



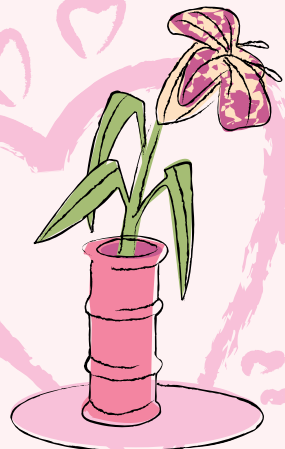
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AMONG FRIENDS

CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY WITH THE GIRLS

Ah, Valentine's Day. Love is in the air. Also on the air are countless advertisements for roses and diamonds and chocolate, featuring fairy-tale couples holding hands. It would all be so touching if it didn't make you want to gag. Yes, the holiday of hearts and flowers is marketed toward couples, and single people who buy into it can feel like "L" is not for "love" but for "loser." Despite what advertisers would have you believe, however, you are still cool and worthy even if you don't receive a sugar-laden box of assorted chocolate joy from your guy on Valentine's Day. In fact, you have lots to celebrate on that special day, including the sistas with whom you kick it most other Saturdays. Let this not be day of hiding at home or lamenting your lovelorn life: Love the ones you're with. Here are three very different ways to celebrate the day with the people in your life who won't let you settle for Mr. Date-You-Till-He-Finishes-School-Gets-a-Job-and-Dumps-You. Let's hear it for the girls.

THE “ZEN AND THE ART OF NOT WEARING NYLONS” PARTY



Baby it's cold outside. And how warm — or comfortable — are your fine-dining dress-up clothes anyway? You know you'd rather chill out at home.

Trade your slingbacks for slippers and your couture for a kimono. Host a house party celebrating the fact that you can hang with the girls in peace and Eastern harmony.

Set the stage for an exotic Asian evening with orchids. Broadview Florists and Greenhouses (5409 Winchester Road, 747-3146) has beautiful blooms in purple, white, pink or yellow. Fresh-cut flower arrangements are \$40-\$75, though you can separate stems into bud vases with bamboo stalks around your home to get a bigger bang for your buck. Individual orchid plants are around \$35 each and make nice gifts for your guests. Broadview also carries silk flowers. Place your order in advance to secure the style and shade you seek.

Scatter some candles and a little incense or even plug in a tabletop fountain for a max-relaxation environment.

Be sure to mark your invite BYOK. Kimonos really are cozy, and they're in a class above your average bathrobe. The girls can check out the cotton and silk selection from \$35 to \$75 at Japan Arts: Zen-Inspired Living (www.japan-arts.com/c-4-kimono.aspx). Of course everyone has to follow the brilliant Japanese tradition of leaving their shoes at the door. Slippers and socks rock.

Forget the warm fermented brew you knew and toast your friendship with some chilled sparkling sake, a sweet, bubbly alternative to champagne. Or mix up

cucumber or ginger saketinis — who knew cocktails could have health benefits? Cap n' Cork (locations around Fort Wayne) stocks traditional sake, but call in advance to be sure they have the sparkling on hand.

Speaking of healthy, serve up some classic Asian dishes. Fresh Market (6306 W. Jefferson Blvd., 459-9691) has pre-made meals and sushi ready to go. Or for do-it-yourself party entertainment, you can buy their sashimi-grade fish and order a Sushi Chef sushi-making kit (\$30 at www.thekitchenstore.com), which comes with everything you need to make your own rolls, down to the wasabi. Just be sure y'all make the sushi before you drink the sake — there are sharp knives involved.

Grab your chopsticks and gather 'round the TV for an Asian flick in which the chick is the superhero. In “Curse of the Golden Flower,” the Empress hatches a plan to force her corrupt Emperor husband to give up his power, taking revenge for his slowly poisoning her with tea. And “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” stars women wielding weapons with skill and grace beyond their peers.

THE “OUT ON THE TOWN WITH OUR OWN BAD SELVES” PARTY



So you're all arguing over who is the hostess with the mostest ... because none of you wants the tiara? Then get out of the house, go out on the town and get out of town — without ever leaving Fort Wayne.

