

GREAT

By Erin Chan Ding



DATES

A good meal and bottle of wine is tried and true, but the real goal is creating a shared memorable experience

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omance can mean roses and candlelight, but it can also mean loads of laughs or an adrenaline-inducing adventure. It can mean a relaxing massage, a riverside stroll, or any experience, really, that gives us moments with someone we care about.

The western suburbs offer a palette of date options, whether you're planning for Valentine's Day or simply looking for fun things to do with your spouse or significant other.

FOR FIRST DATES

First dates are about finding time to converse and connect, and it's easy to do that when two people are on a walk, or better yet, a Riverwalk. Even in the winter, there's something intimate and romantic about strolling through the wooden covered bridges of the Riverwalk that winds through Naperville. Meander down the Riverwalk's 1.75 miles of brick paths and snap a few comical photos with the life-size statues of adults and children dotting the walk.

Get warm afterward in downtown Naperville with Cajun cuisine like grilled andouille sausage on sweet potato polenta mixed with a festive atmosphere at Heaven on Seven or go for some classic Italian rigatoni at La Sorella di Francesca.

If you go: Naperville Riverwalk - Access at Main and Jackson in downtown Naperville. **Heaven on Seven** - 224 S. Main St., Naperville. 630 717-0777, www.heavenonseven.com. **La Sorella di Francesca** - 18 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville. 630 961-2706, www.miafrancesca.com

FOR RELAXING AND REJUVENATING

It's possible, in this vast metro area, to get away without really getting away. Situated on the banks of the Fox River in Geneva, the Herrington Inn & Spa lures those who want to escape. Its intimate spa features heated marble floors in the locker rooms and an enticing ratio of 25 staffers for four treatment rooms.

One of those treatment rooms is designed for couples

massages, though Spa Director Molly Colabuono notes that therapists have portable tables that allow for massages in a couple's hotel room at the Herrington. Couples massages include any of the spa's half-dozen options, such as Swedish, deep tissue and "The Genevan," a treatment that uses a variety of oils.

"It allows people to get quiet time together in a different kind of environment," says Colabuono. "It's the ultimate if somebody is looking for a romantic weekend."

Colabuono adds that couples can customize their massages with special touches, such as adding glasses of wine or ordering a bath basket - there are six choices, with names like "Milk & Honey Oasis" and the "Champagne & Caviar Dreams" - for an in-room, post-massage treat.

For those opting to spend a night or two at the AAA Four-Diamond Herrington Inn, each stay includes a delivery of milk from Oberweis Dairy served in glass bottles and warm, soft chocolate chip cookies.

Should you choose to venture out for a hand-in-hand stroll through picturesque Geneva, check out Graham's Fine Chocolates, a few blocks southwest of the Herrington Inn. Watch candy being made before picking out a handful of homemade raspberry and Tahitian vanilla truffles. Then head two doors down to Graham's 318 coffee shop to share a pot of chocolate fondue.

If you go: Herrington Inn & Spa - 15 S. River Lane, Geneva, 630 208-7433, www.herringtoninn.com. Massages run 30 to 90 minutes and cost \$60 to \$140. Couples massages require a \$10 per person surcharge, and couples in-room massages cost an additional \$25 per person.

Graham's Fine Chocolates - 302 S. 3rd St, Geneva, 630 232-6655. **Graham's 318** - 318 Third St., Geneva. 630 845-3180, www.grahamschocolate.com.



For a luxurious yet informal date night, Gold Class Cinemas in Bolingbrook and South Barrington lets movie-goers enjoy dinner, snacks and drinks, all while watching a movie.

FOR ADRENALINE JUNKIES

Why go for a helicopter ride when you can actually fly the helicopter? At Bachman Aero in Schaumburg, owner Chris Bachman and his three instructors take people up in one or both of two slate-colored Hughes 269C aircraft.

