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HOME & AWAY

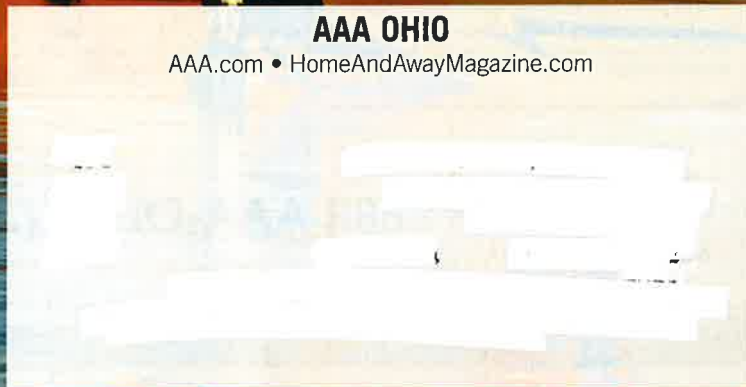
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**Ohio couples don't
have to look far for a
Valentine's Day
getaway.**

**10 for
2**

BY ANIETRA
HAMPER

Cold temperatures may have claimed Ohio's landscape, but savvy couples can still find plenty of ways to spend a warm weekend together. This Valentine's Day, trade the usual box of chocolates for a more unusual experience—Ohio is home to at least 10 getaways sure to ignite some sparks.

1. Amish Escape

In Holmes County, Amish Country breaks from daily commotion with a slow pace and tranquil atmosphere. Spend a day getting back to basics on a horse-drawn sleigh ride at an Amish farm, arranged by Donna's Premier Lodging in Berlin.



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Get up close to the animals during the scenic ride. You'll receive a goodie bag with a dozen homemade cookies and a souvenir mug of hot chocolate to keep warm on the trip.

2. Cozy Up

It's difficult to go anywhere in the Hocking Hills region and not feel romantic. The southeastern Ohio area famous for its impressive fall foliage is just as stunning in winter, when ice encases the moss and ground, preserving it all until spring.

Take your sweetheart by the hand and enjoy a day of hiking along the endless trails in the Hocking State Forest. In the adjacent Hocking Hills State Park, the Sweetheart Hike to Ash Cave on Feb. 11 is an annual favorite. Often, a frozen waterfall at the base of the cave sets a magnificent scene.

■ *Anietra Hamper is a freelance writer from Columbus, Ohio.*

After a day of activity, head to a cozy cabin—the region has numerous quaint lodging options, some of which include luxury perks such as couples' massages and hot tubs. And

some partner with South Bloomingville's Grouse Nest Restaurant, which can send its traveling chef to prepare a Valentine's feast.

"It is very romantic," said Chef Stacy Miller. "If you want to wow your significant other, that is the way to go."

The executive menu includes a dozen red roses, a bottle of champagne or wine, and a sumptuous multicourse meal. Grouse Nest can also schedule massages.

3. Outdoor Adventure

A forest hike is just one outdoor option—there are plenty more wintery adventures at Ohio's 74 state parks. All offer seasonal events in addition to everyday opportunities. Plan a full day or weekend with a combination of activities.

Secure some sleds and hit the hills at one of 42 state parks with designated sledding areas. Rent or bring your own ski equipment to explore park shorelines and picnic areas that

have been transformed into cross-country trails. Lace up skates and glide onto ice-skating rinks. If you're looking for something low-key, pack a basket with binoculars and a thermos of hot chocolate for a little romantic bird spotting. Short-eared owls, grosbeaks and golden eagles stay for the season.

4. Toast and Taste

Ohio wineries raise a glass to Valentine's couples with *Chocolate is for Lovers*, a tasting event along the Vines and Wines Trail near Lake Erie. Because winter crowds are smaller, wineries can give more personal attention to visitors.

"Fifteen wineries open their doors and provide great conversation and tasty appetizers matched with lovely Ohio wines," said Donniella Winchell, executive director of the Ohio Wine Producers Association.

You'll receive a crystal wine glass and a candy dish to fill with handmade chocolates available at each stop. *Chocolate is for Lovers* is scheduled this year Feb. 3–4 and Feb. 10–11.

5. Singles' Mingle

If you don't have a Valentine, don't despair—*Snow Trails* in Mansfield is catering to the single crowd. Feb. 14 will feature half-price unlimited tubing and, at the main lodge, food and drink specials and entertainment. With a rush of adrenaline and a little mingling, who knows—you may even make a love connection.

6. Sweet Smorgasbord

Life is short; eat dessert first in Wooster when the entire downtown becomes a chocolate paradise during the annual *Chocolate Daze*, scheduled this year Feb. 10–11.

