

# destination romance

*Planning a special  
trip for two?*

**Suzanne King**  
*suggests solutions  
for three couples'  
holiday dilemmas*

**Q** For the first time since our children (now 3 and 5) were born, we're taking a break without them. We've both been before, but what can you suggest for a grown-ups-only trip to New York this spring?

**A** You've probably ticked off all the obvious must-dos, so give the wall-to-Wall Street sightseeing a rest and make this a more leisurely visit. Focus on one neighbourhood and play at being native New Yorkers for a couple of days: mingle with the wealthy on the Upper West Side; explore the cobbled streets and buzzing restaurant/bar scene of the Meatpacking District; or check out the edgier but upcoming Lower East Side.

Spring is the perfect time for city strolling. Discover the High Line, a disused overhead train line in the West Village that's been transformed into a green space. Or take a walk over the Brooklyn Bridge for some fantastic views of Manhattan.

With just the two of you, now's the time to enjoy the things that might cost too much when paying for four – like a helicopter tour, which costs from around £91pp for a 10-12 minute swoop over the city. You can also make the most of New York's glamorous eating and drinking options rather than being restricted to family-friendly diners. Head for authentic Italian cuisine and celebrity-spotting at Lattanzi, in the Broadway district, order in Long Island oysters at the Grand Central Oyster Bar,



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and sip sky-high cocktails in one of the city's rooftop bars. If the budget allows, don your finest and head for a high-end eatery such as Daniel Boulud's Daniel or Thomas Keller's Per Se – book ahead to guarantee a table.

**Q** My girlfriend's always wanted to visit Barcelona, so I'm taking her for her birthday – and I was planning to propose while we're there. Any ideas for good places to pop the question? I'd also like to book a hotel (for around £150-£200 per night) and somewhere to go for – hopefully – a celebration meal?

**A** When it comes to romantic spots, your best bet is to head for the heights. Both Montjuïc and Tibidabo, behind Barcelona, have knock-out views of the city and sea, and if you were to head up there at sunset to do the bended-knee thing, it would be a hard-hearted girlfriend who could say no!

Handily, each peak is also home to an excellent hotel. On Tibidabo, Gran Hotel La Florida has opulent décor and a fabulous infinity pool, but may stretch your budget slightly. More affordable (and within easier reach of the centre) is Hotel Miramar on Montjuïc, where sleekly stylish rooms come with indulgent bathrooms. Or if you'd rather be down in the heart of the city, check out Le Méridien, with a central-as-they-come location on La Rambla.

Barcelona's foodie scene is booming, so there's no shortage of venues for a special meal, particularly if you fancy sampling some top-end Catalan cuisine. In the Eixample district, Gaig, Cinc Sentits or Alkimia all win rave reviews, as does Casa Calvet, which is housed in a Gaudí-designed building, so you can admire the Modernist interiors while you dine.

Make time for a beachfront stroll and a long, lazy lunch at one of its restaurants. Pick up some classy chocs to take home – Cacao Sampaka (Calle del Consejo de Ciento 292) has an inventive range of flavours. And squeeze your way into Boadas (Tallers 1), a tiny retro bar, where bow-tied barmen pour cocktails with a flourish.

**Q** Our 10th anniversary is coming up and we plan to spend it in Paris. Usually we do the rounds of galleries and museums, but this time we'd like to just relax and enjoy the romance of the city. Any ideas?

**A** This time, discover the joys of the Parisian outdoors – some of the most romantic spots are in the city's parks, gardens and along the waterways. One of the loveliest corners is Parc des Buttes-Chaumont: set high on a hill in the 19th arrondissement, with winding paths, cliffs and waterfalls, it's the perfect spot for a leisurely picnic. Wander along the pretty Canal St-Martin, or enjoy it the lazier way, on a boat trip. You could even take to two wheels: traffic is banned from several riverside streets on Sundays, allowing for a gentle cycle along the Seine without any impatient car horns.

For old-fashioned afternoon tea, visit Mariage Frères (35 rue du Bourg-Tibourg), stopping off for delicious macaroons in the Belle-Époque splendour of Ladurée on the Champs-Élysées. For the most exquisite patisserie in Paris, head for Pierre Hermé at 72 rue Bonaparte, picking up picnic ingredients at the foodie stalls on place Monge and nearby rue Mouffetard. And to experience *the* most amazing views, take the high-speed lift to the top of the Montparnasse Tower, where the 56th-floor observatory offers a 360-degree lookout.

The Saint Germain des Prés district on the Left Bank makes a great base for a romantic break – appealing little streets to explore, hidden restaurants to discover, and a wealth of charming boutique hotels. Try Hôtel le Bellechasse for over-the-top glamour, La Villa St-Germain-Des-Prés for contemporary style, or the Hôtel de la Bourdonnais for 19th-century elegance.

### Special breaks for two

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