

q lifestyle: with PETE DILLON

When one announces to the world that he or she is in love, and the inevitable introductions to one another's friends starts, it's much easier to do this over dinner or a drink. As a couple gets to know one another on dates, food and drink are invariably involved. Courting is so much better when you can share an intimate meal prepared at home or having some one do it for you – when you collectively find that one spot or one dish over which you have created memories that you will hold dear to your heart forever. I am a firm believer of the old adage that a way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

We are heading to that time of the year that was created so greeting card companies, chocolate makers, restaurants, producers of fine sparkling and still wines and florists can all make a killing from our romantic ideals. Valentine's Day is around the corner, and so at this time of year, I thought it prevails on me to offer my recommendations of the perfect romantic gift or experience to celebrate the feast of St Valentine.

Valentine's Day started in the time of the Roman Empire. Under the rule of Emperor Claudius II, Rome was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns. Claudius the Cruel was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join his military leagues. He believed that the reason was that Roman men did not want to leave their loves or families. As a result, Claudius cancelled all marriages and engagements in Rome. The good Saint Valentine was a priest at Rome in the days of Claudius II. He and Saint Marius aided the Christian martyrs and secretly married couples, and for this kind deed Saint Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who condemned him to be beaten to death with clubs and to have his head cut off. He suffered martyrdom on the 14th day of February, about the year 270.

In a departure from death and martyrdom, I decided to have a gander around and see what I could find that might offer an alternative, to dinner, a card, flowers, chocolates or a bottle of something grapey. These are all activities you can mostly do as a single as well – it's not just a day for couples you know!!

A Tall Ship cruise, with lunch, dinner or just a plain cruise can be had for as little as \$25pp in Sydney or Melbourne.

What about a helicopter ride over the city, with a tippie and taste at your favourite destination at the end?

These can be found in most capital cities and are a great experience.

Hot air balloons, recent tragedy excluded, are a wonderful, romantic way to kick off your Valentine's Day celebration, perhaps finishing with breakfast before you head off to work. Most cities in Australia now offer these as well as some of the major regional centres. My choice would be the Hunter Valley.

A cellar appraisal – does your partner have a collection of wine that they have built up or inherited? What about a three hour cellar appraisal that determines what you should get rid of and what should be added. One place offering this is www.vinified.com.au

Have the stresses that your partner has massaged away – you can do this yourself or you could book in for a couples or separate massages and spa treatments – again these can be found in most capital cities and regional centres.

Wine tasting and lunch – in all states of Australia, apart from the NT, you will find wineries within a couple of hours drive at most. Plan a day away tasting some wines, and book in to a country B & B to experience the local villages. Or book a tour so you don't have to drive and you can be out and back home in a day... some wine tasting and lunch never goes astray.

There is always a cinema experience if you are movie buffs. Book a gold class or directors suite, order a bottle of something you both like and some nibbles, and kick back in a bit of luxury, perhaps with a rom com?

The Zoo, whether it is Taronga Park in Sydney, either of the 3 Melbourne Zoos or else where, is a wonderful way to enjoy an experience together. Many people haven't been to the Zoo since childhood and there is always something to discover in the wilds of a zoological park.

Instead of just buying some chocolates, chase down a chocolate making workshop or master class... They can be found everywhere and are a fun experience to share. If chocolate isn't your thing, then try beer, international cuisines or other similar classes that you can do together.

Spend some time with a charity if you are that way inclined, helping to cook and provide meals for disadvantaged people, a wonderful way to do something productive with your loved one and an experience I can guarantee you will never forget.

Finally, chase down a nice hotel offering high tea. This old fashioned experience is new again and is starting to be found in the most unlikely of places.

Whatever you choose to do, make sure it is something that you will remember and enjoy together. Have a Happy Valentines Day

For more tucker and tipples from Pete, tune in to Cravings on JOY 94.9 every Saturday.

