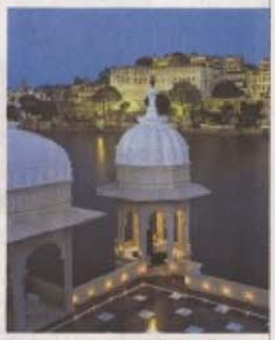

'As delightful as the act of love itself is room service'

I have long believed the best and most cost-effective form of relationship maintenance has nothing to do with the therapist's waiting room. No, it involves a very different form of close scrutiny in an enclosed space. I am talking, of course, about the exquisitely remedial benefits of a couple of nights away in a delightful hotel that – by virtue of its location, furnishings, fresh sheets and solicitous staff – sprinkles stardust on your spirits and libido. The sort of establishment that appears to have been created by Venus and the design team at Coco de Mer (London's finest erotic emporium) expressly as a sanctuary for the careworn lover. The place need not be luxurious or expensive to perform its voodoo, but it must have charm: that elusive quality that seduces the would-be guest without any crossed effort to do so. It should lull you into the sexiest version of yourself with the promise of one treat after another and the best post-coital breakfast in the entire known universe.

We will all have our own cherished examples of the ideal epicurean retreat and they'll differ wildly. I am not, for example, a huge fan of spa hotels, which tend to talk of "pampering" as if it were a form of foreplay and insist on whisking your partner away for a meal wrap at inconvenient moments. But I suspect everyone will agree on certain factors that enhance the chance of romance.

The first is simple: a room that's truly your own. If you have children or pets in a domestic space is truly private. But the main problem with your own bedroom is that you become a slave to its upkeep: you retreat to the bedroom only to tumble across laundry, bills or

pillows or scrubbed the surfaces in the en suite, or left rose-scented bath oil. By contrast, hotel rooms are smooth-ready and have attributes to put you in the mood. If you've chosen well, there's a bath big enough for two and views that makes you swoon. Perhaps even a Romeo and Juliet balcony. Such spaces slice away distractions and leave you with one clear option: mutual indulgence. And, just as importantly, the space to talk and rediscover the other. A good conversation is a better sex aid than the Rampant Rabbit.

The interiors that lurk outside the bedroom door are also an essential part of seduction. There's no finer place than a hotel bar to dig out your inner coquette or rake. The best ones are little theatres, with the barman as stage prompt and fellow drinkers as audience. The easiest erotic role-play known to knee-kind is to pretend you and your partner are strangers meeting for the first time as you happen to perch on adjacent bar stools. Your then-solo beds compelled to order exotic cocktails, invent a lurid back-story and

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fag room (if you venture there) in the National Theatre's Olivier auditorium to the bar's intimate Dorfman: a place for re-connecting couples to try their weekend personas out on the big stage and each other. When cares are stripped away and the chore of cooking removed, you can slip back to the banter of early courting days. If your hotel's top notch then there will be a third act: the maître d' will take you to a low-lit sitting room for some jewel-bright anguini that whispers "kiss me".

But maybe you'll bypass downstairs altogether: because what sums up casual decadence better than room service? If there's one thing as delightful as the act of love itself, it's lifting a phone and ordering up... well, whatever the hotel's larder is famous for, with champagne, oysters, fresh tomato, or a mechanical nightingale with ruby eyes once owned by an Ottoman sultan if ones asked for the latter, just to test them). This is as much the opposite of life as it's usually experienced – safeguarded by bosses, PTA evenings or offspring – that it makes you feel teary by dint of narcotic-toned power: I want a steak sandwich, I get a steak sandwich! Everyone can be a dom in an excellent hotel.

If you want to submit, however, then you need a fabulous divan to be supine upon. The best is at the very heart of a hotel's claim to sex and shot romance. It should be generous in size for proper romping, with the kind of five-star mattress that cradles lovers without squeaking. And, ideally, this couch should be clad in the sort of fine, white Egyptian cotton that's begging for a spot of vigorous dishevelment. Throw in a mound of soft pillows and a choral mirror for saucy angles and only the flint-hearted would remain unbuttoned.

