



VALENTINE'S DAY

ON THE CHEAP

10 things you can do for \$20 or less in Polk County on the holiday of love

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The Itemizer-ObsERVER

Roses, chocolates, wine and candlelight dinners. All are perfect for Valentine's Day, but those options can get expensive and cliché.

If you don't mind trading the roses for an actual experience in nature, chocolates for a delicious mocha, and reservations for a romantic dinner at home, you get out of the typical Valentine's routine — and save a little money at the same time.

Polk County has much to offer — and a lot of it can be done without breaking the bank. Here is a list of ideas that can be done for \$10 to \$20, whether it be a few hours in the afternoon or evening, or an all-day affair with your someone special on Saturday, to spice up a romance without leaving your pocketbook hurting.

• **Vino for your Valentine**

If you've never been, or even if it's old hat, heading out to local vineyards for some sipping and sightseeing is a lovely way to



spend a few hours. The sweeping views from most of Polk County's wineries are impressive on their own, and even more relaxing and romantic while enjoying a taste of the Eola-Amity Hills American Viticulture Area.

Many Polk County wineries offer tastings — often a half flight — for \$5 per person. One offers up to seven tastings for free — Eola Hills Winery. Airlie Winery takes donations to the local food bank in exchange for tastings.

And if you've never been, don't underestimate the quality of Polk County wines — they're some of the best available anywhere.

• **Make it a 'chick flick!'**

Ah, the date classic. To be polite to other movie-watchers, you shouldn't do a lot of talking, but what is more romantic than holding hands in a darkened theater?

Polk County has two movie theaters, one is a multi-screen complex, Independence Cinema, giving you and your date plenty of choices on what to see. The other, the Fox Theatre in Dallas, is a single-screen restored theater with a long history in the community.

With ticket prices ranging from \$5 to \$7.25 for matinees and \$7 to \$9.75 for evening shows, this fits nicely into the "cheap date" budget.

From action flicks to animated movies, from thrillers to Oscar-nominated films, you should be able to find something to fit your movie-going taste this Valentine's Day.

• **How 'bout a coffee date?**

The best thing about the comfortable confines of the many and varying coffee shops and bakeries in Polk County is they are perfect for conversation.

Whether it be Rick's Place in Monmouth, Courtyard Coffeehouse in Dallas, Lion's Share Coffee and Bakery in Independence, The Bread Board in Falls City or Pressed in Dallas — where you can also enjoy a glass of wine and live music — a coffee date is a great way to get to know your Valentine a little better.

Even better? All of those aforementioned establishments offer menus of sweet treats or light plates to share.

• **Go take a walk or hike**

Polk County is packed full of park trails and easy hiking at Baskett Slough or Luckiamute State Natural Area.

Many little parks scattered around have excellent walking paths, some of those are paved for easier access for those with disabilities.

Getting outdoors and getting your blood pumping with some exercise is a great way to spend a heart healthy afternoon while adding a dose of romance, walking hand-in-hand.

The best part about taking a hike? It's free. Bring a picnic or snacks, and a good pair of comfortable shoes. As you eat, see what kind of birds you can spot. Birding is a hobby that can be done alone or together, and smartphone apps can be downloaded to help with identification — also for free.

If taking your picnic to Baskett Slough, we suggest eating lunch tailgating style in the parking lot as there are no picnic tables along the trail and the ground could be too soggy for a blanket.

Speaking of soggy, you might want to dress for raindrops, but a little rain shouldn't put the damper on your Valentine's Day adventure. This is Oregon after all.



• **Be goofy and go bowling**

If you are to the point in your relationship where you don't mind the thought of having your sweetie see you in oh-so-flattering bowling shoes, planning a trip to Starlite Lanes in Dallas could make for a unique and, well, goofy Valentine's date experience you might never forget.

Janine Leep, a longtime employee at Starlite Lanes, said it is not uncommon to have couples come in for a game or two on their date night.

"We have people come bowling before they go to dinner or come over after dinner," she said.

With games at \$3 per person and shoe rental at \$2.50 per person, you could bowl two games each and have enough left over for a couple of sodas on a \$20 budget, Leep said.

She added bowling can be fun, no matter



what your skill level. "It's a sport that anyone can do," she said. "It doesn't matter how old you are. Seniors can enjoy it just as much as teenagers."

• **Start a private book club**

Stop into Second Chance Books in Independence and give a used book a second life.

"We have a pretty general stock," said Dina Carter, co-owner. "We probably have any type of book you can think of."

Prices range as low as \$1.50, leaving plenty of your \$20 bill to head over to a cozy coffeehouse on Main Street and share a coffee and pastry while devouring your new book together.

Alternatively, the public libraries offer a wide selection of books for free to check out and take home. Wrap up in a blanket, sit near the fire and take a trip together through a book.



• **Enjoy a meal and movie at home**

If you don't feel like venturing out, how about a movie and something to eat at home?

If you are planning on a budget, movie streaming services like Netflix, Hulu Plus and others are sure to have plenty of date-appropriate movies available this month.

Add some candles, order takeout from your favorite local restaurant, or try a new recipe and cook with your Valentine for dinner, and maybe add a box of Conversation Hearts — you know, those heart-shaped candies with romantic sayings on them like "Let's Kiss," "Hug Me" or "Puppy Love" — to share and you have a cozy evening at home.

Don't forget, restaurants are busy on Valentine's Day, so order early.

• **Romance is on the stage**

Don't miss Central High School's performance of the musical, "Oklahoma!" Closing night is Valentine's Day. For \$8 a person, enjoy the show. For a little more, grab some home-baked cookies at the concession stand — still within the \$20 budget.

This classic is full of romance — complete with kissing — served with plenty of jealousy, humor and fighting on the side. What could be more appropriate for Valentine's Day!

Watch in anticipation as the lead characters, Laurey and Curly, dance around each other — will they ever get married?

Laugh as other couples attempt to pair up — or avoid nuptials.

With top-notch acting, it's sure to please your Valentine this year.

• **Square dancing at Guthrie Park**

Grab your partner and take a swing at an old-fashioned square dance at Guthrie Park Community Center on Valentine's Day from 7 to 10 p.m.

"It's a good way to socialize, but have fun at the same time," said Sally Clark, manager of Guthrie Park. "You get to act like a kid again. You mess up and nobody cares."

The caller will teach all the dances, so no experience is necessary. Admission is just \$5 — \$10 for a pair — so there's money left over at the end of the night for an ice cream sundae.

Guthrie Park Community Center is just a few miles south of Dallas on Kings Valley Highway.



• **Rent a bicycle built for two**

It won't be a diamond marriage; I can't afford a carriage; but you'd look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two.

What could be more romantic than cruising around Polk County on a tandem bicycle?

It's possible, and affordable. At Veal Bikes Plus, you can rent one for \$10 an hour.

A safe, paved bike path alongside Highway 99W



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