

secret SYDNEY

If your belle or beau is getting mini-break blasé, it's time to veer off the tourist track for a different view of the famous harbour city.

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Think you know Sydney? Think again. Though you may have climbed the Harbour Bridge, visited the Opera House and sunned yourself on Bondi Beach, one thing's for sure, Sydney doesn't give up all her charms on a first date. No, beyond the obvious, there's a wealth of activities in this diverse city that are guaranteed to satisfy every taste - from adrenalin-fueled thrillseekers and gluttonous gourmands to retail junkies and everything in-between. Little wonder that Sydney makes the world's top ten livable cities lists year after year. On your next visit, do yourself a favour; leave the guidebook and maps at home and get ready to see much more than what your average tour bus covers.

For many, the idea of a romantic getaway sans beach is unthinkable. Handily, Sydney has plenty to choose from. In fact, with 94 beaches - 34 along the coast and 60 in the harbour, bays and rivers - there are plenty of places to hide. The sheer number of them means it's easy to find 'secret' beaches even during the height of summer.

Store Beach isn't in the guidebooks, and most locals haven't even heard of it, let alone been there. This stretch of bush-backed beach is desert island perfection. Barely populated, the beach is even close to being deserted during the height of summer, making it the ideal place for some one-on-one time with your partner. However, there is a catch - you can't reach it by land. You have to paddle.

No romantic beach day is complete without a picnic. Start the day early and pick up some fresh Sydney rock oysters and jumbo prawns at the Sydney Fish Market in Pyrmont before popping into David Jones Food Hall (modelled on the famous food hall in Harrods, London) for freshly baked bread and pastries. Next, head down to Circular Quay to catch the ferry to Manly.

The half-hour ride just isn't long enough for a trip this pretty. You'll skirt the Opera House, pass by the towering Harbour Bridge and the millionaire mansions of Balmoral and Vaucluse. Once docking in Manly, it's a leisurely 30-minute trip by kayak around the rocks of Little Manly to Store Beach. Here you can swim in the shallow, clear water; tuck into your picnic and look across the picturesque waters to the cityscape in the distance.

Back on dry land, the perfect foil for a day spent relaxing in solitude is the bustling epicentre of the city's fashion scene between Oxford Street and Glenmore Road, in Paddington. Here you'll rub shoulders with the broadest slice of the Sydney pie. The area has a distinctly European feel, with its masses of boutiques and achingly hip pavement cafes and, if you're over DIY picnics, many of the city's most hidden (and best) eateries are dotted around the area's labyrinthine intersecting streets.

For cosmopolitan urban living happily coinciding with a laidback beach holiday environment, there's truly no other city like Sydney.

PHOTOS: TOURISKY NSW; ABSINTHE SALON; HILTON SYDNEY; OCEANWORLD; MARQUE RESTAURANT; FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

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BAR FLIES

You don't need to leave the city for a taste of European 19th Century romantic belle époque naughtiness. No, for those in the know, Absinthe Salon - a hidden, reservation-only bar on Surry Hills' Albion Street - is the new venue where drinks connoisseurs are flocking in their droves. Serving only absinthe - and 18 varieties at that - this intimate bar is the latest in Sydney's niche, small bar scene. www.absinthesalon.com.au



naturalists

If you want to understand why Sydney has the reputation of being one of the world's most beautiful cities, don your hiking boots and stick to its great outdoors. Eschew the Bondi to Bronte walk (so passé!) and instead head north to Lane Cove National Park. Along the five kilometre bluegum-lined river bushwalk, you'll spot a wealth of flora and fauna. From egrets and kookaburras to delicate ferns and flowers. www.lcrtp.com.au



