

FIRST & FOREMOST

It is possible to have a great first date.

By Martta Rose Kelly





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There are scores of articles, blogs, and web sites about horrendous first dates. Yet not that much has been written about the fantastic ones. Is it a case of not wanting to jinx a budding relationship? Perhaps one needs a little distance from that initial link-up to gain some perspective. Or maybe the train wrecks are just more interesting to read and write about. The fact of the matter is that, whether you're 16 or 60 or somewhere in between, it is possible to have a great first date...if you follow a few simple rules and embrace the experience.

For most people, "the goal of a first date is to get to a second date," says Julianne Cantarella, dating coach and owner of New Jersey's Matchmaker. "For many people, however, obstacles such as anxiety and high expectations can get in the way."

Cantarella's advice is to keep it simple and have fun. When she matches people up through her company, for instance, she usually arranges a lunch as a first date. Dinner, she explains, can be uncomfortable for people just getting to know each other—and expectations are usually higher. "Plus, if you're not hitting it off, you are stuck with



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with coffee and pastries at Calandra's Italian Village, which is nearby.

Luzzi also recommends the Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms in Morristown, Gustav Stickley's early 20th century country estate, a National Historic Landmark that will transport you back to 1911. "I love Stickley's furniture but cannot afford it, so this is the next best thing," he says.

If you both are fond of nature and photography, investigate Hackensack Riverkeeper Eco-Tours. They run from May 4 through October 13. The Eco-Cruises are educational tours of the Hackensack River and the NJ Meadowlands aboard the Hackensack Riverkeeper's specially rigged pontoon boats. Captain Bill Sheehan started the Eco-Cruise program in 1994 to increase awareness of the lower Hackensack River watershed as a vital natural and recreational resource. The tours generally take between two and two-and-a half hours and are fully narrated by a U.S. Coast Guard-licensed captain.

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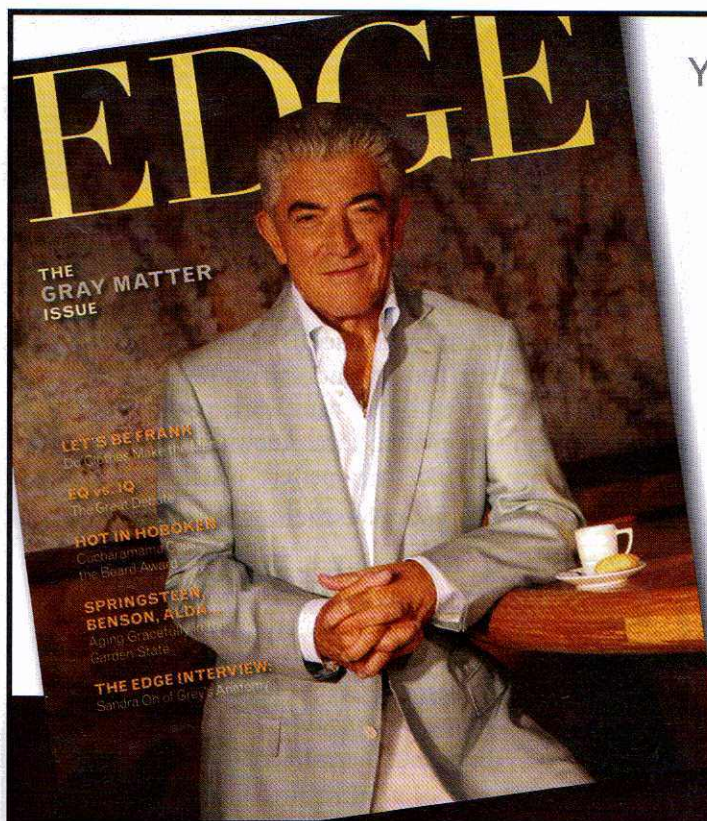


TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

For first dates with someone you've known for a while—and whom you want to impress—then cocktails and dinner are a good bet. Pat Amato, 23, a certified personal trainer in Roseland, recommends Halcyon Brasserie, a popular spot in Montclair for special dates (first and otherwise). "The décor is beautiful, and before dinner you can relax at the main bar or lounge," he says. The menu is eclectic, with selections ranging from Organic Scotch Eggs to Kimchi Fried Chicken to Orange Ginger Glazed New Zealand King Salmon.

Jenn Schiffer, 28, a web site developer from Montclair, recommends Pig & Prince as a "nice, fancy place with great cocktails and appetizers." She also counts Uncle Moustache—which serves French-Lebanese fare—and Tuptim, a Thai restaurant, among her favorite not-too-noisy places to enjoy good first-date conversations.

Another way to make a great impression is to take your date to High Societea House in Wayne—described on its



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web site as a "tea room where one can go back in time and enjoy the lost art of conversation, while enjoying the perfect pot of tea!" Catherine Close, a graphic designer in her 50s from Little Falls, had her first date there with her now-husband, Mick. "It's a lovely ambience," she says, "with the floral tea cup settings, serving pieces and lace tablecloths. A relaxed and romantic atmosphere."

To complement your tea, there are scrumptious caramel and assorted fruit scones with freshly made lemon curd and clotted cream, homemade soups, salads, finger sandwiches, tea breads, muffins, and assorted desserts. Reservations are encouraged since there are a limited number of tables.

The bottom line is that first dates don't have to reduce you to a bundle of raw nerves. A little planning, the right attitude, and being open to having fun and living in the moment can go a long way. **EDGE**



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