



Joe McNamee serves up the best takeaways and meal boxes on offer this Valentine's Day

Love at first bite



There may be no last-minute midnight flights to Paris, no romantic assignations on petal-strewn hotel pillows, no swooning by the Seine—or even the Suir unless it's within your 5km limit—but that

doesn't mean lockdown is going to put any restrictions on our loving this Valentine's Day, especially when it comes to making goo-eyes at your heart's desire over an extra-special candlelit feast. Though currently shuttered and

the hospitality industry may ruefully mark the passing of what is traditionally one of the trade's busiest days of the year, there are still plenty of restaurants and cafés that have pivoted to offer delicious 'dining out at home' options.

We have gathered a selection below of some of the very best, from the already cooked to those requiring a few finishing touches — all wonderful Valentine's Day menus to bring the restaurant right into your home. We have also included a 'Diamond Ring Dinners' selection, just in case anyone got to the jewellers before Christmas and is planning on popping the question, especially common on Valentine's Day and wishes to mark the occasion with a truly special dining experience.

So, haul out the fancy tablecloth and finest ware, dicky up the dining area with all manner of soft lighting and soothing sounds, until suburbia becomes Shangri-la.

Next, herd the kids off to the furthest reaches of your living quarters, laden with digital babysitters and sufficiency of sweet treats to buy a dentist's dream home, locking the door behind you.

Then, crack up a bottle of something splendid and sparkling to sip on as you dress for a particularly special romantic Valentine's Day dinner, a dinner where no one will tell you to finish up because the staff want to go home, a dinner where no one cares if you get overly 'affectionate' across the table and, best of all, a dinner that doesn't end with stressing about finding a cab home.

All offerings are pre-ordered and Click & Collect unless otherwise stated.

Sage Middleton, Main St, Middleton, Co Cork

The incredibly slick Sage take home offering turns its focus on Valentine's Day with equal efficiency, offering four great and varied menus: & Buys You Chips (including wings and burgers); Have I Told You Lately (Fillet Steak); Sharing is Caring (mixed small sharing dishes), and Love Is In The Air (cocktails). www.sagerestaurant.ie/sage-2go

Caitlin Ruth, Clonakilty

Formerly head chef of the late, lamented Deasy's, in Ring, outside Clonakilty, Caitlin's VDay box includes cocktail mix to add to your spirit of choice, nibbles, starters, bread, featherblade main course, dessert, handmade chocs, cheese course plus wines from Wine Direct. C&C in Clonakilty. www.instagram.com/CaitlinRuthFood & caitlinruthfood.ie

Celtic Ross Hotel, Rosscarbery

The kit includes rhubarb & prosecco mimosa, a mezza-style platter with flat breads, moving onto a main course of Allshire's Feather-

blade followed by chocolate and chilli mousse. Coeliac and Vegetarian options also available. Instructional film online. €60 for 2 people, C&C Sat Feb 13 & Sun Feb 14. www.celticrosshotel.com or

call (023) 88 48722

Greene's, MacCurtain St, Cork

Valentine's Weekend Finish-At-Home Menus, including wine selections and cocktails from Cask. Includes complimentary truffles and gift. Choose from three menus (Main courses: beef, monkfish, or confit duck; salmon/crab starter with all) or vegetarian menu option. Sides and desserts also available. Delivery service also available within 10km of restaurant. www.greenesrestaurant.com

Da Mirco, Bridge St, Cork

Finish at home four-course menu for two including: antipasti (fresh seafood), cannelloni with fried aubergine and pecorino, red wine-braised O'Mahony's beef cheek, creamy potatoes, Jerusalem artichoke, choc and orange mousse dessert, bottle of organic prosecco. €80. www.damirco.ie

St Francis Provisions, Kinsale

A top choice judging by previous efforts the 'Lovage' finish at home menu features five courses and a bottle of natural/organic sparkling wine, plus 'The Slow Set', a tailor-made sexy Spotify soundtrack. €5 from every order goes to V-Day Foundation, global activist movement to end violence against women and girls. Menus on Instagram (@stfranciskinsale) & www.facebook.com/SaintFrancisKinsale. C&C Fri, Sat & Sun. Local delivery for those cocooning.

