

Joshua Sheldon/Alamy



Hidden from prying eyes, with room for just the two of you, these are the UK and Ireland's most beguiling love nests. Treat yourselves...

1 THE WATER TOWER
Cornwall

Once upon a time, Rapunzel let down her hair, and she did it from somewhere like this. With arrow slits and a conical roof, the Water Tower looks as if it's been pinched off a medieval Bavarian castle — it was designed as a reservoir for Treilissick House, then the Victorian builders went a bit gothic. Granted, it's on a popular National Trust estate, so the grounds may be populated by day — but from the heights of your dining room, 50 steps up the spiral staircase, you'll be as secluded as you like. Stroll the splendid gardens, swim or surf from the nearby beaches, then return for some fairy-tale romance.

From £267 for two nights, through National Trust Holiday Cottages; 0844 800 2070, nationaltrustcottages.co.uk



2 THE LIMIT
Cornwall

On the outside, it looks like an ordinary, if somewhat sheltered, 1930s clapboard beach hut, but on the inside, it's as louche as a love nest as any lothario could wish for. For her: fluffy towels, Cowshed toiletries, crisp linens and varnished wooden floors. For him: leather sofas, the crackling beach break at Holywell Bay and, ahem, the lovely romantic golf course.

From £695 for four nights, through Unique Homestays; 01637 881942, uniquehomestays.com

3 THE BEACH HUT
Cornwall

Yes, we've included three in Cornwall, but you try choosing between them. Marooned at the end of a single-track rollercoaster of a road five miles south of Bude, this erstwhile 1920s tearoom is perched just above a tiny cove, hidden away from holiday hoi polloi by an amphitheatre of gnarly cliffs that rise sheer from the sea. Licked by sea spray, the clapboard veranda is so surf-shack chic, it's been used in a Tori Amos music video. Wood-burning stove for winter nights, South West Coast Path right

4 LONGBARROW WINDMILL
Devon

It was built more than 200 years ago for grinding corn, but now Longbarrow Windmill is a four-floor bolt hole rising from a hilltop field. With 20-mile views over the South Hams from the window-ringed top floor, it has the feel of a landlocked lighthouse, perfect for battenning down the hatches on a stormy winter night. It's neat and snug inside, but if you must venture out, the tearooms of Totnes and the wild walking of Dartmoor are a short drive away.

Long weekends from £300; 01803 316191, devonwindmills.co.uk

5 ROSIE CARAVAN
Dorset

Rosie is an exquisitely restored gypsy caravan, built in 1934 and now tucked away in a suitably deserted spot at the Old Forge, near Shaftesbury, Dorset. There's not a huge amount inside, but what's there is cute. The double bed is described as cosy — meaning small — and the owners, Tim and Lucy Kerridge, coyly suggest

that you climb into it and "spend the evenings chatting together". From £85 a night, B&B, through Canopy & Stars (01275 395447, canopyandstars.co.uk)

6 THE SHACK
Isle of Wight

A pint-sized beach hut only footsteps from the sand near Ryde, the Shack is as simple as it is romantic, with two or three solar-powered hours of lighting a night, a galley kitchen and views across the Solent from beside the cosy wood-burning stove that'll have you praying for rain. There are two bedrooms here (just about), but this is a love shack *par excellence*: sharing it with kids is just plain wrong.

From £165 for two nights, including firewood, with Vintage Vacations; 07802 758113, vintagevacations.co.uk. Add £24 for breakfast packs

