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The World's Most Romantic Cities

Where to find love, beauty, and inspiration—from St. Petersburg to São Paulo.



January 30, 2018 | By Tim Hasid

Craving epic romance with your love? We explored the number of quality cultural, dining and shopping experiences, landmarks and hotels recommended by locals and visitors to determine the most romantic cities in the world, just in time for Valentine's Day.

1. LONDON

London is a tight, highly curated Venn diagram of multi-ethnic revelry, enviable luxury retail, and chic restaurants to sate the palates of curious global wanderers. Start your romantic exploration of "The Capital of Capitals" with a stop at [St. Paul's](#)

Cathedral, where if you whisper sweet nothings into the Dome's curving wall, your companion standing on the opposite side will hear your words. Next, treat your partner like a king or queen with a stroll through London's Historic Royal Palaces. Wander the gardens of Hampton Court Palace or stop at the Tower of London to admire the sparkling Crown Jewels. Those jewels are not for sale but if you want to pick up some bling for yourself or your sweetheart, make your way to Bond Street with its bounty of luxury stores. Next, book the Champagne Experience on the London Eye. You'll be sipping bubbly while taking in the spectacular views from the world's tallest cantilevered wheel. London has an impressive culinary scene with plenty of Michelin-starred restaurant, such as Akari, a nine-seat, £300-per-person Japanese gem in Mayfair. But for something entirely unique, we recommend visiting a nursery. That's right, on a handful of evenings throughout the year Petersham Nurseries hosts the most romantic dinners by candlelight in their glasshouse restaurant, which is normally only open for lunch. As the sun sets over the nursery, diners soak in the dreamy atmosphere and enjoy a bespoke seasonal menu featuring produce grown right out the back door.

PETERSHAM NURSERIES, A CELEBRATION OF THE SEASONS Petersham Nurseries

2. TOKYO

Think romance and this sprawling metropolis, with its packed subway cars and hectic sidewalks, probably doesn't come to mind. But you're just not looking in the right places. Start your visit with a stroll in Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, which feels like a little slice of heaven. If you happen to be in Tokyo during cherry blossom season, bring a picnic basket and blanket like the locals do. Once the sun sets, you can take in the glittering city from the top of [Tokyo Skytree](#), the highest stand-alone broadcasting tower in the world. A soak in an onsen is a must, and Niwa no Yu features a Finnish-style sauna where couples can relax together. If you're feeling peckish, head to the [Mandarin Oriental](#) where the Michelin-starred Tapas Molecular Bar features an adventurous menu of bite-sized delicacies prepared by the chef right before your eyes.

THE TAPAS MOLECULAR BAR AT THE MANDARIN ORIENTAL Mandarin Oriental

3. [PARIS](#)

The city has always been a destination for lovers around the world—and across France. The Parisian lifestyle, the glamour and the attitude are instantly recognizable. With the highly acclaimed Paris Fashion Week at the end of February, look out for the fashion industry's elite as you shop for the latest trends. Today, the Marais is the place for boutique-scale shopping. If you want to dress like a Parisian, allow a personal shopper to take you to [Merci](#), a 16,000-square-foot concept store

from the owners of the French children's clothing brand Bonpoint, [L'Habilleur](#), a designer discount store, and [Fleux](#), a flagship of the Paris design community. One of the most exciting new museum openings in the city is [Musée Yves Saint-Laurent Paris](#), which is dedicated to Yves Saint Laurent, the man whose designs changed the way women dress. If you're in the mood to splurge, check into the recently reopened [Hôtel de Crillon](#), which features two exceptional suites designed by Karl Lagerfeld. For the ultimate in room service, get a room at [Hôtel Barrière Le Fouquet's Paris](#) and treat yourself to breakfast in bed with a view on the Champs-Élysées. The young and stylish will head to [Les Bains Paris](#), a chic le Marais retreat. Eating in Paris is a slow affair, one that starts late and seemingly goes on forever. The city ranks fourth-best for its culinary scene according to Resonance data, featuring everything from three-Michelin-star tasting menus to cozy wine bars. Taste the world's best steak at [La Table d'Hugo Desnoyer](#), "a sirloin of limousin beef," according to the superstar butcher-cum-chef. Non meat-eaters will love the vegetarian tasting menu by three-Michelin-star chef Alain Passard at [L'Arpège](#). Of course, no romantic visit to Paris would be complete without a kiss atop the [Eiffel Tower](#).