Farmgate, English Market, Cork

Another favourite making a fine fist of lockdown dining options offers Valentine's dinner for two (€65) including bottle of prosecco, red or white wine; crab fish cakes, aioli, green olive and scallion salsa; slow-braised featherblade of beef (O'Mahony's), potato and thyme gratin, glazed carrots, red wine jus; flourless chocolate cake, praline and orange mascarpone. Also Valentine's Hamper for two (€100) adding brunch (juice, compote, yoghurt, granola, corned beef hash, eggs, Stone Valley coffee beans) to above dinner. www.farmgatecork.ie

Market Lane, Oliver Plunkett St, Cork

Heat at home Valentine's Box, includes choice of main course, sides, desserts, Keep Cork Going tote bag, and option of prosecco,

wine or pre-mix cocktails. Collection Feb 12/13/14. www.Marketlane.ie

Airfield Estate, Dundrum, Dublin

A sumptuous five-course meal box (€55 for two) from the Dublin-based estate farm restaurant, including pasta course, Airfield Estate Jacob's Lamb and a sweet treat box for two is available for €25. www.airfield.ie

Aalta, Dublin

Sadly, nationwide delivery options are currently being revisited after courier difficulties so the justly renowned Aalta offering is currently restricted to Dublin and neighbouring counties, including Champagne, wine and three-course meal plus petits fours. www.alltaBOX.ie

Croí, Tralee, Co Kerry

So aptly named for the day in question, the Croí finish at home package offers three menus (mains of steak, monkfish or vegetarian) and a brunch box (two or four people) for Sunday morning. www.croiirestaurant.com

DIAMOND RING DINNERS

Restaurant Chestnut, Ballydehob, West Cork

Rob Krawczyk and Elaine Fleming's Michelin-starred restaurant kicks off for the new season with a Valentine's rendition of their Sticks and Twigs' finish at home menu with full instructions provided. Dishes are still being finalised for this three courser (€65, feeds two) but I've never yet had anything less than heaven on a plate served up by chef Rob. www.restaurantchestnutwestcork.ie

Glass Curtain, MacCurtain St, Cork

Chef/Proprietor Bryan Murray's finish at home boxes (with full instructions online) have proven very popular and a fine Valentine's menu promises more of the same (Skeaghanore chicken and duck terrine, seared scallops, dry-aged rib of beef or vegetarian tasting menu). Also on offer are Valentine's cocktails as well as prosecco and Champagne. www.theglasscurtain.ie

Pilgrim's, Rosscarbery, West Cork

The superb Pilgrim's finish at home offering is reviewed elsewhere in these pages today but the special Valentine's 'Horny Hamper' (€80, for two people) contains starters, main courses, des-

serts, gorgeous stuffed apricots and a bottle of red or prosecco. www.pilgrims.ie

Gregan's Castle Hotel, Ballyvaughan, Co Clare

Close to the very top of my 'return to' list post lockdown is the wonderful Burren-based hotel and chef Robbie McCauley's cooking is a key part of the attraction, and they donated €5,000 of the proceeds of their pre-Christmas 'Gregan's at Home Dinners' to Pieta House and Clare Haven Services. This time around, Robbie has created a special Six Course for Couples (€130) including scallop and langoustine ravioli, dry-aged Hereford beef and dark chocolate creux. C&C with delivery points

also available in Ennis, Lisdoonvarna, Ennistymon, Kinvara and Oranmore. www.gregans.ie

Everett's, High St, Waterford

Peter Everett's fine cooking is brought to bear on their Valentine's heat at home menu including Lambay crab starter, Beef fillet wellington, opera chocolate and blood orange delice, and petit four, as well as homemade brown bread, Glenilen butter and Knocklara sheep's cheese. Lovely vegetarian menu also available. www.everetts.ie

