

50 First Dates

Looking to impress a (potential) special someone this Valentine's Day season? Here are 50 top spots around the Capital Region that will make any romantic outing extra special.

BY LISA ARCELLA



That old adage is true: You get only *one* chance to make a first impression. So we've put together the ultimate list of Capital Region "brand-new" love interest ideas that will leave your love interest wanting to come back to see what you've got up your sleeve for date No. 2!

1 Museum mode The Albany area has some world-class museums that are worth spending an afternoon checking out. One of the best is The New York State Museum on the south side of the Empire State Plaza. Pro tip: Don't miss the stunning antique carousel on the fourth floor. nysm.nysed.gov

2 Game on Stressed about having to hold conversation through a whole sit-down meal? Go to Bard & Baker, the



Capital District's first board game café, which serves up coffee, sandwiches, cocktails and—'90s kids take note—pizza bagels (!) with a

side of Scrabble/Monopoly/Chess at its Troy and Albany locations. bardandbaker.com



3 Escape to the Mediterranean Athos Restaurant will get you there without ever having to go through customs. The

hot spot is regularly voted one of the most romantic restaurants in Albany, and the fresh Greek dishes are to die for. athosrestaurant.com



4 Take a mini Hamilton tour Want to impress your date with your intimate knowledge of every song on the *Hamilton* soundtrack? Don't throw away your shot: Take him or her to the Schuylcr Mansion. The historic estate that belonged to Alexander Hamilton's father-in-law, Gen. Philip Schuylcr, is a National Historic Landmark and a local treasure. What comes next? If it goes well, you can check out Scuyler's country home in Stillwater on the second date! parks.ny.gov/historic-sites/schuylcrmansion

5 Brunch goals If a brunch date is in the cards, check out the popular (with reason) Iron Gate Café, nestled in a gated garden. Hitting this Albany hot spot on a weekend? Be sure to call ahead. Then settle in to a dream breakfast menu of scrambles, hashes, Benedicts and sweet treats, plus a hefty vegan menu. Or opt for lunch items such as a Kickin' Chicken fried chicken sandwich or one of its signature bowls. irongatecafe.com

6 Brunch goals again Speaking of fried chicken, no one does it better than the chefs at chic, newish brunch hotspot The Nest in Schenectady. (You can even get your half-bird on a waffle with bourbon maple syrup, honey butter and honey hot sauce.) Other to-die-for offerings include carrot cake pancakes, shrimp and grits and buttermilk biscuit sammies. thenest518.com

7 Take an art gallery tour There's an abundance of great spaces showcasing the works of local and international artists throughout Albany and beyond. One little known gem is the Albany Barn, which also offers live performances. albanybarn.org

8 Trivia pursuit If you want to make sure your interests align with a potential love interest's, take him or her to a themed trivia night at Rare Form Brewing Co. in Troy; recent Wednesday evening themes include *Christmas Vacation*, *Gilmore Girls* and Halloween movies. facebook.com/RFtrivia

9 Pursue the clue One really fun way to get to know each other quickly is to try to find a way out of an escape room together. Teaming up to answer puzzles may offer a clue as to what kind of team you might be in real life, too. escaperoom.com/venue/pursue-the-clue-albany-ny-usa

10 Bravo! The Egg Performing Arts Center at Empire State Plaza features great performances from artists across the spectrum. (Hot winter tickets range from stand-up comic Wanda Sykes and Bruce Dickinson on his spoken word tour, to tours such as Abba Mania and New York Theatre Ballet.) Your date will certainly appreciate your sophistication and style after spending an evening here. theegg.org



11 A one-horse open sleigh The Capital Region might as well be Canada during the winter months, so make the



most of it with a cozy horse-drawn sleigh ride. Make the journey up to Exit 25 of the Northway for a romantic ride for two at Chestertown's Circle B Ranch. circlebranchny.com



12 Another beer, dear? The C. H. Evans Brewing Co. at the Albany Pump Station is a date-time showstopper. The huge, beautiful building (which was, yes, formerly a pump station) was meant for hanging out and trying an assortment of new beers, over good conversation. evansale.com



