50 GREAT DATES: WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO DO

Delaware Today

DINING GUIDE

109 ETHNIC FAVORITES

Chinese
Japanese
Thai
Vietnamese
Indian
Caribbean
Mexican-Latin
Mediterranean
Cajun-Creole
British-Irish
Pan-Asian

World Champion Gymnast Morgan Hurd Looks Ahead

Author Mark Bowden Examines Vietnam
Love is in the air. Following: Great ways to get to know someone else, from low-key and casual to epic.

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1. How competitive is your intended? Find out by watching the 2018 Winter Olympics. You may be late on a flight to PyeongChang, but you can score a front-row seat to the events of your choice at favorite sports bars such as Stanley’s Tavern in North Wilmington and Arena's Deli and Bar (multiple locations). If you crave authentic fare, hit Korean Barbecue and Sushi Bar in Newark or Kalbi Asian Bistro in Wilmington (facebook). Take it to go if you plan on skiing from your couch.

2. After watching downhill Lindsey Vonn crush it yet again, you may be inspired to learn a winter sport. There are three ski areas less than two hours from Wilmington—Spring Mountain, Bear Creek and, Blue Mountain, all off I-476 in Pennsylvania—where you can take lessons in skiing or snowboarding. Skip the group class. You’ll pay extra for a private instruction, but this is a date after all—and not a competition (springmountainadventures.com, bcmountainresort.com, skibluemt.com).

3. Live your own “Love Story.” When the mood is right, The Riverfront Rink in Wilmington can feel like Wollman Rink in Central Park. It’s open seven days a week through March 4. You can also break the ice during Cosmic Skate at The Pond Ice Arena in Newark (thepondicearena.com) on Friday nights or at public skating sessions at the Fred Rust Ice Area at the University of Delaware (udel.edu/icearena), The Skating Club of Wilmington (skatewilm.com), and the Centre Ice Rink in Harrington (delawarestatefair.com).

4. Too cold for the ice? Try rollerskating. If you haven’t been since you were a kid, enjoy Friday and Saturday night skating sessions at the Christiana Skating Center (christianaskatingcenter.com) for only $8 per person. Open skate sessions at Dover Skating Center (doverskate.com) happen on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Keep it low-key.
5 Take a walk on the beach. Yes, it's February. Yes, it's frigid. Yes, the beaches can seem desolate, especially at the state parks. But they are beautiful, you'll be alone, and, afterward, both of you will be in need of warmth (destateparks.com).

6 Meet for coffee or hot chocolate. Brew HaHa serves both at locations across New Castle County—and some have cozy fireplaces (brewhaha.com). Geek on exotic varieties and pour-over service at Drip Café in Hockessin (dripcafedc.com). Or go French. Café Papillon in Rehoboth (cafeppapillon.com) and De La Coeur Café et Pâtisserie in Wilmington (delaceurcafe.com) offer hot chocolate and pastries that make delicious first impressions.

7 Show your playful side and go sledding. Hit Bear Mountain at Glasgow Regional Park (ncdc.org/912/Glasgow-Regional-Park), brave the steeps at Brandywine Creek or White Clay Creek state parks (destateparks.com), or schuss at Rockford Park, the epicenter of snowday fun in Wilmington. After, see No. 6.

8 Enjoy an oyster happy hour. At Harry's Seafood Grill in Wilmington, oysters are half price at the bar on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. till close. Drinks are half price from 5 p.m. till 7 p.m. (harrysseafoodgrill.com). Other favorites: Trolley Square Oyster House in Wilmington, the Big Fish Grills upstate and down, and Blue Coast Seafood Grill, Fins Fish House, Henlopen City Oyster House at the beaches. And that's just the start. Need we say more?

9 Add a twist to the classic dinner-and-a-movie date. See a foreign film at intimate Theatre N at Nemours in Wilmington, which shows first-run indie and foreign films. The weekend of Feb. 2 brings the documentary “In Between,” the story of three Palestinian women in Tel Aviv. See the shorts nominated for an Oscar on the weekend of Feb. 9. Experience the tragedy of Verdi's "Rigoletto" the weekend of Feb. 21. And that's just February (theatren.com).

10 Dine by the fireplace at Dilworthtown Inn. The setting is historic. The food is fabulous. The wine selection is amazing. The experience is peerless. More than 200 years' worth of guests can't be wrong (dilworthtown.com).

11 Ponder the mysteries of love and the universe during a stargazing night at Mt. Cuba in Greenville. Nothing inspires awe more than a look at the sky guided by a professional astronomer. Visit a public night at the observatory through the cold months. When the weather warms, gaze from the lawn. Don't forget to say hello to Venus (mtcuba.org).

