

## Flowers, chocolates,

— Annabelle Cheng (鄭富恩) has seen her fair share on past Valentine's Days. But the date the 33-year-old Taipei resident remembers the most?

"I went bungee jumping ... and after that we had some hot chocolate — it was fantastic," she said over tea at Taipei's Village Cafe, where she works as manager. Although the guy that came up with that Valentine's date eight years ago is no longer her boyfriend, she remains impressed.

"It was romantic — we screamed together," she said, bursting into laughter.

With Valentine's Day falling on a Saturday this year, more couples are likely searching for ways to celebrate. While bungee jumping is harder to find these days (although you can try the **Taipei Bungy Club** [www.bungy.com.tw](http://www.bungy.com.tw), (02) 8666-6019), Taipei offers a wide range of activities whether you're on a budget, looking to splurge or searching for a novel way to rekindle the flame.

### OUTDOORS

If you're not afraid of the outdoors and a little exercise, Cheng suggests a romantic walk on **Elephant Mountain** (象山), part of the Sishou (Four Beast) mountain (四獸山) range in the Xinyi District (信義區). The views of eastern Taipei and notably, Taipei 101, make it a "perfect place for a Valentine's Day," she said.

Young couples have been known to congregate at **Xinsheng Park** (新生公園), which sits in the flight path of nearby Songshan Airport and offers close views of airplanes taking off and landing. The park is located on Xinsheng North Road (新生北路), between Minzu East Road (民族東路) and Songjiang Road (松江路). Be careful later in the evening, though, as the area is known for a few unsavory characters.

If you fear the noise of the planes will wreck the mood, there's the neighboring Dajia Riverside Park (大佳河濱公園), which runs along the Keelung River in north Taipei. An easy way to get there is to take the R34 (紅34) bus from Yuanshan MRT Station (圓山捷運站) to Hope Springs Station (希望噴泉站).

Southern Taipei offers riverside scenery suitable for an evening stroll. The **Bitan** (碧潭) area, right outside Xindian MRT Station (新店捷運站), has a newly renovated arcade with outdoor cafes and restaurants overlooking the Xindian River (新店河). You're likely to run into crowds on Saturday, but they can easily be avoided by following the paths by the riverside, which stretch nearly 1km.

### DINNER WITH A VIEW

If money were no object, Cheng says she wouldn't mind an evening "in the clouds" on one of the world's tallest buildings, **Taipei 101**. On the 85th floor, Italian restaurant **Diamond Tony's** (02 8101-0016) has a set menu where diners choose one of four main course choices of seafood and steak. Set dinner prices range from NT\$2,800 to NT\$5,800.

For another skyline view, the **Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel** in Taipei ([www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com))

has a few more options. Go for chic Shanghai cuisine at the **Shanghai Pavilion** (02 2376-3245) on the 39th floor or a six-course Italian set menu designed by head chef Dario Congera at the **Marco Polo Restaurant** (02 2376-3156) on the 38th floor. Meals at both places cost NT\$2,900 per person, with Marco Polo offering window seats at NT\$3,200 per person. If you can't get enough of the view, then consider the hotel's Valentine's Grand View Room package, which includes an assortment of gifts and three room types starting at NT\$7,200 a night per room.

It may not have the views, but **Joyce East** (02 8789-6128) has candlelight ambience and fine dining to boot. Some of the main course selections from the restaurant's Valentine's menu include New Zealand rack of lamb with pommery mustard and breadcrumbs with fresh herbs (NT\$3,200) and charcoal grilled Australian Wagyu steak slices with sea salt, pepper and porcini sauce (NT\$4,800).

### CHOCOLATE

Chocolate on Valentine's Day: why not make it a meal? **La Fusion Restaurant** (六國餐廳) at the **Taipei Garden Hotel** (台北花園大酒店, [www.taipeigarden.com.tw](http://www.taipeigarden.com.tw), (02) 2314-6611) is offering an all-you-can-eat "chocolate feast" for NT\$999 per person. All dishes are made using chocolate from French luxury brands Valrhona and Cacao Berry. Notable offerings include crab and chocolate mousse and seared tuna with white chocolate sauce.

For something more intimate, cozy — and less expensive — **Chocoholic** (巧克哈客, [www.chocoholic.com.tw](http://www.chocoholic.com.tw), (02) 2321-5820) on Yongkang Street (永康街) has several Valentine's specials tomorrow and on Saturday. A set meal for two persons, which includes various chocolate concoctions both sweet and savory, costs NT\$1,500. Definitely make reservations for this — with such a small space, Chocoholic can only offer seating in hour-and-a-half blocks starting from noon to 9:30pm.

### PEACE AND QUIET

If quiet and privacy is all you need, **Nonzero** (02 2772-1630), located near Zhongxiao Fuxing MRT Station (忠孝復興捷運站) may be just the ticket. While communal dining is the focus, this rustic-urban chic restaurant has a seating area in the back with antique tables and intimate lighting. There is no Valentine's special, but you can't go wrong with any of the menu offerings, as the food emphasizes fresh, natural ingredients and innovative combinations. Set menus are NT\$1,300 per person.

Nowadays, Cheng says she prefers a more low-key Valentine's Day, whether sharing a meal at home with her partner or heading for quieter, easy-to-reach places such as Wulai (烏來). Noting that hot springs are a popular Valentine's option, she recommended Wulai's **Spring Park Urai Spa and Resort** (春秋烏來, [www.springparkhotel.com.tw](http://www.springparkhotel.com.tw), (02) 2661-6555) as opposed to the smelly sulfuric waters of Beitou (北投), which might kill the mood.

# Heart to heart in Taipei

*This year Valentine's Day falls on a Saturday, offering a wide range of things to do, from the lavish and expensive to quiet and cheap*

BY DAVID CHEN  
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