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Valentine's Day Dates? Think Outside the Chocolate Box

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If you're looking to treat your sweetheart this Valentine's Day, don't be afraid to think outside the chocolate box and plan a date that you'll both be crazy over.

We checked in with experts to find eight special date options under \$200 that go beyond the traditional dinner and a movie and are guaranteed get the heart pumping.

Trapeze School

Trapeze lessons may sound a little extreme, but the point is to do something that gets your blood flowing but is more interesting than a simple workout at the gym.

Check local athletic complexes for activities like trampolining, controlled bungee jumping, or giant foam pits where you can spend an afternoon tumbling around together, suggests Paulette Kouffman Sherman, psychologist and dating coach and author of *Dating From The Inside Out: How to Use The Law of Attraction in Matters of the Heart*.

If you're feeling really daring, check local listings for stunt schools; some towns have facilities with trained performers and offer lessons to people looking for a few hours of adrenaline-pumping fun.

It can be really great to do this, and just go laugh with somebody, but with the caveat of checking out who your sweetheart is, Sherman says. There are some people who would rather get the flowers and the necklace than get shot out of a cannon.

Trapeze lessons along with stunt schools can range in price from \$50 to \$100 per person, according to Sherman.

Create a Scavenger Hunt

You may think of scavenger hunts as something for the kids, but they can be a meaningful experience for couples, according to Sherman.

Some companies offer professional Valentine's Day scavenger hunts in cities like New York, where couples are given a list of places to visit where they'll find tasty treats like cupcakes or wine and cheese waiting to be discovered. Tours like these typically cost around \$50 per person.

If you are in a town and that doesn't offer professional hunts, it's even sweeter if you make your own, says Sherman.

Look back through your history together, and make your own scavenger hunt that takes you to places that have meaning for the two of you, recommends Sherman. Think about the place you met, the place where you got engaged, and you could even give your significant other little presents along the way.

A modified version of a scavenger hunt could include doing an evening rundown of favorite things, like going to see a favorite show or stopping for dessert at a favorite restaurant.

A One-Day Cruise to Nowhere

For just \$79 per person, cruise lines including Norwegian and Carnival offer what are known as cruises to nowhere, which leave the harbor (right now, New York and Miami harbors are the



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only two options) at 4:00 on a Friday night, and return by 9:00 the next morning. Included in the cost is a suite for the evening and all-you-can-eat food.

Basically, you stay up all night eating and drinking, the boat cruises into international waters long enough for some gambling, and then you come home, Sherman said. Even with port taxes thrown into the bill, it's still a good deal when you think about how much an evening at a bed and breakfast and two or three meals would cost.

For couples with kids who find it difficult to get away for an entire week, a cruise to nowhere is a great idea, Sherman said.

It's just one night away, so it's much easier to get grandma or a sitter to stop in for just one evening, but you still get the thrill of going on a cruise, she said.

A Nature Night

If weather permits, touring a botanical garden for an evening under the stars can be a nice change of pace, advises Jill Spiegel, author of *The Flirtologist's Guide to Dating*.

It really is for everyone and you do save money, said Spiegel. Just strolling and holding hands can be as exciting as a concert. As adults, we often forget to do these little things.

Be sure to take a long a few little things to make your evening brighter. For those interested in making wishes for the future, take along a penny or two and make a wish into a fountain. If you're headed to dinner afterward, enjoy your appetizer in the garden with wine and cheese, suggests Spiegel.

Of course, taking a walking tour of a garden isn't the only thing to do at your local green space--many centers offer classes, for example, how to grow and train a Bonsai, or start your own herb garden, according to Debbie Mandel, author of *Turn On Your Inner Light: Fitness for Body, Mind and Soul*.

Hometown Honeymoon

It's easy to find a hotel near you with great Valentine deals and recreate your honeymoon without having to travel far, says Spiegel.

So many hotels have fantastic overnight deals that include a meal or romantic room service, and you get an evening together that feels like you got away, said Spiegel. Call around to hotels you know of, or look online for package deals.

A lot of hotels also offer spa services, so check listings to see about getting a couples massage while you're there, or relaxing in the steam room or sauna together, said Spiegel. If all else fails, spend a little time giving each other back rubs on the cheap.

Test Drive a Car Out of Your League

A relationship has to go the distance, says Mandel. If you look at couples who are in love, they have novelty in their lives. This is a novelty, you're being original, and you're having fun.

If you're going to test drive a fancy car, you better look the part, get dressed up, and own it, says Mandel. It also helps to make an appointment with a dealership so you know what they have in stock.

Wouldn't test drive anything less than a Porsche, says Mandel. Pick something that you can't buy either for financial or practicality's sake, and let the dealership know you'll be gone for half an hour.

In most cases if you ask nicely, (and you're dressed nicely) the salesperson won't come with you, Mandel says, but don't be surprised if they ask for a form of identification to be left with them while you're on your joy ride.

It's an adventure. It's being a kid again. Don't be hesitant, and don't look guilty. Get in there and have a great time and let the adrenaline flow, says Mandel.

Go to a Winery/ Wine Tasting

Even if you don't live in Napa Valley, there are often small, local wineries within a few miles drive, according to Mandel, who said it's important to be willing to be a tourist in your own neighborhood.

Some wineries plan for holidays like Valentine's Day, and they'll have a musician on hand, or even small finger foods to pair with the different types of wine, Mandel says. Hang around and taste a few varieties, pick your favorite, and go home and drink it.

If you don't have a winery nearby, check out local wine stores that may plan community-based events like wine tastings or classes at a restaurant or other venue. For the cost of a bottle of wine, (around \$30), many wine experts offer hour-long classes on how to pair wine with food and how to distinguish different types of wine.

Meditate Together

While you may be thinking of each other all the time, it never hurts to give things a little more focus, according to Mandel, who said that a meditation class can be a great way to relieve stress and spend time together.

All studios around town, and I think you'll be surprised that a lot of them offer free classes, or offer free meditation when you buy a yoga class, Mandel says.

Beginning meditation classes typically run around half an hour and most will offer lighted candles and soft music to set the mood, Mandel says. At the most, a class should cost around \$20, and the teacher will give you breathing techniques and sometimes a quick rundown on aromatherapy.

Honestly, you'll feel like you've been on vacation, said Mandel. Of course the catch is that you have to meditate about each other.

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