

Sunday Independent

Food, fun and frolics to satisfy the romantic soul

Breakfast with lions, Italian picnics and 'Downton Abbey' dreams are some of the Valentine's treats on offer, says **Lucinda O'Sullivan**



FANCY a romantic Valentine's breakfast date with monkeys, lions and tigers, and maybe an amorous hippo? Well, you can do so this coming weekend at Dublin Zoo. This is a special event limited to 100 couples on Saturday and Sunday, February 14 and 15. The gates will open at 8am for you to collect a romantic breakfast picnic from Haughton House before taking off to experience the early morning sights and sounds of the zoo. Throughout the morning, the zoo team will host special keeper talks on the courtship, breeding and exotic romantic rituals of the animals in their care. You will also receive a romantic goody bag as a reminder of the experience. Tickets cost €65 per couple. Over-16s only. dublinzoo.ie.

With St Valentine's Day falling on a Saturday, the options for fun and romance over the weekend are endless. Hotels and restaurants all over the country have great breaks and romantic dinners.

In the Garden of Ireland, at Druids Glen Resort in Co Wicklow, from €193pps you can have a romantic escape to include 2BB1D, a glass of prosecco and a rose-petal turndown.

druidsglenresort.com

In Kilkenny, Lyrath Estate Hotel has one- or two-night Valentine's breaks from €115/€235pps, to include 2BB1D from their Valentine's menu and a pink bubbly cocktail.

lyrath.com

Also in the Marble City, Hotel Kilkenny has a 2BB1D break from €165pps including a glass of prosecco and a rose. hotelkilkenny.ie

Fancy your own castle in the country? At John and Teresa Russell's Bansha Castle in Co Tipperary, you can play out your *Downton Abbey* dreams, snuggle up in front of a roaring fire, dim the lights and pour a glass of wine. You can even bring a dozen or so of your very best friends or family and stay two nights at the special offer price of €1,500. banshacastle.com

Whites of Wexford has one- or two-night breaks at €99pps/€169pps, to include an evening meal and a snipe of bubbly on arrival. whitesofwexford.ie

The fab Castlemartyr Resort in east Cork has a Couple's Two-Night Retreat package from €309 per night and a five-course dinner on one evening. castlemartyrresort.ie

In Cork, at the newly reopened Kingsley Hotel, you

can have a night of luxury accommodation and dinner in the Fairbanks restaurant from €185 per room per night. thekingsley.ie

In Kinsale, the Blue Haven Hotel has 1BB with a tapas evening from €85pps or two nights from €115. Live music all weekend. bluehavenkinsale.com

The Muckcross Park Hotel in Killarney has a one- or two-night Romantic Escape package at €300/€500 for two, with a five-course dinner on one evening. muckcrosspark.com

In Limerick, the cool Absolute Hotel Bar & Grill has a good value three-course Valentine's Day dinner at €35 to include a glass of prosecco. absolutehotel.com

In Ennis, Co Clare, the Old Ground Hotel has a 2BB1D Valentine's break with breakfast in bed and a late checkout at €129pps. flynnhotels.com

Everyone's dream must be dinner in a chocolate factory! John Connolly of Hazel Mountain Chocolates in the Burren, Co Clare, is having a five-course chocolate-themed dinner at €45 on Valentine's night in their chocolate factory. Head chocolatier and chef Ana Murphy and creative chocolate director Kasha Con-

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nolly will be coming up with chocolate-tweaked dishes.

Hazelmountainchocolates.com

The 18th-Century Glenlo Abbey is set on 134 acres just outside Galway city. Here, from €229pps you can enjoy 2BB plus a romantic meal for two in its restaurant, while dining on the best of local produce and enjoying views of Lough Corrib. Prosecco and chocolate-dipped strawberries await your arrival.

glenloabbeyhotel.ie

Renvyle House Hotel in Connemara has a Valentine's one- or two-night weekend package on Friday and Saturday at €125/€165, which includes, on the Saturday night, a pre-dinner cocktail and canapes, as well as a candlelit five-course gourmet dinner with live music.

