

Chicago Tribune
TRAVEL

The road to romance

10 great places
to pop the question

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY
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Special to Tribune Newspapers

With Valentine's Day on the horizon, here are some great places to propose marriage. For the long-range planners, take heart. For the short-timers, let this be a lesson to you.

Sure, you can pose the question over an intimate dinner at a local restaurant or just during a snuggle on the couch, but why not make a marriage proposal part of a romantic vacation? You'll be creating pages in a new book of memories, adding chapters later for the wedding, honeymoon, maybe a family.

A few suggestions, from right here in the U.S. to dream destinations around the globe:

1. Lavender field, South of France: Getting engaged in Paris, à la Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes at the Eiffel Tower, is *tres passe*. Be different: Head south to the lavender fields near Mont Ventoux or Provence. Pull over anywhere, wander into a field and speak your love. If you want a specific spot, consider the field at Grignan, with its wonderful Renaissance chateau, or Senanque, a 12th-century abbey near Gordes. Lavender blooms from late June to mid-July. She may be so blown away she'll choose lavender for her wedding bouquet.
web.france.com/landmarks/castle_of_grignan_sacred_destinations.com/france/senanque-abbey

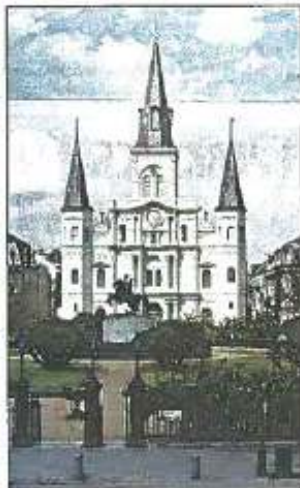
2. Biplane over the Alabama coast: Husband-and-wife pilots Bar and Dannie Eisenhauer take couples up in their 1928 biplane for engagement flights, with Champagne upon landing. Flights over sugar-white beaches off Gulf Shores are especially lovely at sunset. The plane seats two snugly, with the pilot in an open cockpit in the rear. Headphones prevent you from hearing each other, but you don't need words, do you? 866mustfly.com, gulfshores.com



No need to buy flowers. Lavender in the fields at Senanque Abbey blooms from late June to mid-July.



A diver can pose the question in Atlanta, left. Or maybe you like the ambience of New Orleans, right.



stroll through the pleasure garden of Kenilworth Castle. Robert Dudley, favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, created the garden to romance the queen, whom he'd been courting for 17 years. Let's hope you'll have better luck.
shakespeare.org.uk, www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/kenilworth-castle

8. Georgia Aquarium, Atlanta: Are you and your honey into marine life? Enlist a diver at the world's largest aquatic habitat to help you declare your love. Book the Ocean Voyager Dive Proposal Program, and a certified diver will descend into a 6.3-million-gallon tank, dodging whale sharks and rays to display a personalized sign for your intended, standing with you on the other side of the glass. Not quite your thing? Stephanie Brown and the aquarium staff will design a proposal plan for you, perhaps in one of its galleries or behind the scenes. georgiaaquarium.org

9. New Orleans: More than six years have passed since Hurricane Katrina swept over the city, and it has returned to its romantic roots with Creole culture, great food and music providing a backdrop. Plan a picnic under the moss-draped trees of City Park, first filling a basket with wine, cheese and muffuletta from Central Grocery in the French Quarter. Or celebrate with Champagne and a meal at Commander's Palace after declaring your love on a horse-drawn carriage ride through the Garden District. Take a moonlight cruise on the Mississippi River aboard the Steamboat Natchez, or ask a jazz band in the French Quarter to play her favorite song, enticing her on stage, where you will follow to share in the spotlight as you ask the big question. neworleanscvb.com, neworleansonline.com



TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTO

The trip to Machu Picchu in Peru includes camping out on the trail along the way.

TRIPS, TIPS & DEALS

Camping Machu Picchu

A visit to Peru's legendary Machu Picchu combines touring Incan ruins with trekking in the high-altitude countryside. The six-day Inca Trail Express trip begins with a tour of Cuzco before heading to the Sacred Valley and the trail that climbs to 13,773 feet at Warmiwanusca, also known as Dead Woman's Pass, and the steps at Intipunku, the Sun Gate. The group, limited to 16, camps out in the evenings while on the trail. \$1,270 for two if booked by March 31 for travel by the end of September; after that, \$1,270 a person, double occupancy (check with the company about single supplements). It includes four nights in a hotel, three nights camping and 12 meals. International airfare is not included. The trip is offered throughout the year. Intrepid Travel, 800-970-7299, intrepidtravel.com

Napa: Served chilled

The Napa Valley in winter can be nippy, but this Silverado Resort & Spa deal comes with a fireplace in a one-bedroom suite — and some nice extras, including a bottle of cabernet sauvignon, a free movie and more. Prices start at \$179 a night, excluding taxes and resort fees. The Cabernet Season Special is available on select winter nights and offers some discounts: free use of the golf range, half-off golf lessons (save \$40) and half-off club rentals (save \$20). Along with the freebies, you save 20 percent on spa services and receive a free mimosa with a breakfast purchase at the hotel's Grill restaurant. Use the promotion code CAB when making a reservation. The offer is good for stays Feb. 5-9, 12-15, 20-24 and 26-29. Silverado Resort & Spa, 800-532-0500, silveradoresort.com

