

THE ULTIMATE ROMANTIC GETAWAYS

The *Peak's* jet-setting travel columnists, **HRH Tengku Zatashah** and **Aubry Mennesson**, pick five of the world's dreamiest destinations to check yourself into this February 14th.



February is usually one of the busiest times for Originalo, thanks to all the lovers out there choosing romantic gifts for Valentine's Day. With the Escape gift packages we created for Originalo, couples can enjoy a 'mini honeymoon getaway' any time of the year. For us, romantic breaks are the most memorable because it's about sharing quality time privately as a couple – enjoying the scenery and breathtaking hotels. It's about discovering a place together and taking time out of busy schedules to simply wake up and smell the roses. This month, we bring you our five favourite romantic getaways.

TAORMINA, SICILY

Taormina was our honeymoon destination and our hotel, Grand-Hotel Timeo (part of *The Leading Hotels of the World*), sits right underneath the impressive Mount Etna volcano, Europe's highest still-active volcano. The grand hotel has hosted the likes of Sophia Loren, Audrey Hepburn and Elizabeth Taylor. This historic town is littered with Roman and Greek ruins and is perched on the side of a cliff on the east coast of Sicily, overlooking the azure Ionian Sea. We dined beneath starry skies and Mount Etna's snow-peaked frame, walked the paved walkways lined with designer boutiques, ate in charming open-air *terrazza* restaurants and swam in the sea - the perfect romantic paradise.



All smiles on Cocoa Island.



OPENING Paradise found on Pangkor Laut. **1** Quaint delights at Hotel de Orangerie. **2** Idyllic Cocoa Island.

SOUTH MALÉ ATOLL, MALDIVES

This had to be one of our most romantic getaways. We knew the Maldives would be incredible; we just had no idea how spectacular! Cocoa Island, off the South Malé Atoll (part of COMO Hotels & Resorts), is so romantic. A small private island resort (we walked round the entire island in 20 minutes), it offers amazing diving and snorkelling right outside our over-water Dhoni suite. We swam amongst reef sharks and rays, there was a fabulous spa, and all the time, we were surrounded by pure, white sandy beaches and an endless turquoise-blue ocean. It's still our screen-saver and we're planning to go back soon. It is, after all, like stepping into heaven.

BRUGES, BELGIUM

This was our first romantic getaway. Bruges (in Dutch, it's spelt Brugge) is known as the Venice of the North. We stayed in the romantic Hotel de Orangerie (part of *Small Luxury Hotels of the World*), now called Martin's Orangerie. A convent in the 15th century, the building was converted into a luxury hotel much later on, with a breathtaking location on the picturesque Diver canal in the historic and cultural centre of Bruges. Bruges is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and we visited medieval towers, took boat rides along the canals, ate *moules marinière et frites* (mussels and French fries, a Belgian specialty) like it was going out of fashion, and climbed all the way to the top of the 13th-century bell tower - the Belfry of Bruges. It's a romantic step back in time.

BARCELONA, SPAIN

This was a fantastic romantic weekend getaway for us. The sun was shining, the weather warm and balmy for early May. We stayed in Hotel Casa del Fuster (part of *The Leading Hotels of the World*), a luxury hotel preserved in all of its splendor by modernist Catalan architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, located in the heart of Barcelona on Paseo de Gracia. We visited Antoni Gaudí's buildings, toured the



Gothic Quarter, ate paella by the Marina Vila Olímpica, walked along the sandy beaches of La Barceloneta and ate tapas in Plaça Reial. The city is so full of charm, romance and wonder that one leaves with a feeling of enchantment.

PANGKOR LAUT, MALAYSIA

Malaysia's most romantic hotel destination (voted countless times as Most Romantic Hotel, Number One in the World, Best Beach Resort), Pangkor Laut Resort (part of *Small Luxury Hotels of the World*) spells romance at every turn. Located on a private island, Pangkor Laut Resort has beautiful sea villas and spa villas set on the water. Breakfast is brought to you in cute picnic baskets and you can sunbathe in privacy on your deck above the water. In the hills, you're bound to bump into a monkey or monitor lizard, all part and parcel of the natural wildlife. So, is it any wonder we had to sign with this resort for Originalo's Luxury Getaways? **1**



HRH Tengku Zatashah and Aubry Mennesson are the creators and Managing Directors of ORIGINALO Ultimate Gift Experience (www.originalo.com.my), the first to bring gift box experiences, offering the best hotels and spas in Malaysia. You can also follow them on their Frog + Princess Blog 'Travel in Style' on frogandprincess.wordpress.com