

yoga for *Romantics*

Looking for the ultimate romantic destination that includes yoga? Don't go past these top seven destinations.

By Erin O'Dwyer

The beachside yoga studio is more romantic than most. The floor is white sand and the roof is a canopy of wind-bent coastal mangrove trees. Instead of walls, there is 11km of deserted beach. My Sun Salutation is to the Andaman Sea.

It's a sacred place to do yoga. Just yesterday, a wedding was celebrated here. Hanging from each low branch are dozens of strings of fresh flowers—jasmine and frangipani threaded onto twine then studded with an origami fish, delicately folded by hand from pandanus leaves.

"It's beautiful to practise yoga in the same place people get married," says Melanie Schorr, the petite in-house yoga teacher at the Sarojin Resort, on Thailand's Khao Lak beach. "Most of my classes are booked by couples on their honeymoon. Usually the woman is quite experienced and the husband just comes along to try it out."

Only once was there a man more experienced than

his wife. "He had been doing yoga for health reasons for years, but the woman had never been to a class," Schorr laughs. "It was a lot of fun."

Whether you are planning your honeymoon or a romantic getaway, it's no longer a struggle to find somewhere that offers yoga. The ancient practice is now on the standard inclusions list in many luxury hotels, as well as being a central feature of acclaimed health resorts and spas. But adding yoga to the mix takes careful planning. How much yoga will she, and he, really want to do? Are classes given in groups or tailor-made for couples? Is the instructor qualified and experienced? And, if you're both serious yogis, how do you find a destination that unites body, mind and soul?

The key is to read up before you go. If only one partner does a daily practice, look for a resort that offers daily group session yoga plus other things to do. If you are both experienced yogis, choose a spa retreat that attracts top international teachers. You'll find they'd be happy to holiday there too.

If it's a challenge to get your partner away from the gym and onto the mat, remember there are benefits to learning yoga as a couple.

Variations of yoga asanas that are practised together build connection, increase energetic flow between two people and heighten awareness of the physical and spiritual. Oh, and it can also be extremely erotic.



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PHOTOGRAPHY CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT COURTESY OF: THE SAROJIN RESORT HOTEL; BANYAN TREE, THAILAND; ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS; THE SAROJIN RESORT HOTEL

Clockwise from top: Poolside extravagance at the Sarojin in Thailand; a couple's yoga class at The Banyan; Ananda Spa in India is set in a former vice-regal palace. Ayurvedic treatments are part of Sarojin's spa menu.



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the more experienced. The Sarojin has a "buy two nights, get two nights free" special until October 31. Villas from \$475 per night, including breakfast with complimentary sparkling wine. www.sarojin.com

ANANDA SPA, INDIA

A palatial spa for yoga devotees who don't mind a bit of pampering and romance. Set in a spectacular vice-regal Rishikesh palace that was once home to the region's maharajah, Ananda combines traditional yoga and ayurvedic medicine with the modern luxury spa concept. In fact it's three times been voted the world's number one destination spa by *Conde Nast Traveller* magazine. Twice-daily hatha yoga and guided meditation sessions are complimentary and there is a regular schedule of visiting masters experienced in massage, reiki and ayurvedic medicine. An Ayurvedic doctor will diagnose your dosha on arrival and suggest the best wellness program for you. Deluxe private villas have a 40m swimming pool and

THE SAROJIN, THAILAND

An affordable honeymoon favourite close to home, The Sarojin is a relaxed five-star beach resort in Khao Lak (a region of five national parks and three golf courses), an hour north of Phuket. Even in peak season there are never more than 110 guests, so you'll feel almost as if you were alone. Honeymoon accommodation is in two-room villas with private plunge pool, marble-tiled bathroom alcove with twin basins, twin showers and an oversized bathtub. Yoga teacher Schorr is Canadian-born and trained in India under Yogi Vijay Amar in the traditional hatha style. Her early morning, beachside couples' classes can be personalised to suit beginners or



Clockwise from above: Follow up a yoga class with a couple's massage at Banyan Tree; Conrad Rangali Island Resort is not only picture-perfect but also draws top yoga teachers including UK-based Katy Appleton. Regular meditation is encouraged at Ananda Spa.



decks overlooking the valley. Five-night Himalayan romance packages start from \$2904 per couple, including daily yoga, spa treatments, Ayurvedic consult and all meals. www.anandaspa.com