FAMILY VALUES

Cork International Hotel, Cork Airport Business Park, Cork

While everyone else is trying to get shot of the kids for the night, the CIH are considerate enough to think of those who absolutely can't by offering a Family Date Night package, two courses (multiple options) for two adults and two children at just €50. www.corkinternationalairporthotel.com

BRUNCH & LUNCH

Kalbo's Café, Skibbereen, Co Cork

For those waking up on Valentine's Day with the love light already gleaming in their eyes, then a Valentine's brunch box from Kalbo's sets the tone for the entire day, including pancakes with Gubbeen bacon, frittata with Thornhill mixed leaves, Kalbo's mini-sausage rolls, yoghurt, homemade granola, berries, three slices of house cakes, two mini-bottles of cava and foxglove cocktail mix to add to cava or sparkling water. Pre-order up to Feb 10, Tel. 028 21515. C&C and limited delivery for cocooners.

AFTERNOON TEA

Praline, Mitchelstown, Co Cork

Valentines Afternoon tea box for

two (€30) includes sandwiches, scones, cakes and chocolate truffles. To order tel. 086 466 5390. www.praline.ie

Metropole Hotel, MacCurtain St, Cork

Valentine's Afternoon Tea at Home (€30 per person) includes sandwiches and sweet treats and prosecco. www.themetropolehotel.ie

The Montenotte Hotel, Middle Glanmire Road, Cork

Pure Cork Afternoon Tea on a Valentines three-tiered carryout box (€55, designed to amply feed two with a mix of sweet and savoury, with the option of adding Louis Picamelot Blanc de Blancs Brut. Tel. 021 4530050 or TheMontenotteHotel.com

CHOCOLATE AND OTHER TREATS

The Chocolate Shop, The English Market, Cork

Valentine's heart boxes, classic and traditional, filled with your choice of favourites and a personalised message. www.chocolate.ie

Exploding Tree Chocolate, Clonakilty, Co Cork

For those earth-conscious lovers wanting to express their love through chocolate in a most sustainable manner indeed, how about a gift of Exploding Tree's Bare Bar Bundles, six unwrapped bars (choose your own mix) for €23. www.explodingtree.com

Kelly's Oysters, Co Galway

Stock up on these marine aphrodisiacs, the Wild Atlantic Medley including 25 Kelly Wild Native Flat Oysters, Kelly's Blue Mussels (2 x 1kg packs) and 1kg of Kelly Wild Surf Clams, delivered to your door. www.facebook.com/KellyOysters

TOP TIPPLES

Wines Direct

Offering a special loved-up case for all your VD food pairings, The Wine Shed Valentine's Case, includes; Le Contesse Pinot Rosé, Italy, pink fizz for breakfast in bed; Domaine de Nancelle Macon Villages, Burgundy; Las Cuadras Muscat, Viognier, Spain; Clos Sainte Anne, Bordeaux; L'Amourier, Minervois, France, perfect with chocolate; Domaine de la Pirolette, Saint Amour, Beaujolais, France, all in a beautiful wooden box, delivered to your door. www.winesdirect.ie

Le Caveau, Kilkenny

The go-to importers for natural, organic and biodynamic wines, offers a Valentine's Day Wine Duo, beginning with lively bubbles, Tour des Gendres Pet Nat, and velvety Rhone, Vinsobres Chaume-Arnaud, a natural with chocolate. (Delivered nationwide and available in Neighbourfood markets). www.lecaveau.ie

The Twelve Hotel, Co Galway

Valentine's Cocktail Box by The Twelve for €90 and features two carefully crafted cocktails for two, 'Between The Sheets' and 'Galway Rose' along with a bottle of house Prosecco and Chambord for Kir Royals and glassware for two. (Nationwide delivery) www.thetwelvehotel.ie



**Left: The love offering from The Montenotte includes sweet and savoury treats to amply feed two people.
Below: The Valentine's brunch box from Kalbo's sets the tone for the entire day.**