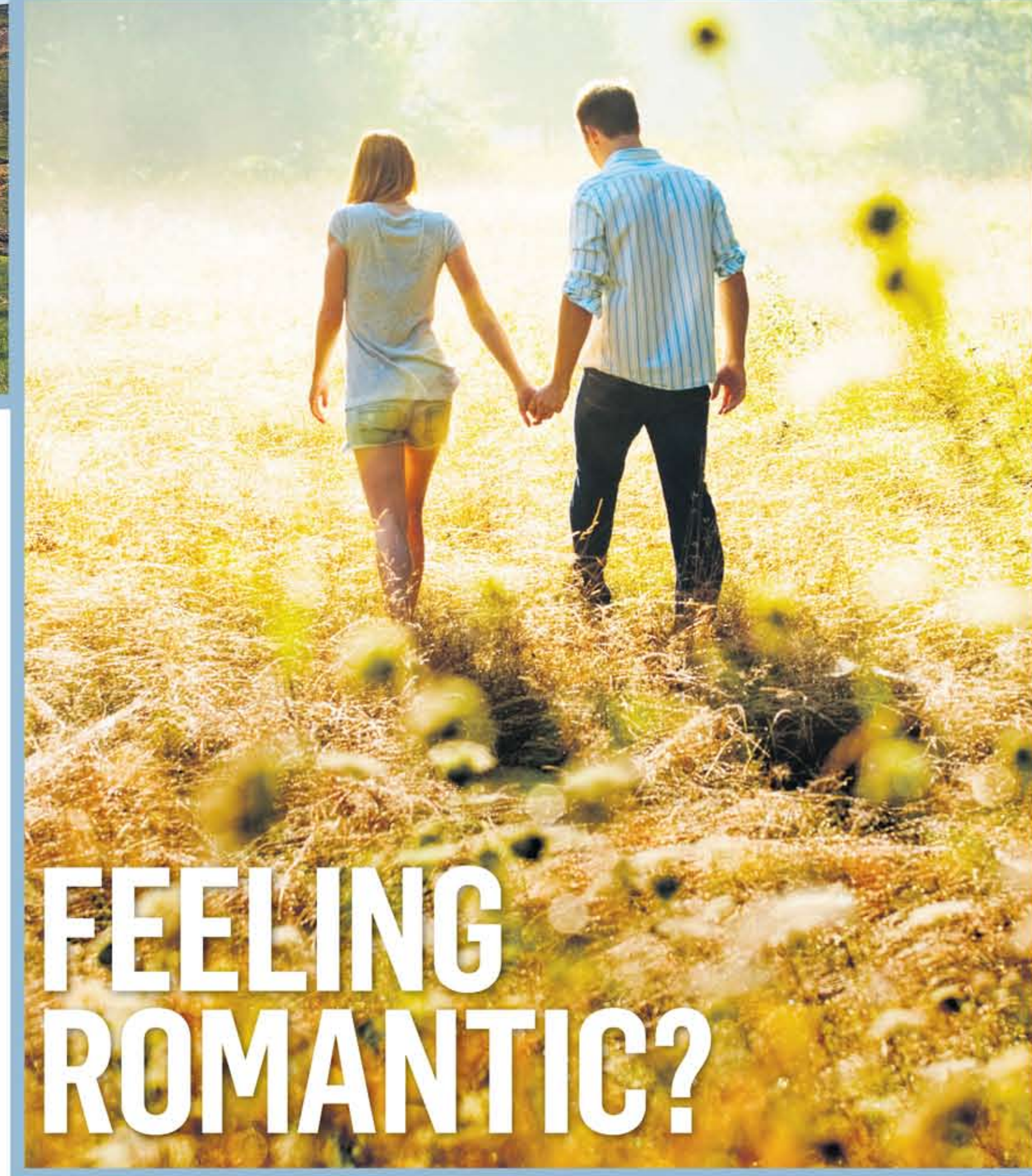
7 ON THE WATER
London

This one's a bit different, because it floats. How about a preposterously romantic houseboat tethered on the Regent's Canal, just outside London Zoo? Inside, a huge open-plan bedroom and loafing area leads through tall glass doors to an outdoor dining space. You probably won't want to get off, but, if you do, there are buses that stop outside the zoo to take you into town; or you can rent Boris bikes from the Gloucester Slips docking station.

From £500 for two nights, including a breakfast bar, through Canopy & Stars; 01275 395447, canopyandstars.co.uk

8 ROWAN COTTAGE
Brecon Beacons

The information pack says that wellies should be brought "in all seasons", and, given the romance of this 16th-century stone cottage, they might be all the outdoor kit you need. The gumboots are for the last leg of the journey, when you have to abandon your car and stride into the wide Welsh yonder. Once installed, you have an enormous slice of the Brecon Beacons to explore, including 55,000 acres of roadless mountain right on the doorstep. You probably



won't need it. Rowan Cottage has a wood-burning stove, a freestanding bath, a cruck-framed bedroom and wall-to-wall Farrow & Ball. Lock the door, get your wellies off: the rest is up to you.

From £375 for two nights, through Brecon Beacons Holiday Cottages; 01874 676446, breconcottages.com

9 BLUEBELLS
Leicestershire

Ever since city girls decided that camping was glamorous, mouldy

tents in Somme-like locations have been marketed as "glamping" sites. Most of them aren't, but Bluebells is a cut above. Yes, it's a tent, and yes, it's on the edge of a wood in Leicestershire, but inside it's as indulgent as any brick-built love nest, from the wood-burning range and whistling Le Creuset kettle to the leather trunks, battered old chesterfield and candlelit rolltop bath.