CONRAD RANGALI ISLAND RESORT, MALDIVES

The Maldives' proximity to the Indian subcontinent means top yoga teachers, many who have been practising since childhood. Conrad Rangali Island is the name in yoga in the Maldives, most notably because UK 'teacher to the stars' Katy Appleton has taught here regularly. The resort spans two islands linked by a 500m walkway, that has a glass-bottomed spa for a fish-eyed view on coral reefs and the world's first underwater all-glass restaurant. Accommodation is in deluxe

overwater bungalows or dreamy beach villas with garden bathrooms. Yoga, Pilates and tai chi are conducted in a purpose-built pavilion that overlooks the lagoon. Yoga sessions are divided into four classes: beginners, stress management, vinyasa and early morning Sun Salutations. One-on-one yoga sessions with visiting masters can be arranged. Beach villas from \$533 per night, with regular specials advertised online. www.conradhotels.com

PURA VIDA RETREAT & SPA, COSTA RICA

A serious yoga retreat and wellness spa just outside the pretty town of Alajuela in the mountains of Costa Rica. Pura Vida has twice been voted one of the world's best spas by *Travel+Leisure* magazine. The retreat attracts the best teachers from

the US—Keith Fox, Kelly Brookbank and Michael Gannon among them—who jostle to fill the busy calendar of events. Styles include Iyengar, ashtanga and Vinyasa flow, taught twice daily in one of five timber-floored yoga halls. Deluxe accommodation is in private pagodas with jacuzzi, outdoor shower, sunken living area and views across the valley. You can even get married and treat your wedding party to a deluxe detox. Seven-day packages include 10 yoga classes, daily meals, one spa treatment and local guided tours. Pagodas from \$2006 per person per week. www.rrresorts.com

INTERCONTINENTAL GOLF RESORT & SPA, FIJI

An ideal romantic destination for keen yoginis with reluctant partners. On the

main island of Viti Levu and just 40 minutes from Nadi airport, the newly opened resort is the place to stop and stay. There are four pools, five restaurants, a championship Vijay Singh-designed 18-hole golf course, plus sensational diving and snorkelling. Spacious beachfront suites have a private outdoor tub for two. A spa highlight is the Vake-Cegu four-hands massage, which features a full body hot herbal poultice of sweet basil and kaffir lime. Complimentary yoga is conducted on the yoga deck three times weekly. Private sessions are also available. Bed and breakfast packages from \$392 per night, and the resort also offers regular wedding specials. www.ichotelsgroup.com

BANYAN TREE, THAILAND

Banyan Tree is the ultimate in Thai-style luxury. Its spacious manicured grounds sprawl between an 18-hole champion golf course and Bang Tao Bay, on the north-western coast of Phuket Island. The resort offers daily complimentary yoga and Pilates group classes taught by a qualified Indian naturopath as part of its wellness focus. The spa features 20 different Ayurvedic treatments as well as an in-spa menu of Tri-doshic food. Then there's a 40m lap pool, an extensive fitness pavilion and classes

in windsurfing, sailing, canoeing and scuba diving. Deluxe two bedroom villas that have a private swimming pool, outdoor meditation and an open-air sunken bath. From \$963 per night. www.banyantree.com

VIGILIUS MOUNTAIN RESORT, ITALY

For an uber-romantic experience, head to the top of the world. The exclusive Vigilius Mountain Resort, in Italy's South Tyrol, can be reached only by cable car—an ascent of 1500m. The sleek 36-room timber-and-glass hotel is as impressive as the view. Plan on watching the sunset from the terrace before retreating to the warmth of your clay-walled room. In summer, there's hiking, Nordic walking and archery. In winter, ski gear is rented free and the Dolomites are only an hour away. Vigilius takes wellness seriously. Yoga classes are

private and personalised, incorporated into individual training plans. Yoga retreats are scheduled regularly. Three-night honeymoon package from \$1910 per couple, including breakfasts, cable-car rides, one gourmet dinner and spa treatments. www.vigilius.it

Erin O'Dwyer is a freelance writer based on the south coast of NSW and a Shadow yoga student.



Clockwise from top: Vigilius Mountain Resort in Italy's South Tyrol can only be reached by cable car; accommodation at Pura Vida Retreat and Spa in Costa Rica; the yoga deck at the Intercontinental Golf Resort & Spa, Fiji; Pura Vida's yoga studio; the Intercontinental's outdoor lounge.

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