



30 Fun Winter First Date Ideas That'll Make You Forget All About the Cold

We're not just talking about ice skating—though there's a scientific reason why you should try that, too.

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The best first dates are immersive, allowing you to open up and get to know each other in a fun setting. The trouble is, freezing temps (in the Northeast, at least) mean otherwise great ideas (and great outfits)—such as grabbing a coffee and strolling through a park—might be impractical. Just because it's blustery, however, doesn't mean the activities need to be droll (or even indoors), especially this time of year when romantic holiday villages abound. Instead, grab your most stylish boots and a coat that makes you confident, and try one of these fun (and inexpensive) winter first date ideas that'll keep the conversation flowing.

Have an Indoor Picnic

Candles, a warm soft throw on the floor, a bottle of wine, take out, and a classic holiday movie on the TV: instant picnic! "It's perfect for snuggling, and creating a bit of romance and fun," says Rachel Federoff, matchmaker and relationship expert of Love and Matchmaking.

Build a Snowman

"Get on the snow gear and build a snowman together," says Federoff. "It's a great way to be a kid again, share some stories, and then warm up afterwards at a local pub for a grown up hot chocolate." No snow on the ground but still looking for something festive? Head to a local holiday festival.

Go Roller Skating

Bonnie Winston, Celebrity Matchmaker and Relationship Expert, loves a retro roller skating evening for a first date. "You'll grab on to each other if you're not a pro, so you can hold each other's hands and waists to make subtle, gentle contact. Plus, it's good exercise and will get your heart beating."

Play Groupon Roulette

Amber Trueblood, marriage and family therapist, suggests playing Groupon Roulette for a rollicking first date. "Login to your local Groupon page and click on 'things to do'. Pick one *thing* from the first five choices that pop up." Everything from trampoline parts to axe-throwing to murder-mystery dinners might arise, increasing the chances of novelty.

"Spontaneity boosts the endorphin and dopamine levels linked to decreased anxiety and increased happiness," says Trueblood. "Take a chance, have fun, and deepen your connection by experiencing a unique activity together."

Cozy Up Stargazing

"Understanding our tiny place in the universe can be an eye-opening way to foster acceptance, understanding, and appreciation for one another," says Trueblood. "A planetarium show can provide a change of pace from our otherwise busy lives and be deliciously relaxing and romantic too!"

Catch a Drive-In Movie

For instant romance, Winston suggests a drive-in movie. "Grab some old school goodies like Cracker Jacks, Red Vines or popcorn and find a romantic classic." Because it's more private than a movie theater, you can still talk and get to know each other. "You can be more comfortable than if you were at a public screening."

Volunteer Together

For your first date, why not give back—together? "Volunteering allows you to explore shared values," explains Bianca L. Rodriguez, licensed therapist and relationship expert. "Science has proven that giving back stimulates the brain's reward center, releasing endorphins creating what's called the 'helper's high.' When you volunteer together, you share this amplified mood state, fostering closeness. Finally, helping those in need provides the opportunity to feel gratitude, another elevated mood state that when experienced with another can increase affection."

Take a Workout Class

Who says a first date needs to be over cocktails? For the ultimate in quick bonding, Rodriguez recommends exercising together. "Taking a boxing or yoga class together encourages mimicry, which is when we imitate another's movements, speech patterns or emotions. Research has shown that when people mimic each other they report feeling more attuned to their partner and rate the interaction as smoother."

Check out an Ice Hockey Game

Cheering crowds, fast-paced thrills—what better way to spend a wintery first date than throwing on your cutest hat, and catching a hockey game? And, of course, if the date is going well, the chilly air encourages a bit of cuddling, too. “Elevated emotions from thrilling endorphins can easily be mistaken as chemistry and attraction,” says Laurel House, Celebrity Dating Coach and host of Man Whisperer podcast. “In addition to the excitement, there’s plenty of time to talk in between periods.”

Catch an Improv Show

According to a study published in the journal Human Nature, the very act of laughing together helps to bond new relationships by helping people open up, making an improv show an ideal first date.

Go Sledding

If you live in a snowy area, grabbing a pair of sleds and finding the nearest hill is an inexpensive and surefire path toward giggles. You’ll unlock your inner kid while getting to see a playful side of your date, too. “Fun requires vulnerability, as you drop your emotional guard, let go, laugh, and play without judgment, self-checking, or rigidity. And vulnerability is the root of having a heart-opening connection,” House says.

Try Indoor Rock Climbing

Adrenaline can help make couples feel bonded, according to a Harvard University study. So, jump-start your relationship by sharing a unique physical challenge, like rock climbing at a local indoor gym.

Play Ping Pong

Many ping-pong social clubs have opened up around the country. Try a place like SPIN—with locations in New York, Chicago, Toronto, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Seattle, Austin and Washington DC—which allows couples a healthy dose of competition, followed by a drink or meal on-site. “It’s been shown that people who work out together feel more chemistry towards each other thanks to the release of endorphins,” House explains. “After you get your heart rate up, deepen the date with great conversation.”

