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L.A. Is For Lovers

Check Out These Local Sweet Spots That Go Right To the Heart Of Valentine's Day

by Kat Kittredge



Make some memories this Valentine's Day by thinking outside the heart-shaped box. After 15 Valentine's Days together, my husband and I have perfected our favorite day, although our approach to celebrating love may be a bit unconventional. We love to include our children, as they are the direct result of our romance! This year, Valentine's Day falls on a Saturday, which gives us all afternoon to celebrate as a family, then allows us a guilt-free evening without the kids. Here are some of our favorite places to go.

With the Kids

Wish Upon a Star

Starstruck lovers star gaze at the **Griffith Observatory** (www.griffithobservatory.org) all year-round, but Valentine's Day offers rare opportunity to view Saturn with its rings inclined toward Earth and Venus, the planet of love, will be at its brightest. Viewers can see it all through the Observatory's telescopes free of charge. Plan ahead and visit the Samuel Oschin Planetarium, which boasts the most sophisticated star projector in the world. After the show you can stop in at the Café at the End of the Universe, Wolfgang Puck's Observatory restaurant.

The Art of Hearts

Bring the kids and take part in a Valentine art activity with assemblage artist Annie Helm at the **SPACE Art Center and Gallery** (1506 Mission St., South Pasadena, 626-441-4799; www.spaceartcenter.com) from 2-4 p.m. Feb. 14. Create memorable tokens of affection and one-of-a-kind Valentines. This is also the last day Helm's unique collection of imaginative assemblage artwork will be on view. Admission is free.

Hearts and Flowers

Forget the dozen roses. Take a stroll through the downtown **L.A. Flower District** (766 Wall St., L.A., www.laflowerdistrict.com) instead. Did you know that acacia flowers are for friendship and secret love, an orchid signifies beauty, and heliotropes are for devotion? Put together your own bouquet at a fraction of what you'd pay a florist. There are so many unusual types of flowers that visiting is full of unexpected delights. It is open to the public from 6 a.m. to noon.

Love In Bloom

If you prefer your flowers un-cut, **The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens** (1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino, 626-405-2100; www.huntington.org) is another great Valentine's Day destination. The Japanese Garden and the newly opened Chinese Garden Of Flowing Fragrance are dazzling and perfect for a romantic walk. The Children's Garden is full of hands-on fun in a beautiful setting. A Camellia Show and Sale is planned for Feb. 14 and hundreds of Camellias will be on view.

Sweets For the Sweet

We love **Little Flower Candy Company** (1424 West Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, 626-304-4800; www.littleflowercandyco.com) for so many reasons. First, their breakfast pastries are out of this world. Second, you'll be hard pressed to find a better curried chicken sandwich in all of Los Angeles. And third, nobody makes better marshmallows or caramels. Bring the whole family here to enjoy the freshest homemade candy, cookies and delectable treats.

Just For Grown-ups

Romance On the Menu

If the way to your heart is through your stomach, head over to **Briganti Restaurant** (1423 Mission Ave., South Pasadena, 626-441-4663; www.brigantisouthpas.com) and enjoy *Speciali di San Valentino*. Regale your lover with tempting dishes like *Insalata Romeo e Giulietta*, *Pasta Otello e Desdemona* (with homemade black and white tagliolini and fresh Maine lobster) or *Pappardelle degli Amanti* – “pasta for lovers.”

Love Is No Myth

Is there anything more romantic than sharing a breathtaking view? **The Getty Center** (www.getty.edu) offers a stunning panorama of Los Angeles and makes a beautiful Valentine's Day destination. Plan ahead to attend a lecture and tour called “The Myth of Venus: Alluring Seductress or Allegorical Muse” offered between 10:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

A Bit of Burlesque

A night at the theater is always a special occasion. Why not head over to the **Ahmanson Theatre** (135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles; www.centertheatre.org/tickets) to see *Minsky*, a burlesque-style musical comedy. It is filled with sexy chorus girls, great music, and the story of a man falling in love. Then take a stroll around the Music Center Plaza and fall in love with downtown – and each other – all over again.

Classical and Cocktails

The **REDCAT** (Roy and Edna Disney/ CalArts Theater, 631 W. Second St., Los Angeles, 213-237-2800; www.redcat.org) is one of the most intimate venues for experiencing innovative music and performing arts in Los Angeles. The Penderecki String Quartet will perform at the REDCAT at 8:30 p.m. Feb. 14. They will present a program of classical music enhanced with video, amplified strings and electronics. Be sure to stop in the REDCAT Lounge for a Valentine's Day cocktail.

A Little Amor

For double dates, we recommend **Casa Restaurant** (350 South Grand Ave., California Plaza 2, L.A., 213-621-2249; www.casadowntown.com) in Downtown Los Angeles. The menu is small-plate style and the restaurant features “casitas,” semi-private rooms where you feel like you're having your own little party in a wonderful club. Start off with some “bocadillas” or appetizers, then order from the “Cazuelas” section. Try a lavender margarita or a hibiscus martini, or if you're adventurous, order an horchata colada, which is almost as good as dessert. ♦

Kat Kittredge is a South Pasadena mom who loves romance.