Driving Costa Rica

Here's a way to see more of Costa Rica at your own pace. The Costa Rica Fly & Drive package from Gatel Travel starts with a drive from the capital, San Jose, to Arenal, known for its volcano and national park of the same name. From there, it's on to visit Monteverde and a cloud forest reserve that has a treetop walkway on suspended bridges and trails. \$349-\$399 a person (depending on date selected), double occupancy. It includes two-night hotel stays in San Jose, Arenal and Monteverde; daily breakfast; and unlimited mileage for a seven-day car rental with manual transmission. International airfare is not included. Departures from May 1-Oct. 25. Gatel Travel, 800-682-3333, gateltravel.com

— Tribune Newspapers

GEARBOX

Fashionable way to clean

Name: Toddy Gear Smart Cloth

What it is: A two-sided antibacterial microfiber cloth that melds fashion and function to clean and polish touch screens, computer monitors, glasses, camera lenses and other object that collect fingerprints, smudges, germs and grime. The 5-by-7-inch cloth comes in a variety of colors and designs to stylishly keep your iPhone, Android or other device from modeling your DNA. And it's machine washable in cold water.

The good: This cloth helps me see past my fingerprints on my iPhone, iPod Nano, laptops and glasses. It's useful that one side cleans without chemicals (the antibacterial microfiber side) while the other polishes (the shiny fashion-plate side). One cloth keeps my glasses and multiple devices from resembling fingerprint breeding zones. The cloth is amazing in its gripping power against grime, and you can be sure you won't be leaving tiny scratches behind.

The bad: Toddy Cloth is better at cleaning a naked iPhone screen than one wearing a protective covering. I have to dampen the Toddy Cloth to get it to clean smudges off the protector. But I still don't need any cleaner or chemical, just a bit of water. I wish Toddy Gear offered a plain "Shoddy"



Toddy that cost less for budget travelers like me who want function more than fashion.

Cost: \$9.99; cheaper in a pack of two or three.

Available from: toddygear.com, amazon.com, bestbuy.com and in Target stores.

— Terry Gardner, special to Tribune Newspapers

NEED TO KNOW

PreCheck now arriving at LAX

Another airport has joined the roster of those with an expedited security program for pre-screened fliers. The Transportation Security Administration rolled out PreCheck at Los Angeles International Airport, the sixth airport in the nation to participate in the pilot program since it started last year. The TSA said the program at LAX so far is available only to American Airlines frequent fliers at two checkpoints in Terminal 4. Here's how it works: Passengers who are U.S. citizens provide personal information and undergo background checks to qualify for traveler programs approved by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. These fliers are allowed to keep their shoes and belts on and leave laptops and 3-4 liquids inside their carry-on bags. Airports in Atlanta, Dallas/Fort Worth, Detroit, Miami and Las Vegas also have PreCheck screening.

— Mary Fargione, special to Tribune Newspapers



JOE RAEDLE/GETTY PHOTO
Los Angeles joins five other cities with airports that have pre-screening lanes, such as this one in Miami.

News to use

Here are some of the more interesting deals, websites and other travel tidbits that came across our desk recently:

- www.Scenic60.com is devoted to providing information on the 100-mile-long Wisconsin Scenic Byway 60, which extends from Lodi to Prairie du Chien on the lower Wisconsin River.
- If you're looking for lodging in London but don't want to stay at a

hotel, [onfinestay.com](http://onefinestay.com) lists homes and apartments available for short visits.

■ Arizona is celebrating 100 years of statehood this year. Check out special events at www.arizona100.org.

■ Take a gander at what Fronmners.com calls the 10 Best Neon Signs in the U.S. at tinyurl.com/7evgfen.

■ To order the 2012 Official Missouri Travel Guide, go to tinyurl.com/72vrx8d.

■ Bhutan — The Definitive Cultural Experience is a 10-night tour of the tiny kingdom from Geringer Global Travel that starts as low as \$2,070 per person,

double occupancy. Included are lodging, meals, guided tours and more. Airfare is extra. tinyurl.com/7ml7bcw

■ The Online Vacation Center has two eight-night British Isles cruises on Princess Cruises in August as low as \$1,599 per person, double occupancy. 800-780-9002; tinyurl.com/6dmdoh

■ Untours, which has been setting up vacationers in apartments in Europe and other locations for years, has added small-ship cruises to its itineraries. 888-868-6871; tinyurl.com/7ruyug9

■ To celebrate its opening, Anantara Bangkok Riverside, formerly the Marriott Bangkok, is offering the Journey Begins Package, with nightly room rates starting at \$125. tinyurl.com/3ou6tgp

■ Globus is taking off \$600 per couple for air-inclusive Europe tours booked by Feb. 14 for travel through Oct. 31. tinyurl.com/6cfn84

■ The Pallo of Siena tour from Hedonistic Hiking centers on the historic horse race held each year in Siena, Italy. Cost is about \$3,275 per person, double occupancy, including six nights' lodging, all meals, grandstand tickets for the parade and race, museum visits, a cooking class and

more. tinyurl.com/7y3cblid

■ Loews Coronado Bay Resort in San Diego is discounting rates by 30 percent during a major renovation, which means rooms as low as \$111 per night. There will be increased noise levels, but swimming pools, restaurants, etc. should still be available. tinyurl.com/7sdhntf

Deals and websites listed here have been checked for availability as of press time, but the listings are not an endorsement.

— Phil Marty, special to Tribune Newspapers

GEOQUIZ ANSWER

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The Volga, which extends nearly 2,200 miles before emptying into the Caspian Sea.

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