Rowan Pelling is editor of *The Amorist* and a columnist

1 ROYAL MANSOUR, MARRAKECH, MOROCCO

One of the most discreet hotels in the world, with a tangled warren of underground tunnels so that staff can criss-cross the grounds, tending to guests' whims without being heard or seen. Few guests feel compelled to leave their rooms, which are in fact mini-riads, with their own inner courtyards and rooftops boasting a plunge pool, fireplace and Bedouin tent. Though those that do venture out can reserve one of the hotel's buggys – custom-built in champagne gold. Its triple-Michelin-starred Yannick Alléno restaurant, waiters serve Moroccan-spiced lobster and truffled lamb.

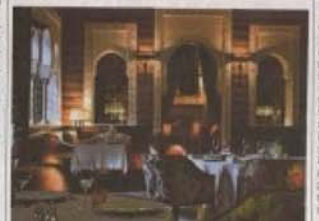
☐ **Rooms from £836;**
telegraph.co.uk/it-royalmansour

2 EROSANTORINI, SANTORINI, GREECE

The blazing white suites are the epitome of cool indulgence: "floating" fireplaces are suspended from the ceilings and angular retro lamps jut out of the walls. Bed heads are tiled with mirrors, and outdo or hot tubs look out to the parakeet-green sea. Thankfully, with only five villas, competition isn't overly fierce for the pool cave, where couples can canoodle over a cocktail away from prying eyes. A V-shaped infinity pool (with underwater music) cascades over three levels. Completing the package are an intimate outdoor cinema lit at night by a bonfire, and seafood lunches aboard a private yacht.

☐ **Rooms from £4,319;**
telegraph.co.uk/erosantorini

PREPARE TO BE SEDUCED
Clockwise from main: a luxury room in the Royal Mansour in Marrakech; Sumba Island: Taj Lake Palace, India; a couple enjoy champagne



3 MORGAN'S ROCK, NICARAGUA

Best suited to romp in the lay types, with hammock-style bungalow dip beds and waterfall plunge pools. Treetop villas are the most isolated, accessible by jungle suspension bridge; the only sounds are the cracks of parrots and hooting of the waves. The most romantic time is sunset, when the sky turns golden. This is a hands-on kind of place: guests can milk the farm cows before breakfast, horse-ride on the beach, or fish for shrimp. A candlelit aromatherapy massage for two adds to the amorous vows.

☐ **Rooms from £285;**
telegraph.co.uk/it-morgansrock

4 NIHI SUMBA ISLAND, BALI

Not a few years old, and already a fashion classic: Thai Indies-flecked infinity pools and linen-draped four-poster beds. Among the most secluded villas is Pascak, which grips a mountaintop edge; it's small, couples can clink champagne flutes in their outdoor hot tub or snuggle around the firepit. Romantic experiences deliver the kind of photo opportunities likely to induce serious Instagram envy: Spa Safaris feature a sunrise trek across rice fields, breakfast on a cantilevered terrace, and a massage for two on a cliff edge.

☐ **Rooms from £1,027;**
telegraph.co.uk/it-nihisumba

5 ONE&ONLY LE SAINT GÉRAN, MAURITIUS

A recent multi-million-pound refurbishment aims to seduce a younger market as well as treat-loving baby boomers – cue a new pan-Asian tapas bar and DJs spinning tropical-infused beats. Guests can also now enjoy private spa treatments aboard the Lady Lisbeth yacht and tasting menus at upmarket steak joint, Prime. Suites feature textured wall panels, sofas upholstered in slippery grey leathers, and smooth stone furnishings. Local references are gracefully done, with hand-crafted lithographs, and fuchsias dyed to the exact colour of Mauritian sand. A new cascading infinity pool zigzags the top of the peninsula, punctuated by muslin-draped day beds. Those seeking ultimate privacy can book Villa One, which comes with a chef and ocean-facing infinity pool.

☐ **Rooms from £628;**
telegraph.co.uk/it-saintgeran

6 IL SERENO, LAKE COMO, ITALY

A great glass block that seems to emerge from the surrounding waters, Il Sereno rebels against Lake Como's established hotel-design etiquette of marble sculptures and faux stucco. It's whimsical, not industrial, though – with a grand staircase of "floating" walnut steps, vertical garden buttressed with art installations made from twisted plants and an infinity pool that gives the appearance of cascading into the lake. In the glass-walled suites, beds swaddled in the finest French linen and tubs carved from rare brown travertine are positioned for maximum views of the mirror-like

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telegraph.co.uk/erosantorini