Take a stroll down Main Street, where several dozen businesses will tempt with mocha martinis, chocolate fondue, chocolate barbecue and, for something different, chocolate

manicures and chocolate diamonds. The decadent feast is free.

"This event has become a signature event for downtown Wooster," said Sandra Hull, executive director of Main Street Wooster Inc. "Lots of people, lots of chocolate and lots of enjoyment for everyone, participants and businesses alike."

Couples can get in on food affairs themselves by signing up for a cooking class at Today's Kitchen Store, also in Wooster. Among its ongoing series of classes is a Romantic Dinner with Rick Davis, scheduled Feb. 11.

7. Love Train

In Nelsonville, climb aboard the Hocking Valley Scenic Railway's Valentine Chocolate Choo-Choo for a romantic evening that includes heavy hors d'oeuvres, wine and lots of chocolate within the ambience of a restored antique train car.

The Chocolate Choo Choo departs after a social hour on Feb. 11. The one-and-a-half-hour ride on the rails includes live onboard entertainment.

8. In the Shadows

Love is a little twisted at the Edgar Allan Poe Live Performance Theater in Canal Fulton. At its Valentine's Day event on Feb. 11, ladies receive a black rose instead of a red one—along with an attached finger or other body part as a token of love.

AAA's Sweetheart Deals

The Inn & Spa at Cedar Falls

Homemade chocolates await your arrival. Join Chef Anthony Schulz for a mouthwatering Valentine's Day dinner in an original 1840 log cabin. After dinner, snuggle up in front of a gas-log fireplace before turning in for the night. The next day, enjoy a hearty breakfast and the famed hiking trails of the Hocking Hills. The AAA Valentine's Day Package is priced at \$189 for a bed-and-breakfast room and \$249 for a cottage. Reservations must be made through AAA Travel.

Berlin Hotel and Suites

A whirlpool tub, on-site movie theater and gift basket from Heini's are just some of the perks featured at this property located in the heart of Amish Country. The AAA package is valid any weekend (Friday and Saturday) during February and is priced at \$129.95 (plus tax). Reservations must be made through AAA Travel.

Maumee Bay State Park

An exclusive AAA Sweetheart Package is available through May 15. It includes a one-night stay, in-room chocolate-covered strawberries and dinner coupons for two at Water's Edge (\$25 each). Sunday through Thursday rates range from \$170 to \$210. Friday and Saturday night packages range from \$180 to \$220.



A costumed interpreter walks the shadows of the theater, situated in a 1906 warehouse, and recites Poe's sinister yet hopelessly romantic words during dinner. Participants are encouraged to wear their favorite dark clothing.

9. Just Desserts

Satisfy every sweet tooth as you eat your way through six of Columbus' most renowned bakeries and restaurants on the All Dessert Food Tour by Columbus Food Adventures. Sample favorite confections at Pistacia Vera and Pattycake Bakery, lavish brownies and blondies at Sugardaddy's, and seasonal flavors at Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams. The tour finishes with a dessert cocktail at M. The three-hour tours are scheduled throughout the year; Valentine's couples can check out those on Feb. 11 and 18.

10. On the Rocks

Finally, for a truly memorable experience, go no farther than a love

shack on frozen Lake Erie for some ice fishing. Capt. Bud Gehring sets up and preheats shanties on the ice while he waits for your arrival by airplane or airboat to Put-in-Bay Island.

"By the time [visitors] get there, the shanties are heated, the rods are in there and it's ready to go," said Gehring, who's chartered for 28 years.

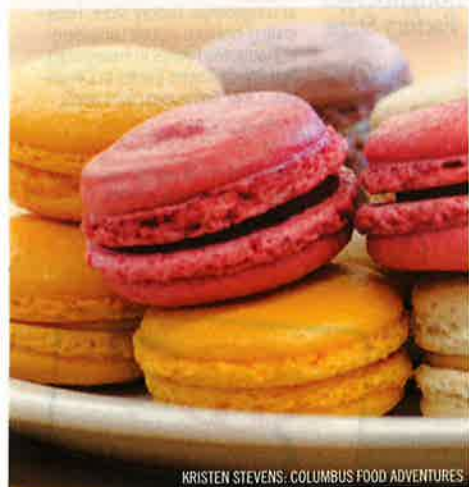
A four-wheeler delivers you to a camp on a floating fortress of ice that's monitored hourly for safety. Even if the fish aren't biting, the moment is prime for snuggling.

Experience isn't necessary—just a zest for adventure and a taste for perch and walleye.

Planning Your Trip

Whatever suits your romantic mood this Valentine's Day, make a new kind of memory with the one you love. Keep in mind some activities are weather-dependent and most require reservations. For trip-planning assistance, visit a AAA Travel agent or AAA.com/travel.

H&A



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