

THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

Crazy Sexy Cool Valentine's Day Date Ideas

Staycations, cooking classes, and aphrodisiacs for brownie points

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If you're a Valentine's Day pro, or in a long-term relationship with one, odds are good that you've worked your way through the usual suspects of Austin fine dining by now. Congratulations, my friend! It's time to level up your love game, with some of our favorite quirky V-Day event options.

Whether you're an adventurous couple looking for a day trip, need a little boost in the bedroom, have decided to keep things low key this year, or are ready to dive in and make a little romance with cooking classes, tastings, and dreamy staycations, there are many ways for you and your beau to make this Valentine's Day a memorable one.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Apis Restaurant & Apiary is offering a \$95 three-course prix fixe menu, with optional snack starters like Market Oysters and their famous egg toast. Appetizer choices include truffle pasta, Osetra caviar and dry aged beef tartare, plus entrées like six-day aged rohan duck and a Terrapurezza red wattle pig tasting. For dessert, it's a cheese plate with Apis honeycomb, or a slice of chocolate torte.



Apis (photo by John Anderson)

Out in Driftwood, Vista Brewing is hosting A Very Vista Valentine's Day with a three-course menu, featuring the seasonal harvest from their onsite "beyond organic" farm and sustainably-raised proteins sourced from local ranchers. Guests are encouraged to take a sunset stroll around the grounds, or snuggle up at one of the two fire pits before sitting down to their menu \$60 dinner for two. There's also a \$110 VIP package available if your sweetheart likes things sustainable and swanky.

Keep it local and cozy up for dinner and a show in the reclining leather seats at Violet Crown to watch Benny & Joon and nosh on movie theater snacks plus cafe offerings like cheese plates, Mediterranean plates, salads, avocado spring rolls, and ginger pork tapas, and tipples from the full cocktail bar.

APHRODISIACS

Ciclo at Four Seasons is emphasizing the sexytime aspects of this holiday with their Aphrodisiac Cart, stocked with what they refer to as (ahem) "romance-inducing items" like Texas Wagyu beef bites, oysters on the half shell, caviar, and bottles of champagne. Word's still out on whether they have a guy in the kitchen with a lead on off-brand Canadian Viagra. Aside from the cart, they'll be serving a \$95 four course dinner with dishes like hamachi crudo, bone marrow crusted filet mignon, and a champagne raindrop for dessert.

Your Valentine's Day dinner at Parkside, priced at \$50 with optional wine pairing, begins with a raw appetizer trio of salmon tartar, lemon and pistachio, a French kiss oyster with ginger and strawberry, and poached prawn, citrus and fennel, followed by a choice of entree from the regular menu. For dessert, there's red velvet cake, with lemon cream cheese mousse and winter fruits.

Caroline is featuring a number of special items including the Love Potion No. 9 cocktail, made from Tito's Vodka, lemon juice, creme de violet, strawberry cordial, and garnished with an elusive candy heart (RIP). There's also smoked beef tataki with togarashi rub, daikon & pear salad, fried shishito peppers, and red hot cinnamon cheesecake, plus a lobster dinner including woodland mushrooms, tomato provençal, and mustard tarragon butter.

At absinthe bar P  ch  ,   la carte specials will include oysters Rockefeller, crab-stuffed flounder, and a rack of lamb from IO Ranch.

Vino Vino is serving two menus, both priced at \$75 with optional wine pairings for an additional \$35. The romantic "Loves Me" menu includes New York strip steak with grilled onion and beef au jus, paired with Howard Park Cabernet Sauvignon, and strawberry shortcake with vanilla chantilly cream, paired with R  serve Priv  e Rivesaltes Muscat. The veggie comfort food "Loves Me Not" will include a simple snack of veggie sticks with farm crudit   and house ranch, paired with Vino Vino's "wine cooler," mac & cheese made from Cowgirl Creamery's Red Hawk, paired with Hops & Grain Pale Mosaic IPA, "fried chicken" with pickles and white gravy, paired with barrel aged "Jack and Coke," and a romcom-worthy ice cream sundae with chocolate sauce and potato chips, paired with a White Russian.

Olive & June has a special shared menu for two, at \$90 per couple plus tax and gratuity. Starting with an antipasti and a gemelli pasta with pork ragu, balsamic pickled strawberries, and ricotta salata. For your second, choose between two shared plates – 44 farms steak in tonnato sauce with crispy potatoes and Brussels sprout slaw, or monkfish with petite carrots, leek cream, and pistachios. Dessert is shared too: a chocolate torta with Texas strawberries and aged balsamic vinegar.

