

Nifty ways to please your lover



Fancy jetting off on a whirlwind romantic break? Pól Ó Conghaile picks last-minute deals and special offers that could make the ideal V-Day gift

On the Camino Romántico ... in Spain

Most pilgrims hit the Camino to find themselves. Walking and cycling holiday specialist Camino Ways, however, has a four-night break that could just help couples find each other. Accommodation is in romantic old farmhouses.

The trip begins with collection at Santiago airport, and a chauffeur-driven transfer to your first "Casa Romántica" for a champagne reception and candlelight dinner.

Walking will be interspersed throughout the holiday and, after the third day, you'll arrive into Santiago de Compostela. There, you'll check into a boutique hotel in a former monastery, where creature comforts include a Jacuzzi with views of Monte Pedroso. There's a full body massage too — helpful for zapping any aches and pains picked up along the route.

The half-board package, departing Feb 14, costs €599, excluding flights.

Details: 01-5252886; caminoways.com.

A perfect weekend ... in Paris

When it comes to romantic city breaks, Paris wrote the book. Left Bank cafes, world-class art galleries and elegant architecture all combine to say 'l'amour'.

It's impossible to see the whole city in a short visit, of course. To make your trip

sizzle, the savvy plan is to pick one or two big attractions — the Musée d'Orsay, for example (get there early to beat the queues), or the Eiffel Tower — and then follow your nose to explore whatever shops, cafes and galleries take your fancy.

Going to press, Gohop.ie had several specials, including four nights in a three-star hotel departing Feb 12 (from €325pp) or four nights in a three-star hotel departing Feb 13 (from €360pp). Seven nights departing Feb 17 cost from €356pp.

Meanwhile, lastminute.com has flights plus two nights at the four-star Best Western Hotel Mercedes (Feb 15-17) from €310pp.

Details: gohop.ie; lastminute.com

Celebrate a big birthday ... in Amsterdam

Amsterdam celebrates a sluce of significant birthdays this year, including its canal ring (400 years old), the Van Gogh Museum (40 years old) and the Frans Hals Museum (100).

But it's not just anniversaries enticing people to take a second look at this super Dutch city. Amsterdam has rebooted itself in recent years, steering away from the stereotypes of hazy coffee shops, and taking steps to gentrify its famous red-light district.

Go shopping in the Nine Street neighbourhood. Check out the shape-shifting waterfront, or an evolving food scene that's less-heralded, but no less exciting, than that of

Scandinavian cities to the north. The Rijksmuseum re-opens in 2013 after a 10 year refurbishment, too — the highlight of a city with more museums per square foot than any other.

Amsterdam "is ready to claim its second Golden Age", as Condé Nast Traveller puts it.

Clickandgo.com has flights plus three nights at the four-star NH Carlton Hotel, beside the flower market, from €349pp. Based on a Tuesday, Feb 12 departure.

Details: clickandgo.com; iamsterdam.com.

Board the Love Boat ... from Barcelona

Barcelona is one of the best city breaks around. Ancient markets mixing with cutting-edge Catalan cuisine, Gothic cathedrals with Gaudi's masterpieces ... at €299, a three-night holiday with clickandgo.com looks very tempting (departs Feb 12).

Barcelona is also a major cruise port, so why not take your V-Day getaway up a level and combine an overnight with a cruise? Tour America has one night in Barcelona, followed by a nine-night sojourn on Norwegian Spirit, including flights, from €699pp.

The cruise departs Feb 12, and includes Funchal (Madeira), Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Arrecife and Malaga as ports of call ... the perfect excuse to board a love boat. **Details:** clickandgo.com; touramerica.ie.

V-Day ... in the USA

Fancy taking your sweetheart to Sin City? A couple of nights in Vegas doesn't have to be *The Hangover III*, you know... there are lots of quality shows, restaurants, spas and shopping to go with the casinos these days. Or maybe *The Hangover III* is right up your street?

Either way, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas. Sunway has flights with three nights at the four-star Tropicana Hotel from €665pp, departing Valentine's Day. Or you could go the whole hog and book the five-star signature suites at the MGM Grand from €759pp.

Another US option, with shorter flights but all the fun, is the Big Apple. Departing Valentine's Day, Sunway has flights with three nights at the three-star Broadway Plaza Hotel from €579pp. The same nights at the four-star Millennium Hilton will cost you €609pp.

