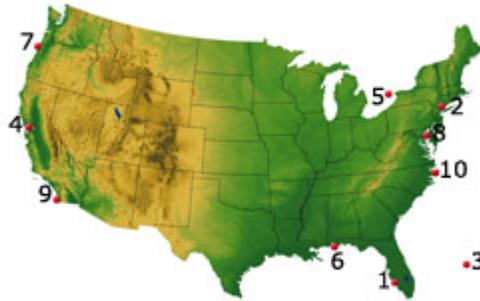


# COASTAL LIVING

## Top 10 Romantic Escapes



## Top 10 Romantic Escapes

Text by Steve Millburg

### 6. Fairhope, Alabama

This charming village nestles on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay like an idealized, movie-set small town. Blossoms burst from planters and flower boxes along every block of the tree-shaded downtown. Wrought-iron balconies lend a bit of New Orleans flavor—appropriate for a community that celebrates Mardi Gras with a half-dozen parades spread over more than two weeks. Couples could spend days contentedly browsing the boutiques, art galleries, antiques shops, parks, and, most deliciously, the restaurants. Day's end brings a beautiful bonus: sunset over the bay; 251/928-2136 or [cofairhope.com](http://cofairhope.com)

### 7. Cannon Beach, Oregon

Cannon Beach encapsulates everything that makes the Pacific Northwest such an enticing escape. Rugged mountains, 9 miles of beach, and the 235-foot offshore monolith known as Haystack Rock provide awe-inspiring natural beauty. Lovers of the outdoors can hike the nearby state park forests or just fly kites on the shore. The town itself, with its wooden sidewalks and cedar-shingled buildings, has become a haven for artists and craftspeople. Boutiques, bookstores, gourmet food shops, and some excellent restaurants cater to those creative types and the visitors they attract; 503/436-2623 or [el.com/to/cannonbeach](http://el.com/to/cannonbeach).

### 8. St. Michaels, Maryland

Some say that tourist hordes have ruined this quaint enclave on Maryland's Eastern Shore. We disagree. Centuries of extracting sustenance and profit from the Chesapeake Bay have left a hardworking heritage that resists gentrification. After checking out the chic shops and pricey antiques on Talbot Street, explore the narrow side streets. Soak up the history. Enjoy the idiosyncratic jumble of architecture. The old-time watermen who once worked (and roistered) here might look askance at today's spas and posh lodgings. But they would certainly appreciate the still-plentiful views of their beloved bay—and the crab cakes; 800/808-7622 or [stmichaelsmd.org](http://stmichaelsmd.org).

## **9. La Jolla, California**

Even the name of this Mediterranean-feel beach town just north of San Diego promises romance. La Jolla (pronounced “la HOY-uh”) in Spanish means “the jewel.” This particular gem offers several glittering facets: exclusive shopping, lavish dining, lots of arts and cultural attractions, and a sumptuous stretch of beach. The hilly terrain provides plenty of vantage points for enjoying the view. The water also invites surfing, swimming, or snorkeling to view the abundant marine life; 858/454-1444 or [lajolla.com](http://lajolla.com).

## **10. Outer Banks, North Carolina**

The Outer Banks offers the most elementally “out there” experience of any bridge-accessible U.S. destination. Standing on a thin ribbon of sand, with the mainland out of sight over the western horizon and burly Atlantic Ocean waves thundering in from the east, you truly feel untethered from your everyday world. Such towns as Nags Head, Kitty Hawk, and Kill Devil Hills offer plenty of tourist pleasures. But it’s also easy to sneak away and find your own private stretch of beach, with vivid stars overhead, moonlight-silvered surf at your feet, the sea breeze tousling your hair—and magic ready to happen; 877/629-4386 or [outerbanks.org](http://outerbanks.org).

*(published January/February 2007)*

## **1. Naples, Florida**

The perfect retreat for two would feature balmy Southwest Florida weather, spectacular sunsets, beaches of feather-soft white sand, and warm waters ideal for swimming. It would allow a choice of activities-filled beachfront resorts or intimate inns. It would provide a sophisticated arts scene and secluded places to connect with nature. It would gather galleries, shops, sidewalk cafés, wine bars, and jazz clubs together in a lively, easily walkable downtown. Yes, this dreamy place really does exist; 800/688-3600 or [paradisecoast.com](http://paradisecoast.com).

## **2. New York, New York**

Of course you must skate arm-in-arm at Rockefeller Center, snuggle under a blanket while riding in a horse-drawn carriage through Central Park, and gasp at the views from the 86th-floor observatory of the Empire State Building. Clichés? Sure. But they’ll still warm even the most jaded cynic’s heart. So will the sight of lower Manhattan from the Brooklyn Promenade, the free trip across New York Harbor on the Staten Island Ferry, and the overlooks from high above the East River on the Roosevelt Island Tram. For a coastal interlude, try drinks at the 14th-floor, waterfront Rise bar in The Ritz-Carlton hotel at Battery Park; 212/484-1200 or [nycvisit.com](http://nycvisit.com).

## **3. Barbados**

Tropicality mixes with civilized formality (courtesy of 340 years of British rule), giving this Caribbean island a delightful sense of occasion. One dresses for dinner here. One pauses for afternoon tea. And Bajans (rhymes with Cajuns), though quite friendly, wouldn’t dream of intruding on visitors’ privacy. Beaches suit every taste—wild Atlantic waves on the east coast, placid Caribbean ripples on the west, and everything in between on the southern shore; 800/221-9831 or [www.visitbarbados.org](http://www.visitbarbados.org).

#### **4. Sausalito, California**

This compact, eccentric town just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco begs to be explored. Its twisty streets harbor everything from art galleries to dive bars. Chic open-air cafés offer great food and better people-watching. Because Sausalito clings to a hillside, almost any place in town delivers one of the most romantic sights in the world: the San Francisco skyline; 415/331-7262 or [sausalito.org](http://sausalito.org).

#### **5. Niagara Falls, Ontario**

Why wintertime? Because spray from the falls coats rocks, trees, buildings, and the occasional slow-moving tourist with ice, turning the town into a glittering fantasyland. Why the Canadian and not the New York side? Because you get better views of the falls and more lodging and dining choices. Why “ice wine” on restaurant menus? Because this dessert wine, a specialty of the region, practically explodes with flavor—be sure to sip, not gulp. Why Niagara Falls in the first place? Because its beauty really will take your breath away; 800/263-2988 or [tourismniagara.com](http://tourismniagara.com).