

Camp Romance

FROM A CANDLELIT ECOLOGE IN UGANDA, TO A REMOTE ISLAND CAMPSITE IN THE UK, **HEIDI FULLER-LOVE** CHECKS OUT THE MOST ROMANTIC OPTIONS FOR SPENDING AN INTIMATE WEEKEND UNDER CANVAS...



WRITER PROFILE

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INFO Based between France, Spain and Greece, Heidi edits *East Crete* magazine, has a regular Greek travel column in the *Athens News*, and contributes features and photos to publications worldwide.

Love under canvas might sound like a chilly option, but just think of all that potential for romance. "Jon and I go camping on Valentine's Day and whenever I want a romantic break. Snuggling up together to keep warm, cooking over an open fire and watching the stars together really brings us closer," says Debbie McNally from Canterbury, Kent.

Camping can also be a good choice if you're strapped for cash, but if you want to go upmarket and sleep in a plush yurt or a state-of-the-art log cabin, we have plenty of suggestions, too. In fact, there's

a romantic campsite for every taste and budget, so read our top tips, then follow our guide to the hottest sites for romance under the stars.

LIKE THE SCOUTS – MAKE SURE YOU COME PREPARED

You don't need to be a boy scout to know that, if love in a wild spot is the raw food of romance, it can also be a recipe for disaster if you don't come prepared. "My boyfriend and I were camping on Bear Island in the States and he forgot to bring a can opener. We only had canned food with us and, after trying to open them with everything but our teeth, we spent the rest of the evening rowing over whose fault

it was. Luckily we made it up the next day," says Laurie Warner from New York.

In order to keep stress to a minimum, check you've got all the essentials, including a torch. If you plan to cook outdoors, make sure there's fuel on site, or bring your own – and don't forget something to light it. Pack perishable items in waterproof containers, because there's nothing worse than trying to light a fire to get warm, cook or dry your clothes and finding the matches are soaking wet...

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

There's nothing like cooking over a naked flame to bring out your inner

caveman/woman, but just because you've gone back to basics, doesn't mean you have to live on roots and shoots. With careful planning you can conjure up gourmet meals on your campfire. A bag of rice, a stock cube and a few fresh veggies can be whisked into a tasty risotto, while bananas stuffed with squares of milk chocolate, then wrapped in foil and cooked in the heart of the fire make a delicious desert.

If you're lucky enough to camp on a farm, ask if they have milk, or vegetables, eggs or cheese for sale. Or why not buy a book about edible plants, then take your lover by the hand and go down to the woods and forage for your supper?

ADD A TOUCH OF ROMANCE

If you want to see the sunrise from your bed, make sure you pitch your tent facing east. But if sunset is your thing, make sure your tent flap faces west. Don't skimp on bedding materials either and, instead of boring blankets, why not bring a cosy quilt?

Use battery-operated lanterns or tea lights to cast an intimate glow around your site. A hand-me-down tablecloth from home will turn a tatty log into a quirky table in seconds, and don't bother bringing plastic cups and plates. Buy china and glassware from a charity shop instead. It's much nicer and no one will care if anything breaks.



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Top Ten Romantic Campsites

SO NOW YOU KNOW HOW TO LIGHT THE FLAME, FOLLOW US ON A TOUR OF THE TOP TEN ROMANTIC CAMPSITES FOR VALENTINE'S AND BEYOND...



Troytown Farm

TROYTOWN FARM, ST AGNES, UK

01720 422 360
www.troytown.co.uk

What's the scene?

This stunningly located farm campsite, ideal for couples who want to play Tarzan and Jane, is on the remote island of St Agnes. One mile across and studded with carns and coves, this isle is just a boat trip from the Scillies' main islands.

What's so romantic?

Private pitches with panoramic views to the uninhabited isle opposite and the crash of waves outside at night are guaranteed passion triggers.

Will we have to rough it?

With a pub just a short walk away, homegrown veg and meat for sale on site, farm power points to charge appliances and even a washer/dryer, this is a great place to get back to nature without having to sacrifice civilisations perks.



