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## Romantic books to read as a couple

Photo Courtesy: Ask Media Group Summer is in full swing and there's nothing like heading to the beach — or the park — sitting by the water, contemplating the view, grabbing a good book and just immersing ourselves in it. That's why we're throwing out some ideas for the perfect summer novels. We are adhering to "beach reads" rules though: most of the titles here are either total page-turners or grant some instant gratification — or both. And all of them will transport you to faraway places or the kind of setting you'd enjoy spending a vacation at, either because of when they were written or where they are set. "The Talented Mr. Ripley" by Patricia Highsmith (1955) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads The oldest book on this list is the first one in a series of five psychological thrillers that Patricia Highsmith wrote about her infamous Tom Ripley character. Even if he's a sociopath with more than murderous tendencies, the reader can't avoid being on Ripley's side while reading Highsmith's engrossing novels. The whole series is set in Europe with the first book taking its protagonist and the reader to San Remo, Rome, Palermo and Venice. Plus, there's a constant longing for a trip to Greece. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads This Australian classic is set in 1900 and features a group of boarders from an all-girls school in Victoria as they take a day trip to the nearby geological formation Hanging Rock. There are plenty of descriptions of proper picnic attire, the beauty of the landscape and the relationships that bond this group of teenagers and their teachers. And while Joan Lindsay's writing style and the setting for this novel may have you drawing some parallels with other classic coming-of-age novels written by and starring women, the ending of Picnic at Hanging Rock could only have been written in the 1960s. "Los mares del Sur" (Southern Seas) by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1979) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Allow me the hometown reference with this Spanish novel set in Barcelona in 1979. Written by the Galician-Catalan author Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Southern Seas is the most famous of his novels starring the private detective Pepe Carvalho. He's a gourmet who's equally obsessed with food, literature and the city of Barcelona. Besides a methodical description of the city in the late 1970s, the book also includes references to a trip to the Southern Seas that never was. "Norwegian Wood" by Haruki Murakami (1987) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Written by Japanese author Haruki Murakami, this coming-of-age novel follows the story of Toru Watanabe, a college student who is obsessed with American literature. He's trying to figure out his life in Tokyo in the 1960s and ends up in relationships with two women who couldn't be more different: there's Naoko, the former girlfriend of his best friend, and Midori, one of his classmates. The story takes the reader from the bustling streets of Tokyo to the peaceful quietness of a rehab center lost in the mountains nearby Kyoto. "Get Shorty" by Elmore Leonard (1990) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Small-time Miami loan shark Chili Palmer travels to Las Vegas, hoping to get a debt paid, and ends up in Los Angeles, where he learns about the movie-making business and how to become a producer. Set in Hollywood in 1990, this California classic masterfully blends suspense, thrills, humor and even the slightest hint of a Western. This story is so quintessentially Hollywood that there's a 1995 movie adaptation starring John Travolta and a 2017 TV show with Chris O'Dowd, but you should definitely start with the Elmore Leonard novel. "Death at La Fenice" by Donna Leon (1992) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads American novelist Donna Leon has been calling Venice home for years. Her first book in the mystery series that stars the Venetian police detective Guido Brunetti follows the investigation of a music conductor's death after he's poisoned during the intermission of a Verdi opera at La Felice. Leon has been steadily publishing one new Commissario Guido Brunetti installment a year for decades. So if you love the Venetian setting, crime stories and the constant descriptions of all the delicious foods (and drinks) that Brunetti ingests on a daily basis, this could definitely be the series for you. "Call Me by Your Name" by André Aciman (2007) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Chances are we'll never get to see Luca Guadagnino's sequel to his Call Me by Your Name movie adaptation. And while André Aciman's follow-up novel, Find Me, may leave hardcore fans of Elio and Oliver a little bit underwhelmed, there's nothing like going back to the original material. Set against the backdrop of the Italian Riviera, this coming-of-age story follows the precocious Elio as he falls in love with Oliver, a graduate student and Elio's parents' guest for the summer. This iconic summer read perfectly captures the feeling of longing for someone and it features plentiful, engaging conversations, early morning swims, leisurely bike rides, a furtive relationship and a passionate trip to Rome. "Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie sets this story — that deals with immigration, race and the feeling of belonging — in Lagos, London and New Jersey. Her protagonist is Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who moves to the United States to further her studies. Americanah makes for a great read not only as an engaging