IN YOUR PRIVATE SUITE

The hardest thing about proposing on holiday is the surprise. If you're hanging out by the pool all day with your other half, how can you sneak away to set the scene? The answer – get your butler to do it for you.

Upgrade to a butler-service suite at Sandals and they can make sure everything is set up to your satisfaction



ABOVE: Butler service at Sandals

BELOW: Hot-air ballooning, Sossusvlei, Namibia

without the other half being any the wiser. Engagement concierge Lina Daukantaite says: "Our team of professionally trained butlers can help deliver the perfect surprise proposal. Discreetly hiding the ring in a dessert or glass of champagne, and decorating the room with rose petals before guests come back from a day on the beach, is all part of the job description." **Book it:** Seven nights at Sandals Royal Barbados in a Royal Seaside Crystal Lagoon One Bedroom Oceanview Butler Suite starts at £2,915, including a balcony with tranquillity tub, butler service, 24-hour room service, →



PICTURE: MACDUFF EVERTON



Proving you know your partner better than anyone is the ultimate romantic gesture

LEFT: Jade Mountain, Saint Lucia

BELOW: Northern lights

all-inclusive accommodation, flights from Gatwick and transfers, departing September 5. **sellingsandals.co.uk**

Or try: Spend the day climbing the magnificent Pitons of Saint Lucia, then come back to find a six-course gourmet dinner with wine pairing laid out in your suite and a view over those lofty peaks, no less. If that sounds like the perfect end to a perfect day, book a stay at Jade Mountain. Rates start at £780 a night, with the Six in your Sanctuary private dining

experience \$300 per person.

ON AN ADVENTURE

Proving you know your partner better than anyone is the ultimate romantic gesture, so if they prefer boots to beaches, book an adventure holiday to pop the question in the place they feel most at home.

That might be the jungles of northern Thailand, where couples can spend a day cycling and kayaking around Sri Lanna National Park, enjoy lunch at

a floating bamboo raft house, then head back to their boutique hotel. All they have to decide is where to pause for the big reveal. Follow with a few nights on the islands to celebrate and you've got the makings of the ideal proposal package.

Book it: Premier Holidays offers a Chiang Mai and Koh Yao Yai twin-centre from £1,697, with three nights at Tamarind Village in Chiang Mai, a Pedal and Paddle Adventure, and seven nights at Santhiya Koh Yao Yai Resort &

Spa, with Heathrow flights and private transfers.

trade.premierholidays.co.uk

Or try: With wild volcanic landscapes underfoot and the northern lights dancing overhead, it's hard to beat the magic of popping the question in Iceland. Skip the Reykjavik crowds and head north to Akureyri, to where Super Break offers flights from 13 regional airports for its three and four-night Incredible Iceland breaks. Add a private northern lights excursion, a Lake Myvatn Adventure, transfers and a stay in a studio with private hot tub, from £995 departing December 28.

superbreak.com/agents

IN THEIR FAVOURITE CITY

It's easy to overlook the magic of a short-haul city break, but whisking a would-be fiancée off to their favourite city – perhaps the first place they holidayed together, or a spot with special meaning – is a classic for a reason.

It's also a great opportunity for you to upsell by offering to book the romantic extras that transform it into a proposal-worthy break. Osprey Holidays recommends a private gondola ride in Venice. Product manager Nathalie Cornish says: "We offer agents 10% commission on all tours, excursions and visits. Queue skips and pre-booked tickets can really show their value, especially when clients arrive at a busy tourist hotspot." **Book it:** Three nights at Venice's four-star Rialto Hotel, flights from Gatwick and a private gondola ride starts at £599 departing June 4.

ospreyholidays.com

Or try: Hop up to the lofty summit of Montjuic in Barcelona for a brilliant vantage point of the Spanish city, and a romantic spot to get down on one knee with the bright lights unfolding below. Jet2holidays offers three nights' room-only in the four-star Pestana Arena Barcelona from £299, departing from Manchester on April 23. For an extra £80, clients can upgrade to a junior suite.

jet2holidays.com