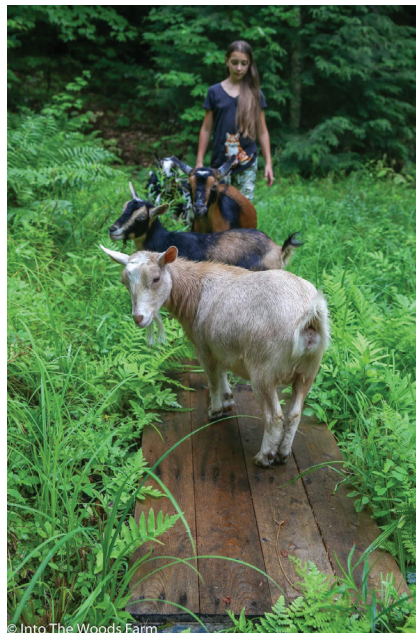
13 Standing ovation Thought you couldn't find great theater upstate in the dead of winter? Think again. The Capital Repertory Theater is a professional regional theater with a lovely cafe

at which to grab a coffee together before or after the show. Their play *Fly* is based on the true events of the first African-American Air Corp fighters fighting for our country, and runs January 28-February 20. capitalrep.org



14 A rare find Albany's Black and Blue Steak and Crab is well known for great service and inspired cuisine. A cozy booth for two is the way to go, then fall into a meal of lobster toast with caviar and a juicy, wet-aged, black angus steak. blackandbluesteakandcrab.com/albany

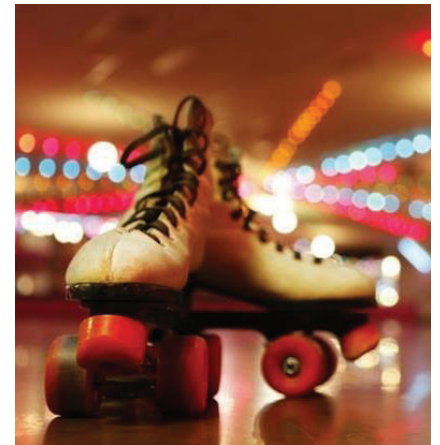
15 Through the woods, with a goat Yes, a goat. Who is likely to forget that time they wandered through the woods with Baaab and a few of his four-legged friends? At Into the Woods Farm in Middle Grove (just outside of Saratoga) you can book a private snowshoe



adventure, with the farm's adorable goats as your guides. intothewoodsfarmny.com



16 Axe and you shall receive The hottest new date night activity is indisputably axe-throwing, and the Capital Region hasn't been left out of the craze. Check out Colonie's Generation Axe for a blood-pumping activity that'll pit you and your date against one another in a friendly competition, all while allowing you to let out your past dating-life frustrations. Did we mention they serve beer, wine and seltzer? generationaxethrowing.com



17 Turn it up old school When was the last time you went roller-skating? Have a blast during a trip back in time at

Rollarama in Schenectady. There are even adult-only nights you can book ahead of time. rollarama.com

18 Revolutionary romance Set in a beautiful building that pre-dates the Revolutionary War, some locals think the Olde Bryan Inn in Saratoga might be haunted. But who cares when there's delicious food, a fireplace and great company? oldebryaninn.com

19 Take flight It's always good to have something right in front of you to talk about on a date, like, say, a beer flight. For a hoppin' good time, check out Active Ingredient, one of the Capital Region's newer breweries located in Malta, which also serves food to soak up all those suds. activeingredientbrewing.com



20 Green machine Troy Beer Garden's recent makeover turned it from a peanuts-and-beer sports bar into a chic jungle of luscious plants that just so happens to serve killer cocktails and a largely plant-based menu. In other words, date night done right. thetroybergarden.com

21 Get in touch with your roots Albany is a great place to bond with a special someone over the exploration of your roots. The city has put together a Black history itinerary (see albany.org/things-to-do/tours-and-itineraries/black-history-and-culture/), the Italian immigrant experience can be discovered

at americanitalianmuseum.org, and Irish Americans can explore irish-us.org.

