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Save the best for your love

There are plenty of wonderful gift ideas for which you don't necessarily have to break the bank

By Cleofe Maceda, Staff Reporter

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Businesses have stocked up on a range of Valentine's Day merchandise keeping in mind that people are increasingly conscious about their spending habits.

Image Credit: Megan Hirons Mahon/Gulf News

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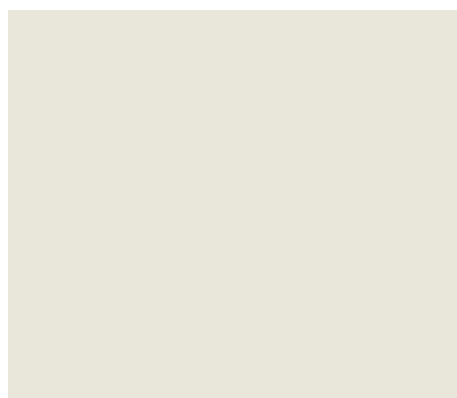
Difficult economic times have taken a huge bite out of consumers' budgets, so spending on lavish gift items, romantic trips and hotel dinners is out of the question for some people.

Robyn Nugent, an expat from South Africa, spent quite a lot on Valentine's Day in the past. This time around, she and her husband will stay indoors as they try to avoid unnecessary spending.

"We will definitely cut down on our expenses this year. No gifts, just a nice romantic dinner at home, otherwise, it just gets out of hand. We did use to go out for an expensive meal, with wine, which sometimes could go up to Dh1,000. I think staying in and cooking a nice meal is much more romantic, private and easier on the wallet," she adds.

While cash may be hard to come by, Nadeem Haji from Pakistan makes sure he has a few dirhams to spare, to warm his wife's heart. "I've already ordered a ring for my wife. It's a 22k gold ring. I've set my budget to around Dh1,000. I normally spend the same amount every year on Valentine's. Also, we have planned to have a dinner outside," he says.

Another expat, Latha Ganes, has been on the lookout for presents and has her eyes on luxury perfumes and watches. "I sincerely feel that I should get a good



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branded perfume and watch for my husband. He is brand-conscious and a big-time lover of great smell," she says.

If you think high-end brands are bad for the wallet, Ganes is confident the household budget is safe this year. "We have never overspent on Valentine's. We usually just exchange gifts and dine out most of the time. We have taken a resolution not to spend much this year, but with the Dubai Shopping Festival in the background, gifts are made affordable," she says.

The big day is just days away and if you haven't planned something special yet, there's no need to panic. There are plenty of last-minute ideas for those who are caught in a bind, and they don't necessarily have to break the bank.

Flowers are in high demand, so most people shell out more for a few stems. A dozen roses can easily set you back by over Dh650 at most florists and, even if you have spare money lying around chances are that, by now, florists are completely booked for deliveries, notes Amy Parker of Kentessa, an online gift retailer.

Flowers

Try buying flowers online instead. Check out retail sites such as Theflowershop.ae, which has a wide selection of stunning blooms at affordable rates compared to retail shops.

But what can you do if you're really strapped for cash? Use your artistic talent. "How about picking up a vase from Home Centre or your local mall, and picking up the flowers yourself from a stall in the mall or Carrefour. Arrange the roses in the vase and voila. You'll be able to save a bundle," Parker suggests.

If you do have a few bucks to spare, make a dash for a nearby florist shop, let them make you a nice arrangement then deliver the flowers yourself. "You'll have to fight for queues but at least there will be no compromise in presentation," Parker says.

Florists, however, advise it's best to avoid groceries, shops in malls or other middlemen. You can save lots if you go straight to a flower shop that deals with bulk orders.

Pradeep Kumar, sales manager at Jenny Flowers, says you can opt to buy roses per piece and do away with elaborate arrangements and door-to-door delivery. "Just go to the shop yourself and pick the flowers. Instead of spending Dh150 to Dh200 on a bouquet, grab a few stems, say 10 pieces. That will cost you only Dh50. That's a lot of savings," Kumar tells Gulf News.