12 Make a night of the theater. The Candlelight Theatre Delaware (candlelighttheatredelaware.com), where each main stage production comes with a meal. This month brings more "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," but things turn sexy when "Boeing-Boeing" opens in May. At Delaware Theatre Company (delawarettheatre.org), enjoy "Ella: The First Lady of Song" and listen to big band classics while learning about Fitzgerald's path to fame.

13 It's winter. You're climbing the walls. Try it at Delaware Rock Gym in Bear (derockgym.com). Climb free on the bouldering wall, which features tricky overhanging "problems." Or take a lesson in belay—arresting your falls—on the vertical routes (you'll be harnessed and roped). You'll soon find out which of you has trust issues...

14 Eat chocolate. Visit the annual Rehoboth Beach Chocolate Festival March 10 (downtownrehab.com). Sample decadent and amazing creations from local restaurants and stores, and feel good about supporting the Harry K Foundation, which works to eliminate food insecurity in Delaware. If you want to show up for your date with a box, shop at the iconic Govatos Chocolates in Wilmington (govatoschocolates.com).

15 Go dancing with your star during a ballroom class. You may feel like a clod at the start, but you'll feel confident and sexy at the end. Check the schedule at BlueBallRoom in Wilmington (blueballroom.net). Take the Lead Dance Studio in Hockessin (takeleadeacestudio). Starlites Dance Studio in Wilmington (starlitesdance.com).

16 Volunteer. Tapping into your shared philanthropic values is a good way to get to know your date while giving back. Deliver Meals on Wheels or walk dogs together for the Delaware SPCA. Tutor a kid. Clean up a stream. Plant dune grass at the beach or count horseshoe crabs. Drive a senior to the doctor. Coach a mock-trial team. There are dozens of organizations with diverse missions that are looking for you. Check the membership of the Delaware Association for the Advancement of Nonprofits at delawarenonprofit.org, then call your fave.

17 Make sweet music during a chamber concert. Brandywine Baroque presents concerts of English and French music Feb. 2-4. (The program had us at "Compell'd by sultry Phoebus' heat.") Delaware Symphony Orchestra continues its chamber series with "Triumph Over Adversity," a tribute to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., in the stunning Gold Ballroom of the Hotel du Pont on Feb. 20 (delawaresymphony.org). Check the websites for local concerts resuming next month by Mélomanie (melomanie.org), Pyxis Piano Quarter (pyxisspianoquartet.com) and Serafin String Quartet (serafinquartet.org).

18 Clink glasses together. A glass of local beer or bourbon will quell any first-date jitters. Which to sample? And where? Consult the Delaware Beer, Wine and Spirits Trail (visitdelaware.com/beer-wine-spirits-trail). You'll find more than 30 places with tasting rooms where you can savor the best in craft brewing, vinting, distilling and more. Newish to the trail: a cidery and meadery. Cheers.

19 Go antiquing. Delaware and the Brandywine Valley are among the oldest parts of the United States, and that history means there are many vintage pieces to be found. You can spend any afternoon scouring local antiques and collectibles stores, or you can visit special events such as the Brandywine River Museum of Art Antique Show every Memorial Day weekend (brandywine.org) and Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library's Delaware Antiques Show each November (winterthur.org/das).

20 There would be no flowers without birds and bees—which makes Longwood Gardens an ideal place for love to blossom. There is no nook of the sprawling outdoor gardens or famous conservatory that is not beautifully romantic. During your visit, save room for a delicious dinner in 1906 or a casual cup in the café. Indoor and outdoor venues stage plays and concerts from rage to jazz to classical by national and international talents. Take a class in flower arranging together. Or attend one of those spectacular fountain shows (longwoodgardens.org).

21 Stroll Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library (winterthur.org). The galleries of American decorative arts are fascinating, the gardens are world-class, and the house will leave you feeling all Gatsby and Daisy.
**Cooking together** is a hands-on way to get to know one another. Take a class at Chef’s Haven in Hockessin (chefshavende.com). SoDel Concepts at the beach offers regular cooking demos at several of its popular restaurants such as NorthEast Seafood Kitchen (sodelconcepts.com). If you really want to spice it up, visit Haneedas’s Kitchen in Glen Mills for a lesson on Indian cuisine (haneedaskitchen.com).

28 **Go on a picnic.** Grab delicious food from a place such as Toscana to Go in Wilmington (toscanatogo.com) or Lewes Gourmet (lewesgourmet.com), then head to a favorite outdoor area. Spread your blanket near the ponds at Carousel County Park in Pike Creek, under the cliff at Alapocas Run State Park, next to an isolated stretch of the Broadkill at McCabe Preserve near Milton, or on the banks of Silver Lake in Dover.