22 Room with a view Take in the spectacular views of Albany and well beyond from the top of the 42nd-floor Corning Tower Observation Deck. The building was dedicated to Erastus Corning 2nd, a long-time mayor of Albany. empirestateplaza.ny.gov/corning-tower-observation-deck

23 Take a hike The 3,500-plus-acre Albany Pine Bush Preserve is home to an endangered blue butterfly and has dozens of trails and educational programs. Not sure of your navigational skills? The preserve will send you out with a guide, but be sure to call ahead. albanypinebush.org



24 Steak night Beautiful décor and the finest fare make Albany's 677 Prime the *crème de la crème* of any "top date spot" list. The steakhouse is so special that if the date goes well, it will make a stellar anniversary celebration, too. 677prime.com

25 Beacon calls Beacon (located about 90 minutes south of Albany) is sometimes called the Brooklyn of the North because it's become a haven for creative types and hip shops and restaurants. Rummage through the flea markets and farmers' market before settling in for a cocktail or two. beaconny.gov

26 Show time Sure, you can catch a great performance at the Palace Theatre—everyone from Bruce Springsteen to Jerry Seinfeld has

performed here, and this winter's range includes Bluesky Bluegrass, comedian Jim Gaffigan and a pre-Valentine's Day Tchaikovsky program from the Albany Symphony. But just getting to soak in the ornate 90-year-old Austrian Baroque architecture is worth the price of admission. palacealbany.org

27 A classic experience The famed Sagamore Resort is open year round for great dining, five-star spa treatments and all kinds of seasonal activities. But its greatest charm may be its incredible views of Lake George. In the winter months, bundle up and sit around a fire under the stars—or plan your visit around its renowned Glacier Ice Bar and Lounge, which is open this year January 21-22 and 28-29. thesagamore.com

28 Must love dogs You both want your dogs to get to know each other, too? The Plotter Kill Preserve in Rotterdam outside of Schenectady has three waterfalls and welcomes pups of all sizes on its trails, making it the perfect spot for a dog—and human—date. discoverschenectady.com/directory/plotter-kill-preserve

29 Small and worldly There are just 15 tables at the award-winning, four-star restaurant Yono's in Albany, so conversation won't get lost in the din of a crowd. And the yummy Indonesian and continental dishes are world class. yonos.com





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30 A bit of history, a lot of fun The Kingston Stockade District (about an hour south of Albany) features lots of lovely shops and restaurants in the midst of a historic little village, and is a fantastic little day trip for a budding romance. Main Street is a must-see. kingston-ny.gov



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31 Go back in time Yes, oysters are always a plus when it comes to romance, but the elegant Jack's Oyster House, established in 1913, is also an Albany legend that's guaranteed to make a good first impression. jacksoysterhouse.com

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32 Bird lovers welcome If the two of you share a passion for nature and bird watching, a visit to the Vischer Ferry Nature & Historic Preserve in Rexford is in order. The dedicated 700-acre conservation area, which more than 200 species call home, is open year round; winter activities include snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and (yup!) birdwatching. cliftonparkopenspaces.org/locations/vischersferry

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33 Support local Called the best farmers' market in the region, the Troy Waterfront Farmers' Market moves to the Troy Atrium during the winter months and is a great way to spend a Saturday morning. Wander leisurely and grab some tasty snacks, knowing you're supporting local *and* getting to know your date. troymarket.org

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34 Wish her well Cozy up to one of the four fireplaces and enjoy a delicious meal at the lovely Wishing Well Restaurant in Gansevoort just a little north of Saratoga Springs. wishingwellrestaurant.com

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35 Cheers to us If your new sweetie likes vino, impress her with a trip to the lovely Galway Rock Winery in Ballston Lake. The beautiful tasting room is the perfect setting for a flight of wine and a shared charcuterie box, and a lazy afternoon of wine-sipping and getting-to-know-you chats and laughs. galwayrockwines.com



