



LOVE IS IN THE AIR

Desperately seeking a sweetheart deal for Valentine's Day? **Pól Ó Conghaile** has a round-up of romantic breaks no matter what your budget ...

THE COSY V-DAY...

Last December three couples checked into a rather sexy set of cottages in West Cork on successive weekends. All three arrived as boyfriend and girlfriend. All three left engaged. Three couples, three weekends, three engagements ... not a bad batting average.

What's in the water around Skibbereen? Perhaps the better question is what's in the name. Cottages for Couples is a collection of custom-built boltholes sensitively

restored, kitted out with hot tubs and — given that no amount of kisses can keep away the clouds — boasting bedroom Jacuzzis.

Riverbank Cottage is where the December couples stayed.

It comes with a large wood-burning stove in the lounge, a double Jacuzzi in the corner of the bedroom, and your own personal DVD copy of Love Actually. On V-Day there will also be rose petals, a bottle of bubbly, heart-shaped hot water bottles and fluffy robes at the ready... dates don't come much cosier than that.



Details: 028 22957; cottagesforcouples.ie. Rates from €99 per night.

THE LUXURY V-DAY...

Loved-up couples with cash to splash certainly have options this Valentine's Day. Take **Dublin's Dylan Hotel**, a sultry five-star stashed away off Baggot Street. Its Valentine's Special includes champagne, a rose petal bath, a suite and private dinner for two from €510 per room. There's also a chauffeur driven appointment with Paul Sheeran jewellers and a €500 voucher for when you get there...

Luxury doesn't necessarily mean five stars. It could just as equally be a sumptuous experience — like the Celtic Ross Hotel's (above) Feasting with Figaro offer. Romance in Rosscarbery comes courtesy of The Drawing Room Opera Company, who will perform opera, musical and popular classics as you dine on Feb 18. Tickets, with B&B, start from €95pps.

Or what about retreating from recession entirely at Adare Manor?



The luxury Limerick resort's "ultimate" Valentine's package has two nights in a Dunraven stateroom, a bottle of bubbly, afternoon tea, one dinner for two in the Oakroom Restaurant, personalised robes to take home, and either a round of golf on the championship course or an elemis spa treatment.

The price? Well, if you have to ask... €735pp.

Details: 01 660-3000; dylan.ie; 025 884-8722; celticcrosshotel.com, 061 605200; adaremanor.com.

THE SEXY V-DAY

Sexy means different things to different people. One couple's dream of rotating waterbeds, strippers' poles and fake fires on the telly can be another's vision of hell (starring Austin Powers as the devil). At the Twelve Hotel in Bearna nothing is being left to chance... its Valentine's Lovebomb surprise package features 12 different romantic elements.

Are you ready? First up, you get a suite. Next are petals strewn across the bed. You also get bubbles, two red iced muffins from the hotel bakery, a packed picnic for a romantic stroll, a candlelit dinner, in-room spa treatments, Love Potion cocktails, a discount voucher for Hartman's Jewellers ("should the need to drop to one knee suddenly present itself"), and a wrapped rose on checkout...

That's 11. The twelfth romantic notion is cheesier than the lot put together. "The wonderful Twelve Hotel itself..."

Details: 091 597000; thetwelvehotel.ie; from €450 per couple on February 14th.

THE FRUGAL V-DAY...

Not many Valentines can afford chauffeurs and suites. But that doesn't mean you and your partner have to stay at home on Feb 14 — there are affordable options too.

Take the **Pembroke Hotel** in **Kilkenny** (above), whose Sparkle package includes a three-course candlelit dinner, sparkling wine, chocolates, a rose-petal bath and breakfast in bed for €99pp. Late check-out is available until 2pm, and there's a €100 voucher for Rudolf Heltzel Jewellery too.

Still too pricey? What about a budget bolthole in the capital? Stay at the new Generator Hostel in Smithfield, and you'll not only get a fresh take on Dublin, but a fresh take on hostels.

The super-slick operation is based in the former Chief O'Neill's Hotel, and I found it spotlessly clean and full of funky design touches (check out the chandeliers made from Jameson bottles) on a recent visit. A twin en



suite costs from €45, or you can bed down in a dorm from just €11pp. Generator comes with a late bar, free Wi-Fi, and a Papaya King franchise selling chilli dogs from €3.

Details: 056 778 3500; pembrokekilkenny.com; generatorhostels.com/en/dublin.

THE GOURMET V-DAY...

After you tear your lips away from your significant other, why not put them to work on a five-course tasting menu developed for Valentine's Day by Dmitry Stroykov of Dublin's Conrad Hotel? The menu features scallop carpaccio; sautéed tiger shrimp; blood orange sorbet; roasted lamb rack or pan-fried Arctic

char fillet, and a medley of decadent desserts.

The meal comes with a glass of champagne, and can be enjoyed either by itself (€49.95) or as part of an overnight stay. The latter sounds tempting when you consider the hotel has a restaurant concierge service for V Day too. Conrad's Cupid will order the flowers, choose the chocolates and even decorate your room with rose petals, we're told.

Though the concierge is free, items must be purchased, however, so don't forget to smooth-talk your credit card too.

Details: 01 602 8900; conraddublin.com; from €229 for two people sharing.

THE FAMILY V DAY...

It isn't just princes and princesses who dream of romantic castle escapes. Turrets and towers, shining suits of armour and sumptuous staterooms make a fairytale setting for families too...

Like many other hotels, Kinnitty Castle has had its recession-related difficulties, but the 13th century pile is back open for business with bargains galore. Its Valentine's special bundles a bottle of Prosecco, chocs in the bedroom, B&B



and dinner à deux in the candlelit Slí Dála Restaurant for €80pp. For an extra €20pp, you can upgrade to a stateroom and a rose petal turndown.

Family-wise, the hotel's midweek offer has two nights B&B with a third night free and dinner on one evening from €139pp. Kids stay free in a family room and, should the knights and maidens wish to leave the castle, there are loads of walks stitched into the Slieve Blooms nearby (see slieve-bloom.ie for ideas).

One of the best is the Glenbarrow Waterfall Loop, entered via a tunnel of hedgerow and following the River Barrow upstream to the tumbling falls. Gorgeous.

If yours is more a city than a country family, consider Cork's Imperial Hotel an alternative.

Sure, the four-star is offering a souped-up Valentine's special in the Penthouse Suite, left, (yours from a heady €499pp), but it has an

"affordable luxury" package too.

Two nights' B&B, one dinner and a third night free are going from just €109 per adult, with kids charged extra at €15 per day for B&B only.

Details: 057 913-7318; kinnittycastlehotel.com; 021 427-4040; flynhotels.com.

Gifts and goodies ...

Make your own Valentine's Day treats with our delicious recipes and check out our top ten most seductive gifts

— Features on Wednesday >>



