

Newsday

October 11, 2018

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WEB EXTRA: Over-the-top grilled cheese on LI

Date night dining spots

DATE NIGHT from B2

"There's a very intimate and cozy atmosphere here, so you can have a good time," Vartholomeos says.

Another new relationship was launching on a date night at the upscale Bella Vie restaurant in Bay Shore, where Riba Hossain, 21, of upstate Newburg and Michael Khodabash, also 21, of Queens had a corner table overlooking Lawrence Lake.

The two met through friends about five months ago, and Khodabash says he chose the restaurant because he loves its ambience. "We like to go out and put on a nice outfit instead of baggy sweats," Khodabash says. He ordered grilled salmon and roasted cauliflower soup, while Riba went for the ravioli stuffed with spinach and ricotta, topped with a creamy mushroom sauce.

At a table across the room at Bella Vie, another Queens resident, Linda Post, 48, of Bayside, was having her regular Friday date night with her boyfriend of five years, Ed Kaleck, 62, of Islip. Kaleck's choice for dinner was a double pork chop so large he had to take the rest home, and Post ate branzino with escarole and tomato. "This is totally romantic," Kaleck says. "It's much better than being at home — there I'd be watching TV, and she's not a TV watcher."

There are thousands of restaurants for date nights across Long Island, for different pocketbooks and palates. Here's how to find those we just mentioned:

INFO Bella Vie, 240 W. Main St., Bay Shore, 631-500-9045, thebellavie.com

INFO Snaps American Bistro, 2010 Wantagh Ave., Wantagh, 516-221-0029, snapsrestaurant.com

INFO The Brixton, 111 Deer Park Ave., Babylon, 631-587-2000, thebrixtonbabylon.com

INFO LL Dent, 221 Old Country Rd., Carle Place, 516-742-0940, lldent.com



Add heat at Spicy Home Tasty in Commack, which features many dishes with chilies.

WHERE ROMANCE IS ON THE MENU, TOO

Spice up your relationship

SPICY HOME TASTY

INFO 1087 Jericho Tpke., Commack; 631-543-8880, spicymomestasty.com
Urban lore about spicy food serving as an aphrodisiac aside, any couple looking to get some sweat on their brows while chowing down will find such an experience at this authentic Sichuan Chinese restaurant. Most items on the menu have the chili-pepper renderings that tell you the dish is a hot one — you can order dishes served hot-sauce style, dry pepper or dry pot — all of which will put a tingle in your mouth, a perfect sensation for a night that will (hopefully) keep getting hotter for both of you.

Far from the madding crowd

THE PRESTON HOUSE

INFO 428 E. Main St., Riverhead; 631-775-1550, theprestonhouseandhotel.com
You have jobs, maybe you have kids . . . you've gone on date night to be alone together, right? Not every spot on Long Island affords two people the ability to speak quietly and be heard, but this elegant hotel-restaurant offers some peace along with its

New American comfort-food menu. Then again, you can fill breaks in the conversation by slurping down some East Coast oysters or feeding your dinner date some veal and pork Bolognese. Don't be surprised if you hear every word your date has to say — and if you fear such calm might inspire you to melt into your partner, you can always have a room booked so the night remains uninterrupted.

First date

LIBRARY CAFÉ

INFO 274 Main St., Farmingdale; 516-752-7678, thelibrarycafe.com

Whether you met in person or online, that first date is always tricky. You don't really know each other at all, so picking a place for a meal can be a deal breaker should you mess it up; going too fancy or not classy enough could make that first date your last. That is what makes this former library (thus the name) such a great choice. It has a smart taproom that shelves bottles of drink like books, and a dining section with cozy booths. Friendly pub food makes up the menu, and if you need a clever way to "accidentally" touch fingers, consider

sharing a big Bavarian pretzel. (For drinking purposes, you can easily consider their cocktails smart, as many are named after classic books.)

Dine and dance, Saturday night

Check out these three places for some after-dinner grooving.

THE CUBAN

INFO 987 Stewart Ave., Garden City; 516-222-0295, thecubanry.com

THE GROOVE Sit and watch in the Copacabana-like atmosphere, with live music and a floor show; couples also get chances to salsa, cha-cha and mambo to Latin beats and disco.

DUNNS RIVER LOUNGE

INFO 93 N. Park Ave., Rockville Centre; 516-764-6540, dunnsriverly.com

THE GROOVE Move to live reggae and DJs after dinner.

HONU KITCHEN + COCKTAILS

INFO 363 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-421-6900, honukitchen.com

THE GROOVE DJs Keith, Dennis and Ness spin pop, dance and other electronic beats.



BARRY SLOAN

Grilled Berkshire pork chop at Bella Vie in Bay Shore

Date brunch

PUBLIC HOUSE 49

INFO 49 E. Main St., Patchogue; 631-569-2767, publichouse49.com
Not all date "nights" need to be at night, especially when you have the fun brunch tweak available at this restaurant. Every Sunday you can come here with your sweetheart and take part in the "bubbly bar": For \$25, you get two hours (between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.) of unlimited Champagne, plus access to a row of ingredients to embellish your drink — candy, fruits and juices are among the fun and yummy items you can add.

Turn up the romance

THE LAKEHOUSE

INFO 135 Maple Ave., Bay Shore; 631-666-0995, thelakehouserest.com
Down past the docks for the Fire Island ferries is this restaurant, which has become synonymous with romantic meals due to its harbor views and elegant rooms, which are bathed in soft lighting and equipped with a pair of fireplaces. Its American menu leans toward seafood, but plates such as the crisp Long Island duck breast and pepper-crust New Zealand venison make for meals that feel a bit regal. Eat dishes like these by the fire — tables near fireplaces can be requested and

reserved — to help stoke the flames that may come later. Or maybe try sipping a chai hot toddy to warm the cockles of your heart.

Hip date

SOUTH SHORE DIVE

INFO 65 Main St., West Sayville; 631-218-6500, southshoredive.com
Perhaps you and your sweetie were planning to ride your bikes out for date night? Here's a place to feel right at home for that, as classic cycles are often parked in front. Inside, you'll see plenty of people with indie attitude at the bar, perhaps there for trivia or bingo night. Casual, artsy and dog-friendly, it's free of the overdressed. True, you'll likely be dining while the bar is busy, but its energy is part of the charm. Go for buttermilk fried chicken, tacos or the toasted almond salad. This is where couples looking for a night out on Long Island, but want a taste of Brooklyn swizzled in, should head.

Cocktails, please

BLACKBIRD KITCHEN & COCKTAILS

INFO 3026 Merrick Rd., Wantagh; 516-654-9200, blackbirdli.com
Craft beer may be all the rage, but for an added dash of passion, bump up that drink order to include a well-crafted cocktail — and these days, devotees of daring drinks are flocking to Blackbird. Just requesting a beverage here feels like an upscale experience, as choices include the "failed to reply, London" (raspberry, prosecco, vodka, sparkling water), "we are the night" (gin, pressed lemon, blackberry, herbs) and the "north garden" (bourbon, Scotch, apple brandy, bitters). Drinks such as these, with unique and full flavors, are good options when looking to make for a date night with fresh energy, even if you and your lover are tried and true.



DANIEL BRENNAN

Blackbird Kitchen & cocktails in Wantagh features well-crafted drinks.

— IAN J. STARK