Visit an Animal Shelter

If you're both pet lovers, spend some QT among in-need pooches and kittens? Many shelters will allow screened visitors to play with animals or take dogs out for short walks, and it's a good opportunity to measure your date's emotional intelligence. "Watching whether or not your date shows compassion can help illuminate their character," says House.

Tackle an Escape Room

Escape Rooms have become popular because of their unique combination of adrenaline and smarts. Solving clues side-by-side is an excellent way to bond, and you'll have a chance to share the thrill of victory (or, alas, the agony of defeat). Either way, you're on the same team. "Escape Rooms require understanding the other's nonverbal cues or weaknesses, so that you get to know each other on a body language level," House says. "You see how you each respond to stressors, leadership positions, or how you handle each other's fears or successes." In short, it's a good test to see if a date two should be in your future.

Spend the Night at an Arcade

Unleash your inner kid over skee-ball and Ms. Pac-Man at a video game arcade. Healthy competition is always fun—while humor is a known turn-on—so the inevitable laughter and gentle ribbing is sure to help conversation flow.

Ice Skate

A classic winter date, lacing up some skates and hitting a local rink is a guaranteed good time. Bonus points for hot chocolate (regular or spiked!) following a few spins around the rink. "Even if one of you is an awesome skater and the other isn't, it's still a great winter date idea," says House. "More so actually, because the touch barrier is immediately broken for 'safety' reasons. No one wants to fall, right? So it's a nice excuse to hold onto each other!"

Meditate

Hoping for a truly chill first date idea? Try visiting a meditation studio like INSCAPE in NYC, Unplug Meditation and The Den Meditation in L.A., or Take Five Meditation in Washington D.C. Studies have shown that mutual vulnerability increases closeness between couples, so tandem meditating might help break down walls and inspire discussion post-studio.

Stop to Smell the Roses at a Botanical Garden

Surprisingly, not all botanical gardens are in peak bloom in summer; many include varieties that only flourish in winter. Spending time in green spaces can boost your mood, research done by the University of East Anglia suggests, so you can channel that happiness towards each other. Many gardens are also open at night, providing bar carts and snacks like popcorn and churros, perfect for sharing.

Enjoy a Craft Cocktail

A little liquid courage, as they say, can stimulate chatter—and so can talking about all the seasonal, bespoke ingredients the bartender is mixing up in your complicated concoction.

Take a Cooking Class

Find out if your (literal) tastes match up. A cooking class is a lower-key setting than a dinner, allowing for more natural conversation—and if the date goes badly, hey, at least you get to eat your results. Places like Williams-Sonoma and Sur La Table offer options. “Every date needs to be building block to the next, expanding and deepening your connection. Cooking will do exactly that,” explains House. “You’re creating something together, seeing how you handle team work, and multi-tasking.”

Play a Board Game

Whether you choose a classic like Scrabble, or more modern favorites like Bananagrams, Exploding Kittens, or The Rivals for Catan, playing a game together is a beloved date night activity for a reason—it’s quite simply tons of fun. And, yes, the old adage is true, studies say: couples who play together stay together.

Head here for some fun game ideas.

Paint Together

Practicing creative hobbies has been shown to increase well-being and even lead to better relationships—so try unleashing your inner artist by going to a paint and sip night. You’ll leave with a unique memento to look back on if they happen to stay in the picture.

Sing Karaoke

Belting out "Don't Stop Believing" in public might not be for everybody, but the point of karaoke is less about hitting the high notes and more about trying not to take yourself so seriously—key for a lighthearted first-date. "Looking foolish, with someone else instantly transforms the embarrassing act into a bonding one," says House.

Hit a Trivia Night

Who says a first date at a bar is overrated? Make a bar date more unique by hitting up a trivia night, letting the two of you put your heads together, plus adding competition, intellect, and conversation into the mix.

Stroll Around a Flea Market

This will allow you to learn each other's tastes and get a sense of your compatibility—not to mention, potentially pick up some great treasures, too. House says, "With an array of vendors, you'll have ample opportunity to stumble upon your secret obsessions, collections, and share stories from your childhood."

Make Fondue

A historic winter treat, fondue takes many delicious forms—cheese or chocolate—making it a tasty first date. Fondue's messiness also allows you to gauge whether your date is game or squeamish. In some countries, like Switzerland, there are playful rules around fondue, requiring bets (such as doling out kisses) if you drop your bread in the pot. And, as if you needed one more excuse to eat melted cheese, studies suggest that couples who engage in novel activities are more successful.

Head to an Art Museum

While a museum might seem like a potentially awkward first date activity, they can also be an incredible catalyst for thoughtful conversation, plus a way to gauge each other's interests. "History nerds, artistically inclined, and architectural addicts alike will love this totally intellectual date where you can reveal your favorite artists and styles that have shaped your perspective," says House.

Take a Carriage Ride

Snuggle under a blanket, sharing hot chocolate, watching the city clomp by. More importantly, you can let your guard down. "As you ride, you can share stories about your

winter traditions and experiences,” House explains. “When storytelling about the past, it’s hard not to get a little vulnerable, which is core to open your hearts.”

Go to a Brewery

With taprooms more popular than ever, visiting a local craft brewery together is a low-key way to discover some blends. And even if you're not a drinker, there's usually giant soft pretzels you can split, which is always a win.