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Surrounded by blended families or not, keep those romantic getaways—just for two—a regular habit. At these relaxing inns with an active twist, gazing into each other's eyes is just the beginning.

BY SARA EDELSON

When looking for a romantic weekend getaway, visions of fluffy bathrobes, frilly duvets, and 600-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets can only get you so far. The truth is, vacation spots are as varied as the people who travel to them, and nothing is more romantic than finding a place that really speaks to both of you. Starting over can be stressful, and part of the joy of new beginnings is appreciating the quirky hobbies and different outlook of your new partner, and creating new experiences to enjoy as a couple. Discover an unusual weekend retreat, and you might just rediscover something about yourselves.

There's so much more to life than being engulfed in antiques.

Take It to the Heights ▶

KESWICK HALL
KESWICK, VA

This genteel turn-of-the-century Italianate estate is no simple B&B; rather, it's a 48-room luxury hotel, part of the lavish Orient Express worldwide property roster. But this 600-acre estate offers more than sumptuous surroundings: It's the perfect place to explore the country sports of gentlemen and gentlewomen. Take a turn at a customized clay-shooting excursion, or try your hand at fly-fishing on the property's well-stocked lake (instructors and equipment provided).

If those, or the more traditional golf, tennis, pools, and pampering spa, begin to bore you, take your weekend to new heights: Climb into a hot air balloon for a bird's eye view of the peaks and valleys of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

RATES: Rooms start at \$425 per night.

CONTACT: 434-979-3440; 800-274-5391;
www.keswick.com



MID-ATLANTIC Retreats

11 CHARGED SPOTS TO FUEL YOUR PASSIONS

This Castle Rocks ▶

**BUHL MANSION GUEST HOUSE & SPA
SHARON, PA**

This honest-to-goodness castle gives new meaning to living the American version of Queen for a Day. Nineteenth-century steel magnate Frank Buhl brought in 150 Italian stonemasons to create his dream house; they were awarded U.S. citizenship for their labors. Today, after a multimillion-dollar renovation by current owner—and inventor of The Club, a car-theft-spurning device—James E. Winner, Jr., the property offers 10 richly furnished rooms, two of which have Jacuzzis actually placed within the castle's 28-foot-ceiling turrets.

Although it's in the small town of Sharon, in the far northwest corner of Pennsylvania, it features a full-service spa to make you feel like a million bucks. This palatial getaway may brutalize your bank account, but it sure will be worth it.

RATES: "Castle Escape Packages," from \$350 to \$450, include welcome tray, afternoon tea, champagne reception, and limo service to full-service restaurant at the innkeepers' other property, Tara.
CONTACT: 724-346-3046; 866-345-BUHL; www.buhlmansion.com

Civil War Civility ▼

**BATTLEFIELD BED & BREAKFAST INN
GETTYSBURG, PA**

Set smack on the border of Gettysburg National Military Park, this 1809 farmhouse inn offers much more than peace and quiet. The Union



There's a turret in your future, complete with Jacuzzi, if you settle in to the 19th-century Buhl Mansion castle refurbished by the inventor of The Club.

cavalry once camped and fought on the 30-acre property, and Friday night ghost storytelling sessions reveal a few of their haunts. Here, breakfast is much more than a meal: it's an early morning history program featuring costumed interpreters dressed in the famous blue and grey. Guests can even try on uniform jackets and hats, and fire a black powder musket.

If your partner's idea of romance includes tales of heroism or harrowing histories, this may be the perfect place to leave the modern world behind for a night or two. Roses and champagne will

keep your battles to a minimum. Surely, before you leave, you'll be fighting on the same side.

RATES: Period-themed rooms range from \$175 to \$225 a night for couples; private ensuite baths.
CONTACT: 717-334-8804; 888-766-3897; www.gettysburgbattlefield.com

It's a Dog's Life

**LAZY L AT WILLOW CREEK
LEWES, DE**

Stepdogs are part of the blended family too. If you can't bear to leave your canine companions behind, the Lazy L is a veritable paradise for four-legged significant others. The beach town inn allows two to three "well-behaved" pets per room, has a lighted dog run, and an outdoor shower to wash off Fido's sandy spots. (And it's not far from Rehoboth and its annual greyhound festival.)