renvyle.com

Kilronan Castle at Ballyfarnon in Co Roscommon, is a wonderfully romantic destination. It has an excellent one-night weekend special from €134pps including dinner from their special Valentine's menu, plus a bottle of bubbly and a rose.

kilronancastle.ie

In Westport, Co Mayo, **Knockranny** House Hotel has 1BBD from €125pps to include hand-made local chocolates, a candlelit swim in their Spa Salveo and a Valentine's cocktail — as well as top-notch food by Chef Seamus Commons. Oh boy, do they make great cocktails!

knockrannyhousehotel.ie

In Ballina, at the fabulous 100-acre Mount Falcon Estate, from €249pps you can enjoy 2BB and a sumptuous five-course meal on Valentine's night prepared by head chef Philippe Farineau. Farineau has a passion for chocolate, and yes, you get a glass of bubbles and a rose.

See.mountfalcon.com

Also on the Wild Atlantic Way, at the Sandhouse Hotel & Marine Spa overlooking the fabulous Rossnowlough Beach you can have 2BB1D for €169pps.

sandhouse.ie

At Lough Erne Resort on the shores of Lough Erne, chef Noel McMeel has designed a new six-course tasting menu

and, with one night's BB, costs from €131pps.

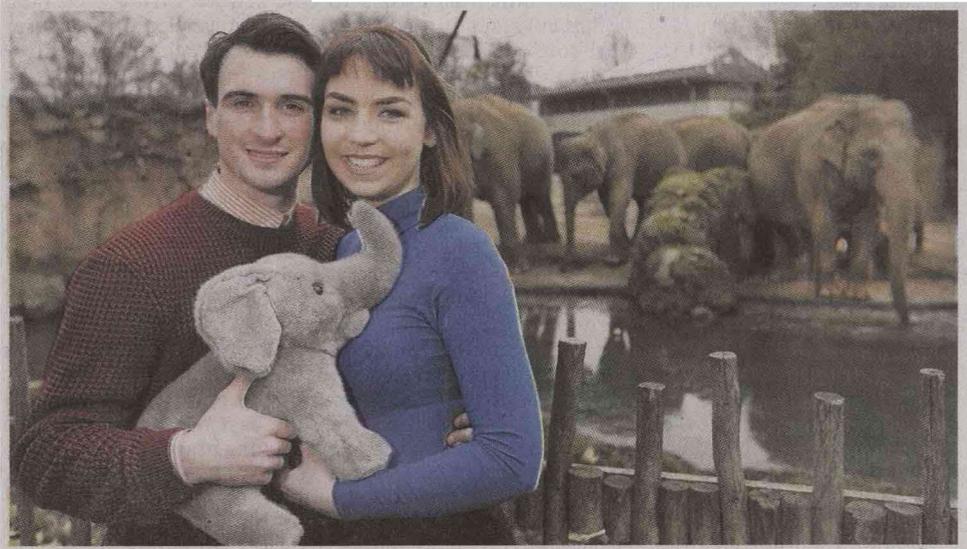
loughernereresort.com

Even if you are not going away or going out to a restaurant, you can bring some Italian style into your own casa, as Dunne & Crescenzi are doing Valentine's home picnic baskets with wine, pasta, wonderful extra-virgin olive oil, gourmet biscotti and irresistible chocolates. Prices start from €36 and can be delivered nationwide, courier charges apply.

dunneandcrescenzi.com

All of the supermarkets including Marks & Spencer, Aldi, Lidl, Tesco and Supervalu will have super Valentine's special deals and meals.

Finally, Ireland plays France in the Six Nations cup at the Aviva this Valentine's Day. You might fancy treating your 'rugby man' to dejeuner in the super French restaurant, Dax on Upper Pembroke Street, which will be open for a pre-rugby lunch on Saturday. The proprietor, Olivier Meissonave, knows his rugby as well as his food, but is keeping shtum on the match result!



BREAKFAST AT THE ZOO: Happy couple Anna Moloney and William Moore enjoying the attractions at Dublin Zoo. Photo: Gerry Mooney