Chocolates

Another all-time Valentine favourite among the romantics at heart are chocolates. They're easy to find, but can be a little hard on the wallet. A heart-shaped box with a red bow on top sounds like a great, last-minute present, yet it can easily cost you Dh150 to Dh500. Sounds a bit too much? Visit your favourite chocolatier and see how you can take home a sweet deal. Alena Soblirova, assistant manager at Patchi boutique in Dubai Mall, says a good way to buy chocolates is by the kilo and pack them the way you want.

A kilo of Patchi Valentine chocolate hearts can cost Dh170. "If you bring a red tray or any item related to Valentine's, we can fill it with different types of chocolates. It will be cheaper because you're paying only for the chocolates," she says.

Patchi also has a wide collection of red and silver wrapped chocolate arrangements with prices ranging from Dh385 to Dh405.

Jewellery

If you feel like buying a ring for your loved one or a dazzling necklace, there's still time to hunt for a bargain. Namita Thakkar likes buying and collecting gold jewellery. She suggests that you head to Gold Souk in Deira. "That is where you can bargain easily. Whereas in the malls, the overheads are high so retailers charge extra. When you bargain, negotiate on the making charges," she says.

As long as you have the budget, there's no harm in visiting the jewellery shops in malls, either. Parker says there are heart pendants for under Dh500.

However, if your wallet won't allow a gold purchase, try silver. "Nowadays, you get some lovely designs in silver jewellery as well, and they're cheaper than gold," she says.

For those looking to give gifts to their friends or family members, buying accessories is a good idea. Think beads, bangles, dangling earrings. Don't be

ashamed if they are not made of pure gold or encrusted with pricey diamonds, it's the thought that matters.

"Anyone will love accessories," says Sharon Pereira from India. A collector of accessories, Pereira says shops like Forever 21 and Aldo are on top of her list. "There you can find items for Dh19 to Dh20 or from Dh30 to Dh40 apiece. Lifestyle shops also have a good, affordable selection," she adds.

For those finding it difficult to choose the perfect gift, play it safe by purchasing a gift card. Visa and Majid Al Futtaim Finance are offering gift cards that cost between Dh100 and Dh3,500.

"A gift card enables your loved one to choose exactly what they want, when they want and anywhere in the world and even online. There are no credit checks at purchase, no age limit for the person being gifted the card and the credit limits are flexible, says Rasool Hujair, CEO of Majid Al Futtaim Finance. Whatever it is that you're looking for, be it a Valentine gift or a memorable experience, try visiting new websites in the UAE that promise to help you celebrate at a great price.

Website options

At GoNabit, UAE residents can choose from a host of "loved-up deals" at seriously discounted prices. Recently bagged deals include a trip to Oman (complete with meals, cruise and a tour, for 63 per cent off the normal price) and a dozen roses for Dh149.

Another site worth visiting is LowCostDubai.com. It's co-founder and director, Ainsley Duncombe, says Valentine hunters can find deals like one-night stay at a hotel for a little over Dh200 per couple or a buffet dinner cruise, valued at only Dh185 per person.

You can also let your creativity do the work.

"How about giving her [or him] a blank card? When she opens it, tell your significant other that you searched all the malls and all the hallmarks and did not find anything that expresses your love for her. Present a bonsai tree and say that you would like to nurture it together as a symbol of each other's commitment. Bonsai trees can be found at reasonable prices at Ikea," Parker suggests.



For the techno savvy, burn a CD or fill his or her Apple iPod with a collection of romantic love songs— those that remind you both of your best memories together. Have it nicely gift wrapped and you're done.

Vanessa Northway, head of the School of Textiles and Design at Heriot-Watt University, Dubai Campus, says you can simply drop by a bookstore and grab a small-scale canvas with mini easel which you can paint on. It could be a sweet gift for a loved one.






Check out Global Village

Or you can go to Global Village and check out the Africa pavilion. There you will find heart-shaped glass stones of varying sizes which they will engrave for you with your loved ones' name or message — for only Dh30.

Another personal gift that will certainly be looked at and enjoyed is a mini-sized journal full of photos and memorabilia that you and your loved one share. You can also give the love of your life a diary with a message for every day of the year.

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