Details: sunway.ie; nycgo.com; lasvegas.com.

Pamper yourselves ... in Portugal

Temperatures can hover in the high teens throughout winter in Portugal's Algarve — reason enough to travel even if you aren't planning to prove your undying love.

If you are, check out the Martinhal Beach Resort & Hotel in Sagres. Spend the night of Feb 14 there, and you can enjoy a special offer of B&B, dinner, a couple's massage and a welcome drink all in for €300. The resort is within a short drive of 12 beaches.

Further north in Lisbon, you won't find the mercury rising quite as high. But with nights out in the Bairro Alto, a visit to the awesome aquarium at Parque das Nações and lots of

pastries to scoff and art nouveau cafes to call at in-between, who'd miss the sunscreen?

Going to press, ebookers.ie had flights and three nights from €414pp.
Details: martinhal.com; ebookers.ie.

China in your hands ... in Derry

China burns brighter on the travel radar with every year that passes.

So how better to celebrate Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day, than a top-end taster trip from Travel Department? An 11-night tour departing Dublin on Jun 7th takes in Beijing, Xi'an and Shanghai in — and all the big hits in between — from €2,199pp.

Not everyone can afford to fly to China, of course. But you don't have to. Derry, one of Lonely Planet's Top 10 cities to visit in 2013, is staging a Chinese Culture Week (Feb 9-16) as part of its UK City of Culture 2013 events, and to celebrate the Year of the Snake.

Flicking through the accommodation options, Blue Book member Ardtara House promises "award-winning romance". Find out what exactly that means, with a package including B&B, a four course dinner, and a fireplace in your room for £170/€198.

Details:
thetraveldepartment.ie;
cityofculture2013.com;
ardtara.com.

Dream big ... via Dubai

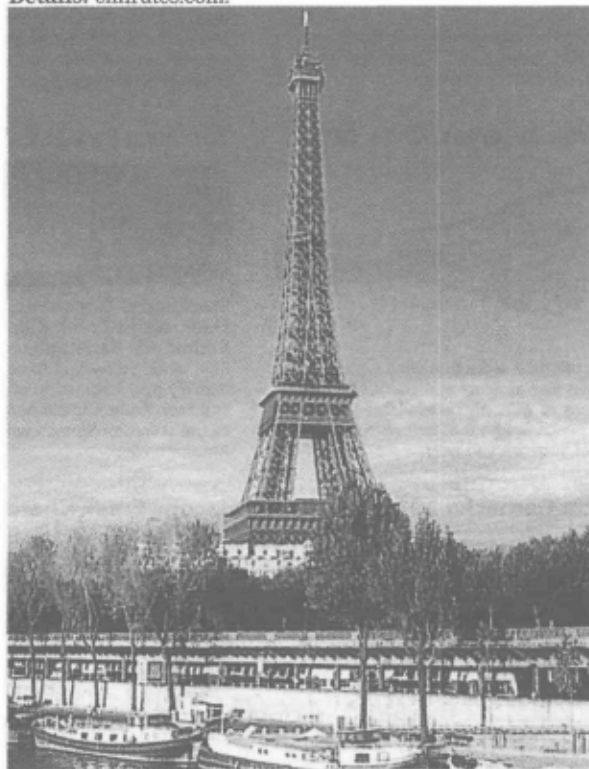
The frequency of flights between Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Dublin has been one of travel's surprise success stories in recent years. Who would have thought, after all, that Emirates and Etihad would run competing routes as the country plunged into recession?

We'll they've done just that, and between them turned the Gulf into one of the main connecting hubs for Irish holidaymakers (and emigrants) travelling long-haul.

Emirates currently has a special fares promotion, with economy fares starting from €521 return between Dublin and Dubai. The real savings are to be made in the onward connections, however — one

rate that particularly catches the eye is Dublin to the Seychelles, at a promotional fare of €666. Another is the E=economy class to Beijing at €568.

Promotional flights need to be booked before Feb 15.
Details: emirates.com.



Paris wrote the book when it comes to romantic city breaks; right, finish off the Camino Way at Santiago de Compostela; opposite, Amsterdam "is ready to claim its second Golden Age".

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