Start your Saturday afternoon in Europe. Head to Spiece Day Spa (5310 Merchandise Drive; call 969-6353 as far in advance as possible to schedule) and discover the joie de vivre with a French manicure (\$25) or pedicure (\$55). Feeling more indulgent? Spiece offers several treatments that incorporate European seaweed, including body wraps and the Repêchage Four-Layer Facial with Hand Treatment. See the full menu of services at www.spiecelm.com/day_spa/day_spa.php.

Next, grab the girls for a trip to the Big Apple. At the time of this writing, “Confessions of a Shopaholic,” set in Manhattan, was to open in theaters on Feb. 13. Joan Cusack is surely hysterical as always in this big-screen adaptation of the best-selling novel. If you're not the ooh!-boys-and-shopping-bags type, take a spin around the Arctic Circle instead ... OK, it's really just the ice rink at Headwaters Park, but it's a rather out-of-the-ordinary adventure for only \$5 (plus \$2 for skate rental).

Surely by now you've worked up un apetito pequeño. Vigneto (6370 W. Jefferson Blvd., 459-6215) expects to have ample seating at its bar, where you can order an assortment of small-ish Mediterranean dishes to share. Need a little more Italiano in your life? Casa D'Angelo on Fairfield will maintain its no-reservation policy on Valentine's

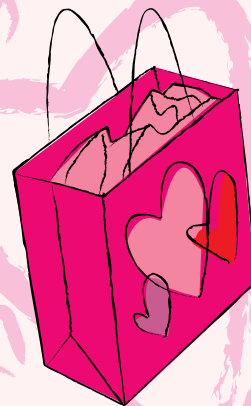
Day, so your shot at a table is as good as anyone's. The Casa Grille northeast (6340 Stellhorn Road, 969-4700) has a fabulous bar where you can belly up for dinner and some cocktail conversation.

Wrap up the night with the fun Irish folk at JK O'Donnell's (121 W. Wayne St., 420-5563, open till midnight), where seating remains first-come, first-served this evening.

Here, you and the crew can get a brew from just about anywhere in the world: Germany, Scotland, France, Denmark, Holland, Italy, England, the Slovak Republic and, of course, Ireland. Diehard wine drinkers should try the raspberry Belgium Lambic (\$8), which has an interestingly fruity red flavor slightly reminiscent of a pinot noir-rosé-auburn beer mash.

End with a sweet Valentine's Day treat: Young's Double Chocolate Stout (\$5) from England with JK's bread and butter pudding (\$5), a rich and delish custard dessert from Ireland or heaven, one of the two.

THE “TURN THIS MUTHA OUT” WEEKEND IN CHICAGO



Perhaps nothing befits the fabulousness of your friendship like six in the city (or five, three, whatever your crowd). Take a spin to Chicago, where the endless entertainment opportunities of the country's third-largest city await just 3.5 hours west.

Leave early-ish Saturday morning (you will gain an hour with Central time) to get to Colorlab (857 W. Armitage Ave., (773) 525-8749, www.colorlabcosmetics.com) in Lincoln Park for lunch. This cosmetics boutique custom-mixes to match your skin or that old favorite lipstick that's been discontinued. If you book in advance, they'll arrange lunch delivered from Bistrot Margot and a special private session for you and your girls. The \$250 charge for as many as six (\$350 for seven to 10) is redeemable in products. Lunch is extra.

In Chicago, mid-February is winter-clearance time at the clothing boutiques. Fortified and beautified, head down to Michigan Avenue to check into your hotel. The InterContinental (505 N. Michigan Avenue, (312) 944-4100, www.icchicagohotel.com) is classic luxury — think fluffy robes and hushed voices.

The InterContinental is conveniently located across the street from the Shops at North Bridge, where you can buy warm and dry. Stop by the Vosges Haut-Chocolat boutique on the second floor and sample the sweet wares of the business founded by Fort Wayne native Katrina Markoff.

