

■ WILDLY IN LOVE

They might live happily ever after

Make plans for a romantic getaway on Valentine's Day with ideas that don't involve roses or teddy bears



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(Clockwise from above) *Jawai Leopard Camp; The Serai Bandipur; Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa, Gulmarg; Kurumba Village Resort, near Coonoor; and Amanbagh, Ajabgarh Valley*

Upscale resorts in India are pulling out all the stops to give couples the holiday of their romantic dreams.

KURUMBA VILLAGE RESORT, Near Coonoor

Dusk daubed the mountains in lavender light as we sat on the terrace of our suite at the Kurumba Village Resort, 14 km away from Coonoor. Soon darkness fell and lanterns glimmered around the resort. On Valentine's Day that year, the stage was set for romance. In a tree house, up high on a jackfruit tree, a couple schmoozed at a table for two. Eyes-for-only-each-other couples dined at candlelit tables by the pool. Others revelled in the unique intimacy of a barbecue on their private balcony. The romantic highlight is the cave dining option. This candlelit cavern has been the venue of many marriage proposals. Our meal in the cave was a seven-course affair, an imaginative tribal menu that set our hearts and taste buds aflutter.

Created artfully over 10 acres on what was once a spice plantation, the Kurumba Village Resort is done in a muted colour palette and blends into its environs.

Contact: www.naureresorts.in

THE SERAI BANDIPUR, Bandipur

The wilderness beyond The Serai Bandipur is unseen but not unheard. At our private table

for two on the terrace of our villa, on a moonlit night, low growls wafted across the cool night air and one of the waiters said that a lion was probably on the prowl some 4 km away. The Serai Bandipur is located on the periphery of the Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka. Built across 19 acres, The Serai snuggles in 17 acres of dense private wilderness. The resort with its Mountain Log Huts and Courtyard Rooms, buried in blooms, was lit with fairy lanterns. We renewed our vows to each other over a sumptuous meal and so did, in all likelihood, several other couples that evening.

Contact: www.theserai.in

AMANBAGH, Ajabgarh Valley

For couples teetering on the edge of making a commitment, Amanbagh, at the foot of the Aravallis in Rajasthan, may be just the place.

Located 90 minutes from Jaipur, the pink-tinted resort inspired by Mughal palaces sprawls on the former hunting grounds of the Maharaja Jai Singh of Alwar. This plush outpost in the rural Ajabgarh valley is a complex of domes and cupolas and richly furnished suites and pavilions. The resort brims with charming spaces, ideal for romantic tables for two.

Contact: www.aman.com

JAWAI LEOPARD CAMP, Jawai

There was romance in the starkness; mystery too. Jawai in the Aravalli Hills, a three-hour drive from Udaipur or Jodhpur, combines pastoral beauty with rugged terrain. This

is not a wildlife park but a cluster of 20 villages interspersed with arid scrub and 850-million-year-old boulders and rocks that spring from the earth like snarling behemoths. Around 40 leopards live in this parcel of wilderness and are regarded by villagers as guardians of their temples. We were staying at the swish Jawai Leopard Camp, a cluster of eight en suite tents and an in-the-middle-of-nowhere feel. Done in shades of black and white in local stone and brushed steel furniture, the camp cocoons its guests in luxury.

Contact: www.sujanluxury.com

KHYBER HIMALAYAN RESORT AND SPA, Gulmarg

A snow-swaddled landscape glowing in the light of an orange moon could inspire the most unromantic mortal.

Located 8,825 ft above sea level, the Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa in Gulmarg has undeniable oomph. In Chaikash, the tea lounge, pour out honey-gold local *kahwa* to celebrate your togetherness... Or seal your love by a crackling fireplace in Calabash, the cigar and sheesha lounge. Nouf, a covered deck for dining, is a favourite with couples. And here's hoping they live happily ever after.

Contact: www.khyberhotels.com

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The writers are travel junkies who trawled the earth and eventually returned to Mumbai, the city they call home.