THE EIFFEL TOWER BY NIGHT Rafael Kellermann Streit

4. [NEW YORK](#)

As the culture and shopping capital of the world, New York City has it all. In 2017, 40 new Broadway shows debuted—the most in three decades. This year the record-breaking, award-winning film [Frozen](#), comes to life on stage as directed by Tony winner Michael Grandage. No wonder the city finished #1 in the world for Culture, measured by the number of quality culture and performing arts experiences recommended by locals and visitors in a city. The city ranks high for its culinary offerings too. Indeed, the city boasts 77 restaurants with one, two or three Michelin stars. Internationally acclaimed chef Daniel Rose has made his way to NYC to open [Le Coucou](#) with famed restaurateur Stephen Starr. In Soho, [Balthazar](#) is one of the best midweek restaurant in New York City serving traditional steak frites. The Balthazar Bakery is ideal for dessert. For cocktails or a boutique hotel stay, [The Beakman](#) is a majestic residence designed by Martin Brudnizki, marked by a Victorian-era atrium towering above The Bar Room. Rooftops are hot in New York and if a view is what you're after, check out the [The Roof](#) at Public, the [Westlight](#) at The William Vale or [The Crown](#) at Hotel 50 Bowery. Another popular view is the one from the [One World Observatory](#). If you're planning on a slow afternoon, after a patisserie at [Almondine](#), stroll along the water at Dumbo's Brooklyn Bridge Park and ride one of the 48 exquisitely carved horses of Jane's Carousel. For Mediterranean Comfort Food head to the [Atrium Dumbo](#), which took over the former Governor space after Hurricane Sandy. For a romantic evening, book a table at [The River Cafe](#), to enjoy sweeping views of the New York skyline and the Statue of Liberty.

WESTLIGHT, AFFORDS NEARLY 360 VIEWS OUT OVER QUEENS, BROOKLYN AND THE EAST COAST OF MANHATTAN [Westlight](#)

5. ROME

The Eternal City is made for meandering, refuelling, and meandering again. Indeed, Rome is for lovers of good eating and drinking. Forever tweaking its fabulous classics—offal, pizza (try Emma), charcuterie, gelato (Giolitti has been scooping for more than a century) and pasta. You can knock off several classics at once at the esteemed Vevevodetto. Romans have developed a taste for cocktails, often accompanied by jazz, as at Blackmarket Hall. For many, nightlife can be a visit to the Trevi fountain after dark, or a few hours in a romantic square, like Piazza Mattei or Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere, where you can sit, excellent wine in hand, listening to an open-air classical concert and bathing in the melodies of the ages. There's also, of course, eye-popping shopping, and every visit to the city reveals another once-in-a-lifetime find: be dazzled at Palazzo Fendi, where the second floor is home to Palazzo Prive, a sumptuously decorated space reserved only for a select group of guests; find the rare and hip at Degli Effetti, with its men's shop on one side of a tiny square near the Pantheon and women's on the other.

FENDI'S PRIVATE SUITES Palazzo Fendi

6. MOSCOW

Moscow inspires visitors with its artistry, history and majesty. You'll fall under the spell of Moscow the minute you set foot in this endlessly fascinating and dynamic destination. Russia's beguiling capital is a cultural gold mine spanning the ages, especially with the new \$27-million [Garage Museum of Contemporary Art](#) designed by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. The Red Square and the Kremlin in winter are a visual wonder. Most people go to Moscow to visit such well-known sights, but also to experience the 24-hour buzz of one of Europe's most vibrant cities. The art crowds gather at Denis Simachev on Stoleshnikov Pereulok street, while others experiment Absinthe cocktails at the [Mendeleev Bar](#), a speakeasy gem hidden behind luxurious velvet curtains inside noodle bar Lucky Noodles. Feeling hungry? Sample sushi, Russian-style, at [Cutfish Bistro](#), an eclectic local eatery opened by restaurateur Alexander Oganezov and chef Glen Ballis in the Patriarch's Ponds neighborhood. When the night is done and you're ready to tuck in, don't. Head to [Café Pushkin](#), open 24-hours, to savor caviar in a Russian aristocrat decor. Next morning, we recommend a day at [Sandunovskie Bani](#), the oldest surviving bath house in the Russian capital, offering the infamous banya treatment, in other words being thwacked with birch veniks. On your way out, walk to [Tsum](#), an absolute must-see for international shoppers.

BRUNCH AT CAFE PUSHKIN Cafe Pushkin

7. [ISTANBUL](#)

Istanbul is the planet's only major city to straddle two continents, and globetrotters have long praised it for its incomparable blend of East and West, for its museums, entertainment, shopping, and nightlife. It's a city of contradictions if there ever was one: minarets and church spires dot the colorful skyline while down at street level women dressed in black abayas walk side by side pretty young things in tight-fitting Armani dresses. You can be easily seduced by Istanbul, a city where Arabic house music from sidewalk cafes and bars all but drowns out the call to prayer. Get your bearings with a walk down Istiklal Caddesi, a pedestrian avenue in the Beyoglu district that fuses modern with tradition to great effect. Here, impressive 19th-century buildings house cultural centers, shops, and restaurants like [Leb-i Derya](#), which is romantically lit at night and offers views of the Bosphorus River. Speaking of the Bosphorus, a nighttime cruise with Şehir Hatları, Istanbul's official ferry company, is a must. Another must is a visit to a hammam. While the ancient Ottoman sultan bathing ritual continues to this day, most hammams—like the gorgeous [Ayasofya Hürrem Sultan Hamamı](#) and [Cemberlitas Hamamı](#)—feature separate areas for men and women. But that's okay. After you relax in the hammam, you'll rejoin your partner and get your culture on at [Istanbul Modern](#), a museum that focuses on local contemporary art. Set in a converted warehouse on the Bosphorus, it features a sculpture garden, library and restaurant.