For people, there's a heated swimming pool, kayak rentals, gourmet breakfasts, and free ice cream. And for humans and pups who both like some fun in the sun, nearby Cape Henlopen State Park allows leashed dogs to run on the beach year round.

RATES: Rooms from \$110 to \$209, depending on season. \$20 additional fee for each pet.
CONTACT: 302-644-7220; www.lazyl.net

Relive Civil War days—and nights—on the fringes of the Gettysburg battlefield, complete with uniformed soldiers joining the breakfast conversation.

Horsing Around Encouraged ▶

**SHANGRILA RETREAT
SOUTH BOSTON, VA**

Innkeepers Gary and Julie Holmes started their own love story on a trail ride and invite you to join the horsey set at their aptly named Shangrila Retreat, complete with 500 surrounding acres of rolling Virginia countryside.

If the family is coming along, or if spreading out is in order, the Old Home Place, an 1801 dwelling with three bedrooms, two fireplaces—including one in a bedroom—and rocking-chair porch, is the perfect bunkhouse. But the cozy and private Log Cabin, tucked in a glade in the woods overlooking a pasture, is ideal for couples. Trail rides are included in your lodgings, with hayrides and wagon rides for the off hours.

RATES: Packages, from \$495 to \$540 per person for a 3-day, 2-night stay, include trail rides, meals, accommodations, and horses. Check in as early as 10 a.m.

CONTACT: 434-517-0888; www.shangrilaretreat.us

Sail Away Home ▼

**SCHOONER WOODWIND
BOAT & BREAKFAST
ANNAPOLIS, MD**

Forget the bed in your B&B search. When staying in Annapolis, the sailing capital of the world, you need a *boat* and breakfast, and the *Schooner Woodwind* fits the bill nicely. This 74-foot wooden sailing yacht departs on four 2-hour cruises daily



More than 500 acres of rolling farmland await you and your steed at Virginia's Shangrila Retreat.

around Annapolis Harbor, but on summer weekends, it transforms into a floating hotel. Up to four couples can come aboard per night; each has a private stateroom, but guests share two heads (bathroom to you landlubbers).

After a romantic sunset cruise, the *Woodwind* docks for the night. Head for a waterside dinner in Maryland's historic capital, with its fine colonial architecture and great seafood restaurants. Then stroll along the marina to admire the other huge vessels tied up in Ego Alley, and grin—you've got your own yacht for the night.

RATES: Saturday nights only from first weekend in May until last weekend in September. A double-occupancy stateroom is \$289 and includes sunset cruise and breakfast aboard.

CONTACT: 410-263-8619; www.schoonerwoodwind.com/boatandbreakfast.asp

Now You're Cooking ▶

**INN AT MEANDER PLANTATION
LOCUST DALE, VA**

Built in 1776, Meander Plantation is flush with gentility in the heart of Virginia's Piedmont region. It's just a short drive from Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, but this lovely country inn, featuring a manor house and updated outbuildings with rooms or suites, is more than a historic place to lay your head.

A sunset cruise is just the beginning of a romantic getaway on *Schooner Woodwind*, your in-harbor lodging in the heart of Annapolis.

Calling all gastronomists: The chef/innkeeper serves up a multicourse dining experience three nights a week and will even teach you to replicate it at home. The 2-day cooking school, on Mondays and Tuesdays throughout the year, includes two hands-on classes, a field trip to a local grower, lunches prepared during instruction, topped off with a five-course wine dinner. You might expect wine-enthusiast—and frequent visitor—Jefferson himself to pop in.

RATES: Cooking classes, meals, and one night's accommodation for two, \$850.

CONTACT: 800-385-4936; www.meander.net

No "Hell's Kitchen" here; Meander Plantation's cooking classes evoke the genteel life, just like the surroundings.