Bachman begins with a pre-flight explanation of the helicopter instruments, including the cyclic control, which looks like a joystick and determines the direction in which the helicopter flies. The first opportunity to maneuver the dual-control helicopter comes about 30 seconds into the flight, when Bachman lets the helicopter hover over the ground and then allows students to steer the cyclic stick, sending the helicopter right or left.

A 30-minute flight takes students over Schaumburg and surrounding communities like Streamwood and Hanover Park. Over Busse Woods, at about 1,500 feet above sea level, students can do more flying. The helicopter responds to the lightest of touches, shooting forward or gently turning 180 degrees.

As a date, Bachman says flying a helicopter is “exciting. It’s definitely a great way to see everything.”

Because the helicopters only seat two people, dates can be done in what’s called a formation flight, meaning two aircraft each holding one instructor and one student go up simultaneously. Bachman says once or twice, a boyfriend has sent a girlfriend up for a flying lesson and waited for her on the ground, offering an engagement ring upon landing.

If the adrenaline rush induces an appetite, Pilot Pete’s Restaurant and Bar awaits near the helicopter pad. The restaurant boasts menu items like “turbulence salad” and “mango latitude chicken,” as well as

clear views of the airport’s runway.

If you prefer adrenaline rushes on the ground, try dueling with your date at Chicago Indoor Racing in Addison. (A second location is in Buffalo Grove.) This is serious go-kart driving, with participants donning race suits and helmets. Racers reach speeds upwards of 30 miles per hour on winding tracks that often cause spinouts as participants take curves at a full speed. A printout at the end of the races breaks down lap times and most important, tells you if you beat out your date.

If you go: **Bachman Aero** – 905 W. Irving Park Rd. at the Schaumburg Regional Airport. \$295 for a 30-minute lesson; \$400 for a one-hour lesson (one-hour lesson often flies toward downtown Chicago). Reservations required. Flight times available daily by appointment only. Call 877 435-6382 or visit www.bachmanaero.com; **Pilot Pete’s Restaurant and Bar** – 11 a.m.-12:30 a.m. daily. 847 891-5100, pilot-petes.com.

Chicago Indoor Racing – 2381 W. Army Trail Rd., Addison. 630 433-3700, www.chicagoindoorracing.com; \$25 per race for first two races and \$15 for every race thereafter.

FOR THE MOVIE MAVENS

Why have dinner and a movie when you can have dinner with the movie? At Hollywood Palms in Naperville and Hollywood Blvd. in Woodridge, films come with a choice of entrées like “The Whoopi Goldburger” and “The Kevin Bacon, Lettuce BLT,” as well as a selection of beer, wine and frozen drinks like daiquiris and margaritas.

Located on Route 59, Hollywood Palms in Naperville resembles the set of an Indiana Jones movie, complete with large boulders, towering columns, arching trees and even a waterfall. Beyond two bar areas, the walls boast pictures, some of them autographed, of film icons like Rita Moreno.

“It’s got a little theme, and it’s comfortable,” says Michelle Cruz, 25, of Carol Stream, who was catching a movie at the Palms on a recent Monday with her boyfriend, Ben Alonzo, 26, of Plainfield.

The theater they sat in featured plush, black leather seats that swiveled. Above them stood a figure of Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*, as well as the Tin Man. Throughout the show, servers whisked about, unobtrusively bringing movie-goers chicken sandwiches, sweet potato fries and Oreo pies.

“It’s a little more than just a movie,” adds Alonzo. “It’s different because you get to eat and sit at a bar. It’s a cool thing to do for a date.”

For the most luxurious movie experience in suburban Chicago, check out Gold Class Cinemas in Bolingbrook and South Barrington.

Arrive 30 minutes before the movie begins so you have plenty of time to relax in the lounge and share a couple glasses of champagne. Order menu items that can be easily eaten during movies, such as fajita quesadillas and chicken satay skewers. The theaters seat just 40 people or fewer and offer wide chairs that recline. To get extra cozy, ask for a pillow and blanket during the movie.