CEMBERLITAS HAMAMI'S TURKISH BATHS DATING BACK TO 1584 ON DIVANYOLU STREET
Cemberlitas Hamami

8. SÃO PAULO

If you're a foodie, a shopper, or an architecture enthusiast Sao Paulo is a must. For some, the city feels like the center of the world. Sampa, as locals call their hometown, has the largest population of Italian descendants outside Italy, the largest community of people of Japanese descent, and a large Arab community fueled mostly by Lebanese and Syrian immigrants. In short, if you're in the mood for culinary delights from any of those countries, you'll find them here. The best thing to do in São Paulo is eat. While Piraja is one of those popular lunch spots, to dine with the elite flee to upscale Kaá in Vila Olímpia. The Arthur Casas-designed restaurant features a 4,300-square-foot vertical garden. For extraordinary views, go to the 30th-floor View Bar in Jardins. Get your culture on, a respite from the rain and humid sidewalks, at Pinacoteca, a museum housed in a former high school. On view until May 2018 is Trace Testing, a collective exhibition of videos produced by Brazilian artists dedicated to exploring the limits of the audio-visual language. Also, don't miss the city's main museum, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, showcasing Latin America's most comprehensive collection of Western art. For a bit of shopping, head to the undulating marvel that is the Copan building, designed by Brazil's best-known architect, Oscar Niemeyer. The ground floor alone, with shops, cafes, and bars, can occupy an entire afternoon. If you stay in São Paulo, Emiliano is a top boutique hotel on luxurious Oscar Freire Street. For modernists, Hotel Unique is set in a semi-circle-shaped structure by noted architect Ruy Ohtake.

HOTEL UNIQUE IS LIKE NO OTHER WITH ITS HALF-MOON SILHOUETTE Hotel Unique

9. PRAGUE

To say that Prague is one of the most romantic cities in Europe is no exaggeration. The city's fairy tale spirit can still be found in its century-old cobbled streets and its castle perched on a hilltop, in its hidden alleys, its ancient bridges and dreamy spires. Here you'll find shopping that's at once sophisticated and daring, adventurous chefs who are creating a new Czech cuisine, and an anything-goes club scene. After you've crossed and recrossed Charles Bridge, exploring the nooks and crannies of Prague Castle, score a table at Atelier, an intimate restaurant tucked away off the beaten track and where the adventurous chef is not afraid to experiment with seasonal ingredients. For a cocktail experience like no other in the city, head to Lounge Bohemia, a by-appointment-only space decorated in mid-century modern furnishings where mixologist Pavel Tvaroh delivers drinks in wonderful and unusual vessels.

CHARLES BRIDGE, PRAGUE'S OLDEST BRIDGE Milan Chudoba

10. ST. PETERSBURG

White nights and sumptuous beauty live in regal Piter (as the locals call their town). Imperial capital for two centuries, city of 40 islands and 342 bridges, the Romanov showcase is the very definition of sumptuous. The city places high in Resonance

Consultancy's [Neighborhoods and Landmarks](#) category, meaning you need to roam Palace Square, Nevsky Prospekt—the elegant geographical anchor of the city—and around Square of the Arts and the Summer Gardens. You could begin at the Peterhof Palace, the Peter and Paul Fortress, or the Church of the Savior on Blood—they're all as spectacular as their monikers. St. Petersburg is an artistic powerhouse, too. The word 'museum' gets redefined at the [State Hermitage](#), one of the largest museums in the world, with an exquisite, sea-green Winter Palace so beautiful it could melt a czar's heart. Add to this world-class ballet, opera and classical concerts for an irresistible romantic getaway. From the grand [Mariinsky Theatre](#) to the old and elegant [Mikhailovsky Theatre](#), experience a night of high culture at the world's most famous venues for ballet and opera. For top-quality Russian fare in a sumptuous tsarist-era setting, eat at [Palkin](#). In St. Petersburg, fusion cuisine takes center stage. [Gräs x Madbaren](#) is Anton Abrezov's latest project where Scandinavian cuisine meets Russian locavorism, while [Duo Gastrobar](#) serves crab bruschetta, duck breast with smoked cheese and tomato, and rich French onion soup. For a luxury stay, the [Astoria Hotel](#) and the [Belmond Grand Hotel Europe](#) are probably the finest hotels in town.

CLASS CONCERT AT MIKHAILOVSKY THEATRE Mikhailovsky Theatre

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