Dog sledding and wild camping in Sweden



Uganda Nile Safari Camp

Any useful tips?

The campsite is open for Valentine's Day, but make sure you bring plenty of extra bedding and a rainproof tent. Call ahead to arrange to have heavy packs picked up by the site's tractor.

SYKE FARM, BUTTERMERE VILLAGE, CUMBRIA, UK

01768 770 222
www.lakedistrictcamping.co.uk/campsites/northwest/syke_farm.htm

What's the scene?

Surrounded by striking scenery, Syke Farm sits on the fringes of the tiny hamlet of Buttermere.

What's so romantic?

A bubbling stream, a stone shelter for cooking and Aira Force, the Lake District's highest waterfall within easy hiking distance, make this spot ideal for a loved-up sojourn.

Will we have to rough it?

Facilities are fairly basic, but there are some fabulous hikes to the

Red Pike fell as well as two pubs offering hearty, home-cooked food just a short stride away.

Any useful tips?

If you're planning to cook, bring your own food, because there's nowhere to buy groceries in Buttermere itself.

DOG SLEDDING AND WILD CAMPING, SWEDEN

01929 463 774
www.naturetravels.co.uk/dog-sledding-sweden-dog-sledding-across-jamtland-le8dw1.htm

What's the scene?

This trip will take you to Jämtland, a vast and barely inhabited region of northwest Sweden.

What's so romantic?

A once-in-a-lifetime chance to test your love to the limit. During an eight-day dog sledding trip you'll spend two nights in comfortable cabins and the rest of the time bivouacking in the snowy wastes of the Jämtland mountain range.

Will we have to rough it?

Er... yes!

Any useful tips?

Invest in some sexy thermal underwear and a dog-mushing course before you go!

UGANDA NILE SAFARI CAMP, UGANDA

+256 41 425 8273
www.geolodgesafrica.com/nile_safari_lodge.htm

What's the scene?

Cocooned in a dense papyrus forest, this luxurious lodge of treetop chalets with panoramic views nestles on the banks of the River Nile and belongs to Uganda's largest national park.

What's so romantic?

Breakfast served by your personal waiter on your elevated balcony with views of hippos, giant Nile crocodiles and other fauna cavorting in the river beneath you; remote bush restaurants where you can dine tête à tête with your lover; nights snuggled in your treehouse, listening to the call of the wild around you... What's not romantic about this place?

Will we have to rough it?

With five wooden chalets and five luxury tents, all kitted out with double beds and en-suite washrooms, plus a well-stocked bar/restaurant and a beautifully landscaped pool on site, this lodge offers some of the most luxurious accommodation in Uganda.

Any useful tips?

Dyed-in-the-wool romantics definitely shouldn't miss the boat trip to Murchison Falls.

WHITEPOD, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

+41 24 471 3838
www.whitepod.com

What's the scene?

Whitepod's six electricity-free geodesic domes cluster around a beautifully refurbished, spa-equipped Alpine chalet high up in the Swiss Alps.

What's so romantic?

Keeping cosy with sheepskin throws, oil lamps and wood burning fireplaces, or chilling out in the spa is great for fuelling the passion...

Will we have to rough it?

A private ski zone, meals selected by a qualified nutritionist and comfy double beds all say that eco-friendly doesn't mean comfort-antagonistic!

pic © Nature Travels/U.Svensson



Straw Bale House in Podlachania, Poland

Any useful tips?

Don't pack too much – since there are no roads to the camp, you'll have to hike there by ski or on foot.

STRAW BALE HOUSE, PODLACHANIA, WARSAW, POLAND

01932 352 129
http://earthhandsandhouses.org/rent.htm

What's the scene?

Poland's first straw bale house is a cosy cottage near Lake Hancza, in the Podlachia, a region renowned for its natural beauty.

What's so romantic?

Clay walls, an old fashioned wood-burning stove and as much nature as you could want, all on your doorstep.