29 **Visit an art museum.** We are fortunate to have several good ones. Viewing the Pre-Raphaelite works at Delaware Art Museum (delart.org) is a window to the romances between famous painters and their models. The landscapes of Hudson Valley School painters at the Biggs Museum of American Art in Dover (biggsmuseum.org) will transport you both to a different time and breath-taking places. The Wyeth family art at the Brandywine River Museum of Art (brandywine.org/art) is stunning, and the view of the creek makes the café a charming place for a cup and a chat.

24 **Trains have a romance all their own.** So ride in a vintage coach on the **Wilmington & Western Railroad.** Start at Greenbank Station, roll through the beautiful Red Clay Valley, then stop in Hockessin for dinner, where you’ll dine at the Back Burner restaurant before the return trip. Check the dinner train schedule at wwr.com.

**The story is this:** A petty criminal meets a young teacher and finds the meaning of love. See **First State Ballet Theatre** perform “The Young Lady and The Hooligan” Feb. 17-18 at the Baby Grand Theatre. The warm-up is “Paquita,” with all its passionate Spanish flair. And that’s not romantic enough; there’s always “Romeo & Juliet” April 13-15 (firststateballet.com).

**If dating isn’t scary enough, take a ghost tour.** There are opportunities year round at places like Fort Delaware (destateparks.gov) and towns such as Lewes, where the Lewes Legends Tour introduces a bit of the ghost stories that attend the town’s founding (historiclews.org). But October brings a surfeit of spooky fun during events such as Dark Dover Lantern Tours (destateparks.com), and tours of historic properties such as Rockwood Mansion and Bellevue Hall (ncdce.org).

**Visit a wine bar.** They are, by definition, intimate. Every Thursday is date night at Domaine Hudson in Wilmington, where you can each enjoy a three-course meal and a bottle of wine for $95 per couple. Or visit any night of the week, take a seat at the cozy bar, then get close while you view the list of 450 bottles on the iPad (domainehudson.com).

**Do a wine tasting.** Delaware’s four vineyards—Harvest Ridge, Pizzadilli, Nassau Valley and Salted Vines—all have tasting rooms, as well as special events such as Harvest Ridge’s food truck and music nights (visitdelaware.com/beer-wine-spirits-trail). Or head north on the Brandywine Valley Wine Trail (bwwinetrail.com). Warmer weather brings concerts, outdoor movie nights, craft fairs and more at member vineyards. You never know—you could be subconsciously scouting a reception site...
If you don’t take yourself too seriously (or if you’ve been told you sound just like Marc Cohn when you belt out “Walking in Memphis”), a host of bars and restaurants feature karaoke nights, including 1984 (1984wilmington.com), Catherine Rooney’s (catherinerooneys.com), the Golden Fleece Tavern in Dover (goldenefleetcavern.com), the Blue Moon (bluemoonrehoboth.com) and Purple Parrot Grill (purpigrill.com), both in Rehoboth—and plenty more.

31 Plant a garden together. Whether you reap the harvest as a couple may remain to be seen, and we’ll skip transparent metaphors about nurturing life, but you might as well sow the seeds. Apply for a plot at Bellevue State Park (destatbsparks.com/park/bellevue). Or bring a date along while you help in a community garden managed by The Delaware Center for Horticulture (thecdh.org).

32 You can learn a lot about relationships through horses, so take a lesson together. Facilities such as Sunset Stable in Bear offer classes and opportunities such as one-hour trail rides at Lums Pond (sunsetstable.com).

33 Float in a hot air balloon. You’ll have a truly panoramic view of the countryside when you fly with outfits such as Delmarva Balloon Rides in Chestertown, Maryland. It’s peaceful, exhilarating and inspiring. You’ll be a hero. (delmarvaballoonrides.com)

34 Rock out. If you both love loud music, there are several venues that can oblige. Hit the Bottle & Cork in Dewey Beach (bottleandcorkdewey.com) and The Queen in Wilmington (thequeenwilmington.com) for big regional and national acts, such as Blues Traveler on Feb. 22. For local bands and a bit more edge, hit Bar XIII in Wilmington (bardix.com). Or buy an extra ticket soon for the Firefly Music Festival (fireflyfestival.com) in June. You can worry about who to take later.

35 Mellow out—kind of. For live music in a mellower setting, visit a cozier bar, such as The Nomad in Wilmington (facebook). Kara Lee’s French Quarter Bistro in New Castle (karalees.com) or St. Georges Country Store (stgeorgescountry.com) for great jazz and blues. Homegrown Cafe in Newark (homegrowncafe.com) hosts great pop and rock groups. Grey Hare Tavern in Rehoboth Beach (greyharetavern.com) offers rock and blues. And The Metro Pub & Grill in Middletown (metropubandgrill.com) promises a fun Friday and Saturday night.

