

10 socially distant date ideas that aren't just a walk or a video chat

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Yes, we're still in a global pandemic, which doesn't exactly lend itself to extensive physical contact. But discouraging touch doesn't mean discouraging romantic pursuits.

The initial phase of wooing might take longer than it typically does. Though some states are loosening restrictions, limited capacity in restaurants and bars makes traditional dates difficult. So dates are being replaced with video calls and endless texts.

That allows more time to evaluate what is important to you in a partner, matchmakers and other experts point out — making this an exciting time to embark on a new relationship. As long as you seek out creative ways to deepen a connection.

"If you're with someone physically, it's just easier to learn their nuances, because you're in their presence," relationship coach and matchmaker Amari Ice said. "If you call each other or FaceTime, make it a habit to share something with your partner you wouldn't normally. You just don't have the luxury of being like you would be in person."

Here are 10 ideas for an out-of-the-ordinary social-distance date, in person or online.

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Go on a grocery run

At the beginning of the pandemic, grocery stores were suffering from perpetual empty shelves, turning shopping into a stressful privilege check. But it can be fun and less lonely to shop through a grocery list with another person. As you make your way through the aisles, don't hesitate to point out that sugary cereal you ate while growing up or the snack you remember from travels abroad. Find a time when the grocery store is relatively empty (typically the morning) to ensure you're not taking away from those needing supplies.

Best for: those looking for more spontaneity, less structure.

Have an outdoor picnic — six feet apart

Take inspiration from creative teens by scrolling through their aesthetically pleasing dates using TikTok's #picnicdate hashtag. Scope out an uncrowded hill or park space a few days in advance. Prepare a menu of easy-to-pack picnic fare such as bread, cheese and fruit. Curate a list of topics, or questions you want to ask one another. If you want to make your date Instagram-worthy, coordinate complementary outfits and meet before sunset or during sunrise.

Best for: a long-delayed first in-person date.

Give each other a room tour

One of the formative moments in a relationship is the nightcap at the end of the third or fourth date and the thrill of getting an intimate glimpse of the other's physical space (with the potential for something more). When you feel comfortable, carve out a time for a video-chat tour of one another's bedroom. Matchmaker Tammy Shaklee recommends strategically placing potential conversation starters that represent a key part of your personality (like a display of vintage vinyls or a Matisse print above your desk). A digital room tour should be curated to help the conversation flow. "It's not show and tell, but visual storytelling," Shaklee said.

Best for: getting to know someone on a video call beyond the basics.

Watch a movie together

Drive-in theaters are steadily making a comeback as a go-to communal but socially-distant activity. But if there are none near you, a joint movie viewing — where you watch on one screen while video chatting on another, perhaps while using the app Netflix Party — will have to do. Pick something you both haven't watched. Or, for real cinephiles, schedule a weekly date and trade off watching one another's favorite films, together or separately, and talk about them after, matchmaker Erika Kaplan said.

Best for: those who can finally stop saying, "I haven't gotten a chance to watch that yet, but it's on my list."

Gather outdoors with your date and their friends

Outdoor spaces are generally safer for larger crowds than indoor ones. And if you're willing to do the important and inevitable (but fundamentally nerve-racking) act of meeting the friends of the person you're dating, do so on a porch.

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Best for: those missing and wanting to mimic happy-hour meetups.

Make playlists for one another and listen together

Curating a playlist, especially for another person, is an art form, a fusion of your knowledge, taste and vulnerability. There is something sacred and indulgent about listening to songs together (or separately) that make you feel tender. That feeling of yearning can only be heightened when you can't see one another and can only listen to what reminds you of your significant other.

If you're not up for the emotional task of making a playlist, Ice recommends a music-listening date. Prepare questions in advance. What song reminds you of your childhood? What's the song that instantly brightens a bad mood?

Best for: revealing your feelings without explicitly having to say anything.

Have a meal together, homemade or delivery

If you're missing the performance and accomplishment of cooking a meal for your potential S.O., Ice recommends video chatting while making the same recipe together, then comparing and contrasting your results. If you'd prefer to leave the cooking to professionals, order meals from the same restaurant but delivered to your respective homes, and arrange your spaces to create a date-night ambiance.

Best for: novice chefs or self-proclaimed foodies wanting to break out of the monotony of quarantine cooking.

Write letters

This truly old-school route works especially well if you are on opposite ends of a state or country. Letters are physical reminders that can be kept and reread and are a welcome romantic addition to weekly video calls. It's the reprieve from our never-ending electronic interruptions and helps you recap your days or weeks in a time when they often blur together. Don't worry about how long your letter should be and focus on writing like you're talking to your S.O.

Best for: the romantics who want a physical reminder of pandemic courtship.

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window and take turns guessing. Or, do the same thing with a dictionary, using large paper and markers.

Best for: people sick of dates that require technology.

Make a regular, old-fashioned phone call

It's exhausting for a relationship to exist only in a digital frame. Phone calls allow for a less static experience — you're not confined to maintaining perfect posture or finding the most flattering camera angle. Reclaim your independence and air of mystery without the burden of a screen.

Best for: everyone.

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