LOW-KEY

Kick the day off early at Jo's Coffee downtown, where they'll be serving specially-made heart-shaped strawberry pancakes.

Or head to Wild Chix & Waffles, where anyone who dines in on the holiday gets a complimentary dessert with their meal from 9am-3pm, including housemade banana pudding garnished with sliced bananas, whipped cream, waffle cookies, and mint.

Keep things chill at COVER 2 and COVER 3 where you'll get a complimentary glass of champagne and some chocolate dipped strawberries upon purchasing two entr  es or sandwiches and two beverages on V-day. No word on them having a rule that you can't eat both entrees/sandwiches yourself.

At Second Bar & Kitchen downtown they're running a \$25 special of a cheese board and bottle of bubbly, plus six "flirtatious emoji macarons" to share. There's also big bowl of pasta with meatballs, red sauce, and basil inspired by the scene in Lady and the Tramp where a human chef serves two dogs spaghetti despite the fact that they have no demonstrable ability to pay for it, giving us humans a heartwarming example of socialism at its finest.

Or just cut straight to the important part of the meal and head to Yummi Joy sweet shop for homemade fudge, dairy-free ice cream, truffles, and nostalgic candy and soda shop favorites. Mention the 2nd Street District special to buy one square of fudge and get another for free Feb. 7-14.

Thoroughbread is another good option, with their special chocolate-covered strawberry cookies, chocolate chip cookies stuffed with strawberry preserves, on sale for \$5 each with a buy six, get seven special Feb. 12-17.

HANDS-ON (WITH CONSENT)

If hands-on romance is more your style, It's Italian Cucina is offering a romantic Cucina d'Amore (that's cooking for love for all you monolingual types) cooking class on Feb. 25, a giftable item to keep that flame burning strong. For \$200 per couple, executive chef Al Fini will guide you and your one true love through the process of creating an authentic Northern Italian four-course meal, including scratch pasta, antipasto, and more. After you're done cooking, retire to the dining room to enjoy the fruits of your labors alongside a curated wine pairing.



It's Italian Cucina

Or head to Con' Olio on Feb. 12 for a Valentine's Day Eve Olive Oil 101 Class, starting off with a glass of wine before tasting your way through specially selected ultra premium extra virgin olive oils.

At Central Market's Cooking School they're gearing up for romance with couple-friendly classes all throughout February. Try the Night Up in Flames class, where, for \$70, you and the person who lights your heart aflame will learn how to take your fiery passion to the stovetop, flambéeing cheese, seafood, steaks & dessert to create saganaki, flaming lobster Lisa in a brandy cream sauce over noodles, steak Diane with a cognac sauce served with creamy mashed potatoes and fresh horseradish before ending on a classic flaming dessert note with Crepes Suzette.

Infinite Monkey Theorem is letting couples buy the gift that keeps on giving: massage skills not directly comparable to a vulcan death grip. Massage therapist Rebecca Diana will be on hand to teach you simple massage techniques that improve health and increase intimacy, with a glass of wine on the side.

STAYCATIONS

And if you're really hands-on in your approach to romance, maybe do us all a favor and skip the restaurants this year in favor of a staycation at nearby hotel. Stagecoach Inn in Salado is offering a \$129 Valentine's Day hotel package which includes the room, a

bottle of wine, and chocolates. In the dining room there will be a \$45 prix fixe menu, with tea bread and hushpuppies followed by your choice of a savory appetizer and entrée from the full menu, a chocolate and butterscotch chip brownie, and a complimentary glass of sparkling wine.

The Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Valentine's Day menu will be available Feb. 12-16 and features everything from Blue Point oysters and beef Wellington, to dessert options like sponge cake layered with house-made vanilla whipped cream and strawberry filling, joined by a smooth chocolate pot de crème topped with Luxardo cherries.



Hyatt Regency Lost Pines

The Lone Star Court is offering a S'more Love Romance Hotel Package includes overnight accommodations for two, two complimentary drinks in The Water Trough, a romance amenity and s'mores package to take to their fire pits, continental breakfast at The Water Trough, and complimentary wi-fi for your modern romantics planning on posting it all to Insta.

The Westin Austin Downtown is giving all couples a 20% discount of the second night of their stay between Feb. 8-18, plus access to the special Stella San Jac Valentine's Day menu.