36 Play tourist. No matter where you live or visit often, everything will seem brand new to someone who has never seen it before. So on a date, it will look brand new to you, too.

37 Play tourist in Historic New Castle, the scene of many a date and marriage proposal. Tour Colonial properties such as the George Read House and Garden, wander through the grounds of Immanuel on the Green Church, browse antiques shops such as Hedgecole Antiques (hedgecoleantiques.com) in Delaware Street and amble along the shores of the Delaware River in Battry Park. Successful afternoon? Dine by the fireplace at Jessop’s Tavern (jessopstavern.com). Or buy a ticket for The Day in Old New Castle in May to get an inside look at a few fantastic homes and gardens.

38 Go for the thrills when you ride the Go Ape! (goape.com) zipline at Lums Pond. Harness up, then zip through the trees and zoom along a steel cable. If your date hasn’t been scared off, repair to St. Georges Country Store. (See No. 35.)

39 Cruise the Cape May-Lewes Ferry across Delaware Bay (cmlf.com). Park at the terminal, then walk on for a round trip of just over three hours. On board, enjoy a drink as you sail. Summer brings live music, wine and beer events, and more adult fun. The breezes are fabulous. The sunset views are amazing. Make sure you time it right.

40 Go to an escape room. You have one hour to find the key that lets you out. Work together to solve the clues in rooms built on themes such as Shawshank Prison and “National Treasure.” Locations include Exodus Escape Room in Newark and Rehoboth Beach (exodusescaperooms.com); Great Escape in Newark and Rehoboth Beach (greatescapeldelaware.com); and Escape Room Delaware in Dover (escaperoomdelaware.com).

41 Who says a first date need be a dinner date? Plan a Sunday brunch instead. You’ll be charmed by the Frenchness of Jock’s De La Cour Cafe in Wilmington (jocksdelacourcafe.com) and the Victorian-ness—and the ocean view—at Victoria’s Restaurant in Rehoboth Beach (victoriasdine.com).

42 Fall into your creative sides at Painting With A Twist. Following the instruction of an artist, you can create a memento of your time together. On scheduled date nights, you paint one half of the image, your date paints the other. Visit any of the four studios—Wilmington, Newark, Middletown and Lewes—and paint with your choice of wine for $40. (paintingwithatwist.com)

43 Laugh! Hit a comedy show. Brian Regan visits The Playhouse on Rodney Square on April 29 (theplayhouse.org). Lisa Lampanelli’s “The Queen of Mean” will spew her insults at The Grand on May 11 (thegrandwilmington.org). Also check out the Milton Theatre (miltontheatre.com), which hosts a
variety of comics, including Delaware Comedy Theatre and Kevin Lee, who blends comedy and magic.

Visit OperaDelaware's studios on the Wilmington Riverfront for intimate events such as Opera Uncorked. During Cabarets & Cabalettas on March 16 and March 18, you can enjoy wines from Swigg while listening to rising opera stars in a cabaret-type setting (operaDEL.org).

Book a Swedish massage or classic pedicure at The Spa at Montchanin Village (montchanin.com), one of the most luxurious spas around. (Tip: Do not book a facial. She will not want to have to redo her makeup afterward.) Then enjoy a meal at whimsical Krazy Kat's.

Test your collective knowledge of trivia with a few rounds of beer and Quizzo (quizzo.com), a popular bar game. Pubs such as Gallucio's and Chelsea Tavern in Wilmington or Grain in Newark host weekly trivia nights that are perfect for a low-key group date or a one-on-one showdown. Downstate, try Let's Do Trivia live at Grotto Pizza or Arena's (letsdotruvia.com).

Leave your dress shoes and heels at home and rent some bowling shoes. There are at least a dozen alleys to choose from. First State Lanes in Wilmington (firststategn.com) hosts Cosmic Red Pin Bowling on Friday and Saturday nights. Brunswick Zone Doveroma Lanes (bowlinbrunswick.com) offers discounted late-night fun. Lefty's Alley & Eats in Lewes (loveyleftys.com) hosts Two Dollar Tuesdays, which includes $2 bowling games, $2 shoe rental and $2 fish tacos. Strike!

Go for the spice during the Rehoboth Beach Gumbo Crawl Feb. 10. Buy a ballot, then you and your date can visit downtown restaurants to judge whose is best. It's warming, to say the least (downtownrb.com).

Run a 5K—and get free beer. There's nothing like trying to impress your date with your athletic abilities. (Just make sure you're up to the challenge.) There are special races and race series up and down the state every month, but the Builders' Dash 5K Run/Walk that takes place at Fordham & Dominion Brewing Company on April 14 ends with beer samples—and money raised goes toward Central Delaware Habitat for Humanity (runsgrp.com).

Watch a sunset. All you need is an open horizon. 😍