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36 It's all happening in Hudson Interesting galleries, unique shops, fun restaurants and coffeehouses—Hudson has it! You and your date could easily spend an entire day exploring the easy charms of this great little town. And as your relationship progresses, return for a weekend trip to check out its famous bed and breakfasts. visithudsonny.com



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37 Make just like Mama used to If Mama made amazing homemade pasta like Chef Brian Bowden does at Radici Kitchen & Bar in Glens Falls, that is. Radici also serves amazing seafood dishes, steaks and distinctive cocktails. The indulgent tasting menu might be just right for your special night. radicikitchen.com



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38 Tap into your inner Van Gogh Food and a few cocktails will help you to unleash the artist within you both at Canvas, Corks & Forks in Troy. Hopefully, some romance will be conjured up, too. cancascorksandforks.com



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39 For art's sake The Hyde Collection in Glens Falls houses a collection of paintings and sculptures from artists such as Rembrandt and Picasso. But the grand Italian-style villa, just outside of the town center, is also a work of art of its own. hydecollection.org

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40 Hit the trail If your date is the sporty type, you may want to consider biking or walking part of the 97-mile Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail that stretches from Albany to Rotterdam Junction. The paved trail runs along the scenic Mohawk Valley. mhbht.org

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41 Late-night vibes If you seek a place where you'll both feel immediately relaxed and welcomed, look no further than Next Door Kitchen & Bar in Ballston Spa, where the vibe is local and friendly



and the food is the best around. Date going well, and a nightcap is in order? Simply head across the street to The Front Street Social Club, which boasts fun cocktails such as the Freddie Mercury (gin, vermouth, pineapple juice and fresh rosemary).

nextdoorkitchenandbar.com
frontstreetsocialclub.com

42 Vegan options, please One romantic vegan and vegetarian bistro that's perfect for a date night is Albany's New World Bistro Bar. Plus, it's worth coming just to see the Art Deco mahogany bar, originally from the 1939 World's Fair. newworldbistrobar.com



43 That's Amore! It's delicious Northern Italian fare at the romantic Chianti in Saratoga Springs. The yummy pasta dishes are easy to share, and the delicious red wine (it's an impressive list) will warm your bellies on a winter's night. chiantiristorante.com



44 Ghostbusters If your idea of a good time is to get the bejesus scared out of you, sign up for the Ghost Tour of Albany. A private guide can take you on a late night tour of some of some of the spots where doomed lovers or gangsters met an untimely end. ghostsofalbany.com



45 A taste of the grape The cozy Adirondack Winery in Lake George is open year round, and you can book a private tasting (in fact, reservations are recommended) for you and your date. Cheers to that! adirondackwinery.com

46 It's the climb Get those endorphins flowin' with a first date that combines

exercise and teamwork. The Edge Halfmoon is one of the area's premier rock climbing gyms, and will give you the opportunity to see just how much you trust your potential partner, when they're the one belaying you from below! theedgehalfmoon.com

47 Skiing under the stars Brave the cold and take your could-be lover night skiing at Queensbury's West Mountain. Afterwards, grab a bite (and a hot toddy!) at the lodge's on-site bar and restaurant. If skiing isn't your thing, West also offers snow tubing on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. westmountain.com

48 Say cheese If you and your Tinder crush have been bonding over your shared love of cheese, take your relationship to the next level by building a charcuterie board together. We'd recommend sourcing ingredients at Hudson Falls' Argyle Cheese Farmer, which carries blocks, curds, dips and more. cheesefarmer.com

49 Cinema and cinnamon Yes, movie theaters are still a thing! If you're taking your date to the movies (at this point, it'll probably be almost nostalgic) we'd recommend Schenectady's Bowtie Cinema for one reason and for one reason only: Afterwards, you can go across the street to get a cinnamon rugolah, cannoli and rainbow cookie at Villa Italia Bakery. villaitaliabakery.com

50 Sports center If both parties involved in this upcoming date are sports fans, check out a Union College hockey home game. The Division 1 Dutchman, winners of the 2014 NCAA Men's Hockey Championship, provide for some of the best live sports-watching in the area. unionathletics.com