From £389 for three nights, including a breakfast hamper, through The Dandelion Hideaway; 01455 292888, thedandelionhideaway.co.uk

10 ANCHOR BOTTLE
Norfolk

If you've ever driven through the pretty seaside village of Blakeney and wished you could stay the night, we know the place. Anchor Bottle is a secret hideaway above a pretty gift shop on a narrow lane near the quay. Inside, you'll find a posh kitchen, a posh bathroom, a comfy living room and a huge double bed with an arched window overlooking Blakeney Point.

From £245 for two nights, through Blakeney Boltholes; 01263 800326, blakeneyboltholes.co.uk

11 LILE COTTAGE
Cumbria

Despite the heart-melting views across emerald Furness countryside to the ruins of Gleaston Castle, Lile Cottage is, frankly, a pigsty. But don't let that put you off. This former home to Cumberland sausagemeat is now the poshest former pigsty in the northwest, a Grade II-listed hideaway with a trout beck at the bottom of the garden, one double bedroom, a kitchen and not much else. With pubs and restaurants in short supply — excepting the excellent



fish and chips in Barrow-in-Furness, just down the road — this is a place to hole up with supplies. From £220 for three nights, through Gleaston Water Mill; 01229 869244, watermill.co.uk

12 THE PIGSTY
North Yorkshire

What are the chances? Here's another pigsty. Its previous porcine owners must have been chuffed with this timber-columned mini palace, which is believed to have been built in the 19th century. It has a wood-burning stove and views through huge picture windows towards Robin Hood's Bay. There's no room for kids — the Pigsty is just a bedroom, a kitchen and a lounge — so pack wine, bring boots and soak up the views after a windswept clifftop walk on the nearby Cleveland Way.

From £227 for four nights, through The Landmark Trust; 01628 825925, landmarktrust.org.uk

13 THE BOAT HOUSE
Northumberland

Formerly the working boathouse for the Middleton Hall estate, near Bamburgh, this is an almost impossibly romantic retreat. Sat on stilts over the lake itself, the open-plan building has a fabulous veranda with a barbecue, and there's a rowing boat with oars if lapping up the floor-to-ceiling lake views from your bed isn't quite magic enough. Almost half a mile from its nearest neighbour, the Boat House is only a few miles from Lindisfarne and a string of stunning strands, with Scremerston and

Bamburgh beaches both as ludicrously empty as they are beautiful. From £440 for three nights, through Crabtree & Crabtree; 01835 8226711, crabtreeandcrabtree.com

14 RED COTTAGE
Argyll

Cut adrift from the Ardnamurchan peninsula, Eilean Shona is a magical, car-free, beach-fringed private island at the mouth of Loch Moidart, with a magnificent estate house and seven self-catering cottages reached from Dorlin Pier by boat. Frankly, any one of them would rekindle the relationship embers, but our favourite is Red Cottage, perched high on a wee hill overlooking a wild, secluded bay at the island's eastern tip. Hidden by towering trees and visited only by the odd pine marten, this gorgeous stone and rust-roofed cottage has views over Ardnamurchan's glens and bens to make your inner Highlander sing.

From £365 for a week, including ferry crossings, through Unique Cottages; 01835 822277, unique-cottages.co.uk

15 THE BOTHY
Loch Nevis

In the far west of Scotland, beside Loch Nevis (Gaelic for "loch of heaven"), you'll find the Bothy, the sole remains of a community that has long gone. The only other building is the old schoolhouse, also abandoned, and the only living neighbours are two friendly pigs called Babe and Mac. Inside, it has stone floors, an oil-fired stove, exposed beams and open fires. There's no parking, though — not because of lack of space, but because there's no road. You arrive by



Love nests for rent: watch a slideshow of all 17 bolt holes at thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel

16 GEAGLUM COTTAGE
Co Fermanagh

Close your eyes and picture a thatch-roofed cottage with a gypsy caravan parked outside. Walk through the red door and you're in a film-set depiction of Irish cutesiness, decorated by its loving owners, Paul and Kerri Johnson. Spend one night in the cottage and the next in the caravan, which has its own heating and another double bed. During the day, you could wander through the woods to the shores of Loch Erne or stroll to the little-visited nearby beach.

From £142 for two nights, through Under the Thatch; 0844 500 5101, underthethatch.co.uk

17 ROUNDSTONE
Co Galway

The romantically named Property 4248 sits at the bottom end of a three-mile single-track road in Connemara, overlooking Bertraghboy Bay. Thick whitewashed walls keep out Atlantic gales, an open fire keeps you warm and the views across the water to the Twelve Pins mountains will send you gooey. In the pretty fishing village of Roundstone, four miles away, you'll find Irish bars such as Mary Kings, the Shamrock and O'Dowd's.

From £248 for a week, through Imagine Ireland; 01756 707729, imagineireland.com

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