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Travel: Romantic getaways

Looking for an escape plan this Valentine's Day? Pick your direction.

by Cheré Coen

This year it's easy to plan a romantic weekend away, with Valentine's Day conveniently landing on a Saturday. Here are a few suggestions, following the compass:

If you go west

In Houston, whether visiting as a couple or taking the family, visitors can enjoy a double dose of entertainment with the Pilobolus Dance Theatre performing at 8 p.m. Friday and The National Acrobats of China performing at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Jones Hall downtown.

Both companies provide unusual dance and acrobatics, the former featured on Oprah, The Ellen DeGeneres Show and the Academy Awards. Arts Talk!, lectures given by local experts and scholars or post-performance Q&As by the performers, will be offered after the Pilobolus performance and before each of the Acrobats performances in the Lobby Balcony Level. A H-E-B Performance Prelude by Wyldstyl Dance Company will be held at 7:30 p.m. Friday and by Dance of Asian America at 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday in the Lobby Piano Level.

All are sponsored by the Society for the Performing Arts of Houston; visit www.spahouston.org.



Photo by Cheré Coen

A garden in New Orleans' French Quarter.

If you go north

Enjoy a delicious romantic dinner in the renovated Officer's Club of the former England Air Force Base at Bistro on the Bayou in Alexandria. The menu is extensive and features wonderful seafood creations, steaks and pastas.

Then head over for the night to ParcEngland boutique hotel, literally yards from the restaurant, and relax in heavenly accommodations that include luxurious linens and oversized tubs.

Both are minutes away from downtown Alexandria.

For information, visit www.bistroonthebayou.com and www.parcenglandhotel.com.

If you go east

The Ritz-Carlton in New Orleans offers luxurious romance in the heart of Canal Street with a renovated and enlarged Carlton Spa. Two romance specials are available, in two price ranges.

The Ritz-Carlton Signature Spa Package includes deluxe accommodations for two for one night, a 50-minute Swedish massage for two, American breakfast for two in Mélange Restaurant and complimentary overnight valet parking for \$399, plus tax.

The Valentine's Romantic Rendezvous Feb. 13-15 costs a bit more — \$1,200 — but includes executive suite accommodations for one night, a Deux (couple's) Warm Stone 80-minute massage, complimentary overnight valet parking, a prix fixe dinner in Mélange for two with wine pairings and breakfast in bed for two.

The hotel also will offer Valentine's dinner in Mélange restaurant as well as Valentine's promotions in The Spa.

If you go south

Take a stroll back in time through the charming town of Franklin, which boasts of 420 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Franklin is unique in that it's settled within Cajun Country but was founded by an American in 1808 and developed by more arriving after the Louisiana Purchase. The town later becoming a melting pot by natives of Germany, France and England, among others. Today, you can find Cajun cuisine in Franklin but its historic architecture reflects the early settlers.

If you walk down Main Street you'll find many of the historic homes and iron turn-of-the-century — 20th that is — street lights that still grace the sidewalks in a row. There are numerous bed and breakfasts, such as The Fairfield House and the Prevost House.

If you stay here

Grab your loved one and head out for a romantic Valentine's Day paddle on Lake Martin with Pack & Paddle Outfitters. The moon will be waning, but there should be more than a quarter visible to shine down on the cypress trees and roosting birds, not to mention the sun setting over the water.

Participants will meet at Pack & Paddle on Pinhook at 5 p.m. and return around 9 p.m. The cost is \$85 and includes canoes and paddles, a Pack & Paddle guide plus dinner at the starting point on tables with lanterns and music.

Reservations are required; call 232-5854 or visit www.packpaddle.com.

If paddling isn't your speed, hang out on the streets of Lafayette and catch some red beads from the Rio Parada Parade as it rolls through downtown and Johnston.

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