Flights of Fancy ▶

CHESTNUT COVE B&B
FARNHAM, VA

Relaxing overlooking the marshes of Virginia's Northern Neck isn't a bad way to spend a weekend, but creating a piece of art—now that's something special. At Bob and Barney Harris's Chestnut Cove B&B, a day turning those ospreys or windrushes into a unique piece of stained glass is a day well spent. Their studio, Zekiah Glass, attached to the two-guestroom riverside inn, is home to classes offered by Barney Harris, who guides guests from the creation of a design straight through picking and cutting specialty glass onto the finishing touches—no experience required.

If your spouse isn't the crafty type, former NASA glass artisan Bob Harris will whisk him or her off to flight school. He builds and races model helicopters in worldwide competitions, and he'll take time out of his stained-glass tasks to teach the basics on the nearby fields. Lesson One: It's not as easy as it looks.

RATES: Glass class, \$200, includes lunch and all materials except glass. Rooms range from \$200 to \$220 double occupancy. Remote-control helicopter flight school, \$200 a day.

CONTACT: 804-394-3142; www.zekiahglass.com

Vineyard Vine Time ▼

FINCASTLE VINEYARD BED & BREAKFAST
FINCASTLE, VA

If it's the wine that draws you, tap it at the source at this intimate Virginia inn. The 1926 farmhouse near the Blue Ridge Parkway features two bright

A glass of wine and thou, as the saying goes, sets the tone for a vineyard weekend, perfectly poured at Fincastle.



Bob and Barney Harris's love of stained glass, flying, and the beauty of the Northern Neck are infectious, and worthy of more than a night in their unique B&B.

rooms, and guests can stroll through the vineyards and gardens before deciding which bottles to taste and take home with them.

The little town of Fincastle, 325 residents strong, has Jeffersonian roots; its courthouse was reportedly designed by the famous architect/founding father himself. It's the perfect stopover for those who don't equate their "cabs" with taxis.

RATES: Rooms from \$115 to \$135. Vineyard open Thursday to Monday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and by appointment.

CONTACT: 540-591-9000; www.fincastlebb.com

It's Relaxing Being Green

MIRACLE FARM B&B
FLOYD, VA

If you're a couple who cares about its carbon footprint, you can get away without giving up your convictions. At Miracle Farm, a working farm off the Blue Ridge Parkway near Floyd, Virginia, guests can settle into one of four private retreats, from a fully outfitted farmhouse to a rustic riverside cabin, complete with a four-course, organic, meatless breakfast each morning.

Hosts Karen Osborne and Ed Cohn run the B&B to fund their farm, a nonprofit sustainable living center and animal sanctuary. They create their "permaculture" by building with recycled or local materials, growing their own organic food, and generating their own energy. Karen, a Pilates instructor, can also provide workouts and massages. If that doesn't calm you, lolling in the river surely will.

RATES: Farmhouse, from \$125 to \$155; Creekside Cottage, \$105-\$125; Creekside Rustic, \$105-\$125; Riverview Cabin, \$95-\$115 per night, including breakfast.

CONTACT: 540-789-2214; www.miraclefarmbnb.com

Lord of the Manor

GRAMERCY MANSION BED & BREAKFAST
BALTIMORE, MD

Yachts aside, you can still see how the other half used to live on dry land in baronial Baltimore by taking a room at Gramercy Mansion. Built in 1902 by railroad tycoon Alexander Cassatt, brother of the famous Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt, the enormous English Tudor country house was a wedding gift for his daughter, Eliza. Today, this bed-and-breakfast mansion, overlooking Greenspring Valley, welcomes guests to its 11 rooms with rich features, like antique period furniture, huge damask-covered beds, and whirlpool tubs with 24-karat-gold-plated faucets.

If you tire of lounging about like royalty, check out the Olympic-sized swimming pool and tennis courts, or just stroll about the flower gardens and 45 acres of woodlands. You, too, could have your wedding here, though, sadly, you shouldn't count on getting a mansion as a present.

PRICING: Rooms and suites range from \$150 to \$375.

CONTACT: 410-486-2405; 800-553-3404; www.gramercymansion.com

Freelance writer and video producer *Sara Edelson*, who contributes to travel magazines as well as *Discovery Channel* and *History Channel* series, lives in Washington, DC.