If you go: **Hollywood Palms** - 352 S. Rt. 59, Naperville, 630 428-5800, www.hollywoodpalmscinema.com. **Hollywood Blvd.** - 1001 W. 75th St., Woodridge, 630 427-1880, www.atriptothemovies.com; \$8 adults (\$11 for 3-D), \$6 for matinee shows before 5:30 p.m.

Gold Class Cinemas - The Arboretum of South Barrington, 100 W. Higgins Rd., South Barrington, 224 293-1001; and The Promenade Bolingbrook, 619 E. Boughton Rd., Bolingbrook, 630 378-8034. \$25 for adults, \$20 for members. www.goldclasscinemas.com.

FOR CULTURE LOVERS

In a metro area brimming with architectural gems, perhaps no residential structures are more iconic than the houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. Head to Oak Park, which served as the base for the first two decades of the renowned architect's career, and tour the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio. Made of wood and stone and featuring some of the architect's trademark angles and design concepts, the structure has been restored to how it appeared when it was originally built in 1909. A Wright-filled date for design enthusiasts can include a guided tour of the building's interior, as well as a self-guided audio tour of the surrounding historic district.

If you'd like a date filled with eye-catching sculptures, paintings and collages, check out the Elmhurst Art Museum. Scheduled for display is an exhibition by Chicago artist Melissa Oresky called "Tangled Grounds," an exploration of landscape and abstraction, as well as works from the artists of Chicago Sculpture International. While you're there, note the McCormick House, one of just three residences in the United States designed by architect Ludwig



For a date with a little culture, take in a concert by the New Philharmonic Orchestra at the McAninch Arts Center at College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn.



Looking for a laugh? Try Zanies Comedy Club at Pheasant Run Resort in St. Charles where comedians, like Kyle Cease (pictured) perform stand-up.

Mies van der Rohe, which became a part of the museum after its move to the site 16 years ago.

If you go: **Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio** - 951 Chicago Ave., Oak Park, 708 848-1976, gowright.org. Combination building interior and audio tour is \$25 for adults. Historic district audio tour from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Interior home and studio tours from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. daily.

Elmhurst Art Museum - 150 Cottage Hill Ave., Elmhurst, 630 834-0202, www.elmhurstartmuseum.org. Tues-Thur & Sat 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Fri 10 a.m.-8 p.m. \$7 adults.

FOR STAGE ENTHUSIASTS

For those who love it live and love it funny, head to Zanies Comedy Club in St. Charles around Valentine's Day weekend for a date of laughs. Comedian John Roy, who has appeared on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and won the comedy category in *Star Search*, is scheduled to perform on Feb. 9, 10 and 12. Steve Rannazzisi, who plays "Kevin" on *The League*, a fantasy football-oriented comedy on FX, is scheduled to perform on Feb. 11.

Because Zanies is at Pheasant Resort, a date can include dinner at Jambalaya, which specializes in New Orleans cuisine, or Harvest, where diners can feast on stuffed filet mignon or crab-crusting lobster tail.

For a more musical stage performance, check out the "New Philharmonic: Valentine's Pops," which will feature love-oriented tunes from film, television and Broadway. Played by an orchestra directed by award-winning conductor Kirk Muspratt, the concert is scheduled for Feb. 13 at the McAninch Arts Center, known as the "MAC," at the College of DuPage. For some pre-Valentine's Day passion, and perhaps for some inspiration, catch "Tango Buenos Aires" on Feb. 4 at the MAC.

If you go: **Zanies Comedy Club** - Pheasant Run Resort, 4051 E. Main St., St. Charles. 800 474-3272, www.stcharles.zanies.com or www.pheasantrun.com.

McAninch Arts Center - College of DuPage, Fawell & Park Blvds., Glen Ellyn, 630 942-4000, home.cod.edu/atthemac. ■