

Ten great first dates

Ten top places to go for that all important first date

By Chris Barnardo

So you've met someone you like and get on with online and now you want to meet for your first date. What can you do and where can you go to make the best impression and have a great time and stand the best chance of going on a second date?

Where you choose to go on your first date says a lot about you as a person and how you think, so it follows that the venue can make all the difference between failing or getting to go on a second date.

Never go to the cinema on a first date, it seems like any easy option, but sitting in the dark, in silence for two hours is not the way to get to know someone. Put your thinking cap on and dream up something a bit more out of the ordinary, something light, relaxing, and simple to do, which will show your date that you are interesting and creative. And there's no need for it to be expensive either. In fact, it shouldn't be expensive, because firstly, you want

to be able to pay for it all without a worry and secondly, and if your date wants to contribute towards the date, or pay their half, then they too have to comfortably be able to afford to do so.

Next week, we'll put our top ten tips a successful first date, but for starters let's get the venue right, so here 's my top ten tips for places to go on your first date, and by the way, they make great second and third date venues too :

Picnic

This is quite a funky option, but a picnic is a very subtly sexy and relaxing way of meeting someone. It's a simple idea that allows you to show your good taste in the food buying department, or even how skilled you are preparing food, which of course you can do beforehand. Visit the deli and get some nice treats to eat. Stick to simple small sandwiches or one bite finger foods and steer clear of messy foods or things that need cutlery to eat. A picnic works well in summer but it can work just as well in the winter if you choose your location carefully or combine it with one of the other venue ideas below. Readymade (or homemade) sushi is a good healthy finger food, but check first that your date likes sushi, because it is an acquired taste.

Art gallery

The intellectual option, or is it? Whether it's a big city gallery or a small local exhibition, walking round an attractive gallery looking at art, can be a great way of getting to know someone. You don't have to be an art critic to have an opinion, and if you choose the show after doing some homework, it doesn't have to be highbrow either. Modern art, photography, garden sculpture, local artists' exhibitions are all ready to be explored. Even small galleries have a tea room and the bigger city ones will have a restaurant. Reserve a table at the gallery restaurant beforehand, if you plan to eat, it

will show that you are organised and have taken control of the date to make sure that everything goes well.

Museum

Dusty old bones not your cup of tea? Museums don't have to be all about bones. A country house museum, a working medieval village, a museum of nostalgia or Roman Baths are all great places to spend a first date, with loads of interesting things to see and chat about. First dates are about breaking the ice, so walking round exhibits of Victorian toys, or the palatial rooms of a famous country house are perfect ways to get chatting about loads of things and get to know someone.

Zoo

Just because your date isn't a kid, doesn't mean that they won't like the zoo. Everyone was a kid once, and when was the last time you went the zoo? Remember that some people don't like zoos because they think that it's cruel to keep animals in cages, but pick a good zoo with big enclosures and a track record of saving animals from extinction and you should be alright. When you arrive at the gate, decide together on a few animals that you would really like to see and go to them rather than plodding round the whole park. Avoid the zoo café or restaurant, zoo food is best left to the inmates, instead take a picnic.

Wine tasting

Very chic! Wine tasting is a classy way to spend your first date. Interesting discussions about subtle differences between one wine and another with a generous helping of wonderfully expressive adjectives... wine tasting is a soft fruity number, bound to impress, silky smooth with a good finish... I'm sure you get the picture. And you won't be getting drunk, because you have to spit the wine out.

Bowling

Bowling can seem like a bit of a boy's night out thing to do. Check if your date would like to do this, because if they like the sound of it, it's great fun. Don't go bowling if your date has never been before and you have your own ball and a personal best over 150; getting strike after strike while your date bowls down the gutter each time is no fun for either of you. But if you're a casual bowler and you fancy something fun and vaguely sporty (in the loosest possible way), then bowling is a good fun evening.

Miniature / crazy golf

Perhaps both wackier and in some ways better than bowling, miniature golf is a low risk first date. It's outside and allows you to dress casually. It's fun and even with very little skill you can still have a great game. There'll be lots of game related chit chat and you might even make up the odd catch phrase which will survive the date and give you and your date an instant repartee when you next chat online. Nothing in your first date should be about competitiveness, see who can hit the goofiest ball or take the most hits to get in the target, or who can use the club in the most original way. First dates are about getting to know someone and working out if you can hit it off, not about who can score the most points.

Book signing

Book signing is a bit of a long shot, but a sure fire winner if you're lucky enough to find one locally that suits. Book shops often have them, and finding out that there is one near you and it's for a book that you think your date will like is a winner. Meet outside the venue, queue up and together meet someone famous who then signs your book as a lasting memory of that day. Who could resist having a second date with someone who could pull that off!

Meal

No first date list would be complete without a meal as one of the options. Everyone has to eat, at least twice a day, and a restaurant meal can be a lovely way to spend time with someone. Pick something simple and not too expensive. If you want to lavish special treats on your date, wait till you know them better so that you can go to a restaurant that you really know they will like. Also you want to be able to pay for the evening and for it to be affordable enough for your date to be able pay their share if they want to. It's best to go somewhere where you know the food is simple and healthy. Try and avoid haunts that you went to with your ex-partner, because nothing is worse than reminiscing when you are meant to be on a first date, and no one likes to find out that you took them to the restaurant that used to be you and your ex-partner's favourite place. When choosing the restaurant, think what it will say about you, and the sort of choices you generally make. Always phone beforehand and reserve a table.

Coffee house

If all else fails and either you can't afford a meal or are too nervous to try any of the more adventurous venues, it's hard to beat meeting at a coffee house on a Sunday morning. This is a short date and due to the lack of things to do, actually a potentially high pressure situation that will really focus you on talking to each other about yourselves. Unlike a meal, there are no long menus to ponder over and no big servings to hide behind. In a coffeehouse, you're stuck looking at each other over the brim of a coffee cup, with perhaps a pastry to play with if you're lucky and feel confident enough to eat it without making a mess. If possible choose a coffee house in a busy street so that there is something going on which can fill up any potentially awkward silences.

Whatever you do on your first date, keep it simple, but have fun and make it a date to remember. Be original and engage the child in you and your date. Even if you realise five minutes into the date that you there is no possibility of a second date, enjoy yourself and treat it as a training exercise for the next first date.