Will we have to rough it?

With all the basics in place, this comfortable love nest is ideal for back-to-nature-ists.

Any useful tips?

If you fall in love with your straw bale hideaway, you can join one of the organisation's courses and learn how to build your own.

steamy camp accessories.

Loved-up campers longing for a little luxury should invest in a double Aerobed, or one of Ted Baker's blow-up tiger skin mattresses (available at John Lewis, www.johnlewis.com).

For the next level in camp-dining, spice up your under-tent table fare with Guyrope Gourmet (www.guyropegourmet.com).

Another must-have steamy camp accessory is your own outside sauna. Light a bonfire, cover it over with stones, build a tall, tipi-style frame from wood, cover it with tarpaulin, then crawl inside with your lover and throw ladles of water on the fire – and enjoy that sexy sizzle!

CAMPING DU COL, TOUSSUIRE, FRANCE

0479 830 080
www.camping-du-col.com

What's the scene?

Perched at an altitude of 1,650 metres, near the snowy slopes of the Arvan-Villard mountain range in the Savoie, this campsite – which has tent pitches, but also mobile homes and chalets if you get chilly – is just a short slalom away from the pistes of La Toussuire.

What's so romantic?

A picture postcard muffled in snow, this tiny campsite spread over one hectare is a great place for romantic snowshoe treks and après ski in the site's bar before returning to your snuggery with the one you love.

Will we have to rough it?

With lashings of hot water, cosy beds and restaurants serving home-cooked food, not likely!

Any useful tips?

A free ski bus runs four times per hour to the village centre and stops 400 yards from the campsite.

ÁREA DE CAMPISMO DA BERLENGA, ILHA DE BERLENGA, PORTUGAL

+351 262 789 571
www.ilhadasberlengas.no.sapo.pt

What's the scene?

High on a hill overlooking the crystal clear waters opposite the pretty Portuguese port of Peniche, you'll share the place only with a handful of fishier families.

What's so romantic?

Amatory ideas are given a kickstart when you sling anchor in Peniche and start the bumpy seven-mile ride over to the island. Once there you'll live like Adam and Eve in this protected nature reserve with its

coastline of grottoes, miniature fjords and special rock formations.

Will we have to rough it?

With salt water showers and a limited daily allowance of fresh water, just a bit, but at least the island's only restaurant serves delicious grilled fish.

Any useful tips?

Reserve your boat ticket a few days before leaving – the island is very popular and access is restricted to a very lucky few.

SUNDANCE NATURE VILLAGE, TEKIROVA, TURKEY

+90 242 821 4165
www.sundancecamp.com

What's the scene?

This eco-friendly campsite with tent pitches, treehouses and adobe bungalows, 60km southwest of Antalya, is a short ride from the ancient Lycian city of Phaselis.

What's so romantic?

No phones or TVs, a bonfire burning brightly every night, a restaurant serving homemade yogurt, jam and pickles, and a stunning secluded beachfront setting within a private bay make this a great place for lovers.

Will we have to rough it?

Although the emphasis is on a back-to-nature experience, there

are plenty of creature comforts on this lovely site.

Any useful tips?

Book for at least a week because you won't want to leave.

PINCKNEY AND PORCUPINE MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS STATE PARK, MICHIGAN, USA

+1 517 373 9900
www.midnreservations.com

What's the scene?

Three yurts in Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, one of the few remaining large wilderness areas in the Mid-West that can only be reached on foot.

What's so romantic?

For couples looking to get away from it all, this site, surrounded by towering forests and secluded lakes, is guaranteed to light your fire, but keep an eye out for black bears.

Will we have to rough it?

The yurts don't have any electricity or running water, so you'll have to get the wet stuff from a nearby stream and learn to live life by candlelight – but at least the wood for cooking on the outside range is provided.

Any useful tips?

Wrap up warm and don't forget to bring essentials – the nearest shop is a full day's hike away. ■



Yurt interior in the Pinckney and Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park