and entertaining novel but also as a study about race in America from the perspective of a non-American Black person. The novel also packs a complex love story between Ifemelu and Obinze, who moves to London and has to live there as an undocumented immigrant. "Big Little Lies" by Liane Moriarty (2014) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads I don't care if you've already seen the star-packed HBO miniseries and know not only who the killer of this story is but also the identity of the person who dies and whose investigation propels the whole plot, Liane Moriarty's soapy thriller still very much deserves a read. On the one hand, instead of the rugged coast of Northern California, the novel Big Little Lies is set in the suburban Northern Beaches of Sydney. On the other hand, the book jams enough humor and sharp banter — especially when it comes to the inclusion of dialogue from the police interrogations among the many parents who take their kids to the same school as our protagonists — that you'll find enough nuggets of new material to more than justify the read. "The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo" by Taylor Jenkins Reid (2017) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Taylor Jenkins Reid's historical fiction bestseller is set between the publishing world of present-day New York and the classic Hollywood of the 1950s, 1960s and onward. When the relatively unknown journalist Monique Grant is tasked with writing a profile on the legendary actress Evelyn Hugo, she can't believe her career-changing luck. The novel guides the reader through a series of interviews between Monique and Evelyn in which the former star tells her origin story and the reasons behind her many marriages throughout the years. "Less" by Andrew Sean Greer (2017) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Andrew Sean Greer's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel stars Arthur Less as a novelist with a dwindling career and a broken heart. As if all of that wasn't enough already, Less is on the brink of turning 50. When his former long-time boyfriend invites Less to his wedding, our hapless protagonist decides to embark on a series of back-to-back international trips with a "ranshackle itinerary" to avoid the much-dreaded event. Greer's fun and never-quiet novel takes the reader and its protagonist from the foggy shores of San Francisco to New York City, Mexico City, Turin, Paris, Berlin, Morocco, India and Japan. "Agent Running in the Field" by John le Carré (2019) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads The last published novel of late spymaster John le Carré is a return to some of his career-defining themes in the world of international espionage, which he describes with precision — and without a glimpse of glamour or spectacle. The novel stars Nat, a reluctant-to-be-out-of-the-field agent in his late forties, who has had a long career developing sources in Russia. Nat's back in London and somehow can't avoid getting himself involved in yet another surveillance plot. The book is set in 2018 and there's constant chatter among its characters regarding Brexit and the Trump administration. Le Carré favors none of those. Even if you don't like international thrillers featuring double agents that much — who doesn't though? — Agent Running in the Field is still worth a read if only to appreciate Le Carré's succinct yet masterfully rich and descriptive prose. "Beach Read" by Emily Henry (2020) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Let's add Beach Read to this list of beach reads because Emily Henry's romance novel truly does its title justice. Set in a small Michigan town, the novel tells the story of bestselling romance author January and acclaimed fiction writer Gus. They end up being neighbors and living side-by-side in lakefront cottages. One thing leads to another and they end up making a deal: by the end of the summer he'll be the one to pen a romance book and she'll write a dark and bleak one. They both need to teach the other everything they need to know to be able to produce something in a genre they're not used to working in. Of course, besides all the procrastinating and writing, there's also time for love. "The Vanishing Half" by Brit Bennett (2020) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Last year's revelatory novel The Vanishing Half tackles the subject of passing when it comes to racial identity. The Brit Bennett-penned historical novel, which is already being developed into a limited series by HBO, tells the story of two identical twin sisters from a small town in rural Louisiana where the majority Black population is so light-skinned that one of the sisters passes as a white woman for most of her life after fleeing town. The action encompasses several decades starting in the 1950s and weaves together the life of the assimilated sister — who's leading a double life in New Orleans first and then Los Angeles — with that of the other one, who is forced to return home. "Velvet Was the Night" by Silvia Moreno-Garcia (2021) Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Let's close this list with an August release from one of 2020's bestselling authors. After her Mexican Gothic was chosen as Best Horror novel last year by the Goodreads users, author Silvia Moreno-Garcia returns with Velvet Was the Night. The Mexican Canadian author sets the action in 1970s Mexico City and writes about Maitte, a secretary obsessed with romance stories and her beautiful neighbor Leonora. When the object of her fixation disappears, Maitte starts looking for her — but she isn't the only one. MORE FROM ASK.COM



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