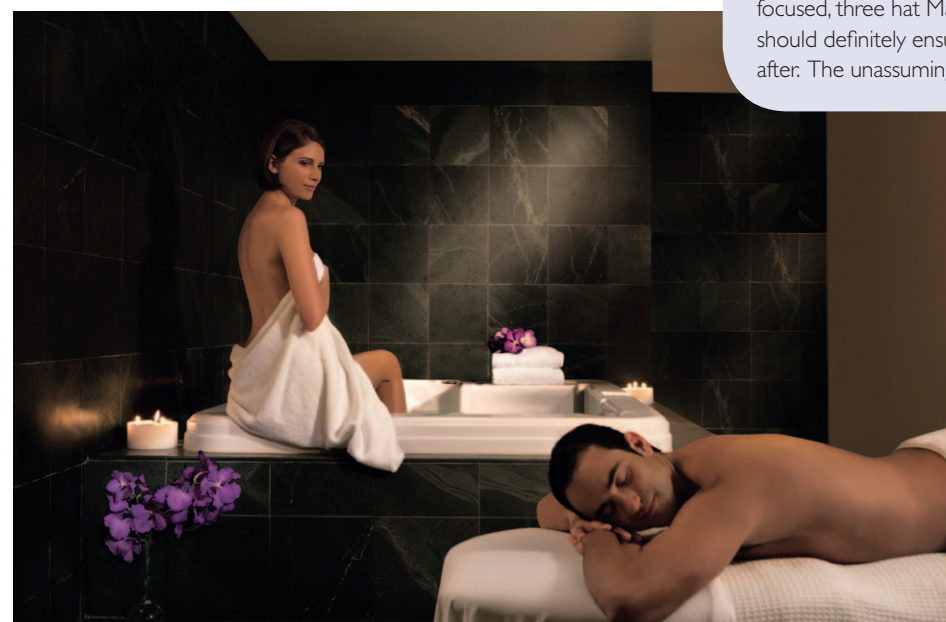
GOURMANDS

If food is the way to your other half's heart then the pricey (but undeniably worth it) degustation menu at the French-focused, three hat Marque restaurant should definitely ensure a happy ever after. The unassuming exterior belies a

foodie heaven where a seemingly endless stream of mouthwatering course after mouthwatering course is served. And, best of all, dishes tend to come in lots of one-fork bites - perfect for feeding each other. www.marquerestaurant.com.au

spa hounds

When the hustle and bustle of the big city gets too much, do as stressed-out Sydneysiders do and retreat to a spa for a bit of TLC. The Four Seasons spa has six designated couples treatment rooms, complete with private steam shower and double whirlpool. And there's a range of indulgent treatment packages to choose from, whether you're looking for a simple full-body massage or a complete head-to-toe overhaul. www.fourseasons.com/sydney





THRILL-SEEKERS

Feeling adventurous? For couples who err on the side of daring, Manly's OceanWorld hosts a couples-only shark dive on Friday evenings. Open to divers of all skill levels, the 30-minute dive will allow you to get up close with grey nurse sharks, stingrays and sea turtles. The dive includes a training session in the pool and shark awareness brief. www.myfun.com.au

culture vultures

Though Sydney has more museums and world class galleries than you can shake a stick at, if you're looking for something a bit different then a visit to the serene Baha'i Temple is a must. Located on Sydney's Northern Beaches, the towering nine-sided temple is one of only seven Baha'i places of worship in the world. And its picturesque nine hectares of gardens provide ample opportunities for a romantic hand-in-hand stroll. www.bahai.org.au



RETAIL junkies

If you're looking for a unique shopping experience – and one that will keep both of you entertained – then Glebe's weekend market is the place to go. A Sydney institution, the market sees a bohemian mix of locals and young designers hawking everything from cutting-edge fashion and antiques to handicrafts and delectable foods. Shopped out? Grab a drink and enjoy the live music or head to one of the massage stalls for some serious muscle kneading. www.glebemarkets.com.au

LUXURY-LOVERS

A luxurious hotel is essential for any romantic trip, and handily the Hilton Sydney has created the ultimate luxe package for lovers. The 'Love Me, Love Me Not' includes everything from Champagne baths (poured by the resident 'bath master') and tailored candelit dinners à deux to your very own 'proposal consultant', if you're planning on popping the question! www.hiltonsydney.com.au

