

Stay Home for the Perfect Valentine's Day

If you and your honey can't face another Valentine's Day of over-booked restaurants—and can't make time for a getaway—don't despair. Instead, you can bring the boutique feeling home, if only for one night.

"It's actually not that hard to transform your space into something special, even if it's for just a short time," says Natalie Vachon, who helps plan great experiences for guests of AKA Hotels properties in New York City, Beverly Hills, Calif., and elsewhere. "Think back to your favorite hotel experiences and try to channel what made the room so special."

Set the mood

Take lighting, for instance, essential to setting a mood, "it can be one of the hardest things to get right," Vachon says. Start by dimming the overheads and turning on the lamps – then don't forget the allure of candles. "Our signature scent is Bulgari's *Parfumee Au The Blanc*," Vachon says. "In candle form, it helps establish the tranquil environment we're after."



Minimalism, too, is key to a boutique hotel stay. At home, prepare for your special night by clearing the coffee table and tossing the mail into a drawer. “Decluttering gets rid of all of that visual distraction,” Vachon says. “It’s about making space for just you and your partner.”

Similarly, leave the athleisure wear in the closet and dress deliberately. If that means suit-and-tie and swirls-and-heels, go for it. If you’re more into the pajama game, consider indulging in super-plush robes and terry cloth spa slippers.

What to do

Once you’ve set the scene, turn the spotlight onto some supporting players. You needn’t invite a string quartet or a singing waiter into your home, but how about, say, Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan? “Streaming a romantic movie that has meaning for you is a great idea,” suggests Vachon. “With something like *When Harry Met Sally*, you can pick out locations that you both have visited together and remember the times you’ve spent roaming around New York.”



Whether it's an old classic like *Casablanca* or a relatively new romp like *Before Sunset*, you can always have Paris.

Or you could really make a leap, says Jorge Collazo, who steers an event planning team at The Betsy, a historic hotel in Miami Beach that's known for producing music festivals, literary symposia and other arts experiences. "Get out of your comfort zone and don't be shy about experimenting with genres," he says. "If you've never listened to classical music or opera, it might have a surprising effect. Experiencing new things together can be very romantic."

Indulge

The same goes with food. "Try a dish that sounds like it might be hard but is actually fun and easy to make together," Vachon says. Maybe something like a poke bowl, which has shown up on hotel restaurants across the country over the last year or so. The Hawaiian raw fish salad seems exotic but you can achieve a credible version by simply tossing some cubed chunks of tuna marinated in soy over rice and topping with avocado and sesame seeds.



To keep the mood going with some cocktails, Vachon suggests you “create your own concoction, or try to duplicate a favorite.” Any boutique hotel worth its Himalayan salt has put together a stellar cocktail list you can look to for inspiration (and check out [our interview](#) with the head mixologist at a classic New York City hotel, The Plaza). A safe bet would be to splurge on a Super Tuscan or to split a split.



You're tipsy, the lights are low and your moviedom couple of choice has loved, fought, broken up and reunited. Time to turn in.

You did remember the chocolates, didn't you?