Or maybe you're Macy's-bound. We learned the State Street institution (111 N. State St., (312) 781-4884) will be catering to out-of-state guests with a Burnham Hotel package launching in January (1 W. Washington St., (312) 782-1111, www.burnhamhotel.com) includes:

- two Macy's Visitors Savings Passes (Good for 11 percent off most purchases. Go to the seventh-floor visitor's center in the store and show them your out-of-state driver's license.)

- two tickets for the Architecture of Culture & Commerce Tour at 1 p.m. on Valentine's Day, led by the Chicago Architecture Foundation and including Macy's Walnut Room, the Tiffany ceiling, the Lost Fountain and the Great Clocks

- two complimentary drinks at the Atwood Café in the Hotel Burnham

- a \$10 off coupon good on purchases of \$50 at more at the Kiva Salon, on the fifth floor of Macy's.

Do-it-yourselfers can see www.visitmacyschicago.com to download savings passes and plan their own package. While you're there, download an audio tour of the historic store's sparkly sights for your iPods.

Surely after shopping, you'll be a wee bit hungry again. Leave your bags in your room and walk or grab a cab to Quartino (626 N. State St., (312) 698-5000, www.quartinochicago.com). It's hip. It's fun. It's crowded in a good way. It's relatively inexpensive. It offers open seating at the tables in the cozy bar area even on Valentine's Day, where you can strike up conversations with other crowds of hipsters. Or you can call and reserve the glass-walled private room right smack-dab in the middle of the bar and restaurant for your group.

Or, for a top-hat kind of nightcap, head back to the InterContinental and Eno (505 N. Michigan Ave., (312) 321-8738, www.enowinerooms.com), the wine, cheese and chocolate bar on the first floor.

Brunch is an institution in the Windy City. The true all-you-can-eat-and-a-Bloody-Mary experience can be had at a huge pile of fantastic places in the “real” Chicago neighborhoods — Wicker Park, Bucktown, Lakeview, Roscoe Village, etc.

There are two terrific options right downtown, however. Shaw's Crab House (21 E. Hubbard St., (312) 527-2722, www.shawscrabhouse.com) is old-school, white-glove service. For about \$40, you get not just your usual carved tenderloin and custom waffles, but also a giant spread of fresh oysters, sushi, smoked salmon and other expensive fare, plus an entire room devoted to dessert. The Gage (24 S. Michigan Ave., (312) 372-4243, www.thegagechicago.com) offers more casual, a la carte Irish brunch choices.

Wind down your whirlwind weekend with a stroll down the street to the world-renowned Art Institute of Chicago (111 S. Michigan Ave., (312) 443-3600, www.artinstituteofchicago.org), where admission is free the entire month of February. In December, its famous Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collections were reinstalled in 11 renovated and expanded galleries. Masterpieces by Gustave Caillebotte, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir and Vincent van Gogh returned to Chicago and were rearranged to better tell the story of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. New sculptural works are on display for the first time as well. Be sure to pay respects to “Two Sisters” by Renoir in honor of your weekend sisterhood before you pile into the car and head south on Lake Shore Drive to Cornell Avenue and then Stony Island Avenue for a shortcut to the Toll Road.

Wasn't that fun? No date and no man-hating necessary. Even your married girlfriends may want to spend next Valentine's Day with the gang instead. ■

Cucumber Saketini

from “Real Simple” magazine

3 ounces gin
½ ounce sake
5 thin slices of cucumber
3 fresh basil leaves, plus sprig for garnish

In a shaker with ice, mix together the gin and sake. Add the basil to the shaker before straining. Strain into a martini glass and garnish with the cucumber. Garnish with a small basil sprig, if desired. Makes 1 serving.

Ginger Saketini

from “Health” magazine

2 tbsp. minced, peeled fresh ginger
2 c. sake
Ice
1 ½ c. ginger ale, chilled
8 strips lemon twists
8 (¼-ounce) strips crystallized ginger

Add ginger to the sake and refrigerate overnight. Fill a martini shaker halfway with ice. Add 1 cup of the ginger-infused sake and shake until well-chilled. Strain sake into 4 martini glasses; stir in 3 tablespoons ginger ale per glass. Repeat to make 8 drinks. Garnish each glass with a lemon twist and a strip of crystallized ginger on each rim. Makes 8 half-cup servings, 95 calories each.