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LIFESTYLES
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SPENDING

Gift ideas? Think sweet, sensuous or romantic

BY KATHERINE IMBRIE
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There's still time to plan something special for Valentine's Day, which this year falls on a Tuesday. That's not happy timing for restaurant owners, who don't know whether to plan special romantic menus for big crowds on the weekend before, the day of, or the weekend after.

"We're perplexed," said Tucker Harris of the romantic bistro Tucker's in Newport, in his soft Carolinian drawl. "Last year, Valentine's was on a Monday, and it turned out so well for us because the whole weekend leading up to it was good."

Hoping for an extended repeat of that experience, Tucker's is planning to offer an upscale romantic menu Friday through Tuesday. Ordinary items such as pizza will be replaced for the five-day period with dishes featuring caviar and those traditionally associated with couples and romance, such as Chateaubriand.

Extending the Valentine's Day menu also gives more people more room for getting a last-minute reservation, and reservations are a good idea, says Harris, because if you don't have one and you can't get one, "you could end up in the doghouse."

Tucker's Bistro, 150 Broadway, Newport, (401) 846-3449. Open nightly, 6 to 10.

Time for a massage

A massage is one of those pampering things that many people do for Valentine's Day. And with a gift certificate, you can get credit for giving a massage without actually scheduling it for Tuesday.

"In terms of gift massages, Valentine's is our biggest holiday after Christmas," said Lori Tupai, one of four

massage therapists at the BodySense day spa on Bassett Street in Providence's Jewelry District. The spa offers customers a combination package of steam bath and massage, or other options such as seaweed or mud wraps and salt scrubs. Steam showers are sky-lit, giving an airy, atrium-like feeling, and massage rooms are decorated to create the feeling of an African jungle tent, complete with cooing birds and water sounds.

Tupaj said that, especially for Valentine's Day, couples massages are very popular.

For a couples massage, two people share a steam room and then go to two tables in an adjacent room to be massaged. Couples massages cost \$160; singles are \$70.

BodySense, 14 Bassett St., Providence. (401) 521-2565. www.bodysenseri.com. Open Mon.-Sat. hours by appointment.

A weekend not-too-far away

Also popular for Valentine gift-giving is the close-to-home weekend getaway. In Newport, at the luxurious boutique hotel called Cliffside Inn, it feels like Valentine's Day year-round. With nine antiques-filled guest rooms and seven lavish suites, the 1880 Victorian inn is tucked on a side street of Memorial Boulevard above First Beach and Cliff Walk.

Built as a summer cottage, the inn has been lushly updated to include all the modern requirements for romance, including fireplaces and whirlpool tubs. Room prices, ranging from \$175 to including fireplaces and whirlpool tubs. Room prices, ranging from \$175 to \$405, include full breakfast and Victorian tea at 4:30 p.m. featuring pastries and savory dishes.



Select a treat from Garrison Confections for your sweetheart.

Chocolate lovers, take note

Chocolates are perennial bestsellers for Valentine's Day. In Providence, the luxury chocolatier Garrison Confections is doing a particularly brisk business as Valentine's Day approaches, following a favorable mention in the current issue of Rachael Ray's Everyday magazine.

Garrison's is offering a specially wrapped red box of 12 pieces of chocolate in a limited edition of 1,000.

Chocolate flavors in the Legendary Lovers collection include Strawberry Thai Basil, Green Tea and Ginseng, and Peanut Butter Banana. A 12-piece box is \$20; 6 pieces, \$10.

Garrison Confections, 815 Hope St., Providence. (401) 490-2740 or online, www.garrisonconfections.com.

Store hours: 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Mon.-Fri.; Sat. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Thai Basil, Green Tea and Ginseng, and Peanut Butter Banana. A 12-piece box is \$20; 6 pieces, \$10.

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Say it with flowers

One Valentine business that may be favorably affected by the Tuesday holiday is Jephry's Floral Studio on Providence's Broadway.

"Definitely, my business is affected by the day Valentine's falls on," says owner Jeffrey Kerkhoff. "If it were on the weekend, we would do less business."

Wait a minute. Less?

"The stereotypical male doesn't become aware that Valentine's is coming until 36 hours before. If that's during the work week, and he's at his desk, he has fewer options than he would on a weekend to, say, go out to dinner or away for the weekend. So he goes the traditional florist route and orders flowers. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday Valentine's are actually our most successful days."

For those last-minute Romeos who want to make an up-to-the-minute impression, Kerkhoff ticks off some recently popular exotics: Mokara orchids in the rust, bronze, or wine color range; Calla lilies; and grande-size French tulips that "look like tulips, only 30 inches high." The average price for a Valentine's arrangement is \$75 to \$100.

Jephry Floral Studio, 432 Broadway, Providence. (401) 351-3510. Hours 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon.-Fri.; this Sat. and Sun. open same hours (normally half-a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon.-Fri.; this Sat. and Sun. open same hours (normally half-day only on Saturdays).