

Eat your heart out: COVID-safe Valentine's Day dining

February 10 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

It's a COVID-era conundrum for Valentine's Day: how to eat out with your beloved when you live in a country where all restaurants are closed?

The answer hit upon by a handful of hotels in Belgium's capital is to

convert empty rooms into private dining salons for two, where a four-course meal with champagne and wine can be enjoyed without breaking the household "bubble".

"We're over the moon about being here tonight, just like in a restaurant," said Marine Deroo, a 34-year-old Frenchwoman living in Brussels who was trying out the concept just ahead of Valentine's Day.

"We've been cooped up at home for months. We've tried setting up pretend 'evenings out' at home—but to actually go out, like to a restaurant, it's a super opportunity that we just jumped on," she said.

She and her boyfriend had just been greeted and shown to a candle-lit table set up where a bed used to be, as music travelled into their room in the Qbic Hotel, which says it pioneered the idea.

A waitress hovered to take their choices from the menu, including a bottle of wine, which had to be ordered before a government coronavirus ban on serving alcohol past 8:00pm kicked in.

It's not just room service, the [hotel](#) manager, Bert Vandewaetere pointed out. The 149-euro (\$180) package covers a hotel room to sleep in, a separate room to dine in, the dinner—not including any drinks—and breakfast.

"Basically, people dress themselves up for a really good night on a Saturday evening—children at home, only couples are coming here, just two people," he said.

'Finally we can go out'

He said he came up with the idea after Belgium closed restaurants and bars in November to slow the spread of the coronavirus, aggravating an

already steep drop in hotel business because of cancelled trade fairs and other events.

It was especially important that the Qbic prove itself, as it had opened in late 2019, just before the pandemic hit.

Providing free rooms to frontline medical workers in the pandemic's first wave and a lobby co-working area for [university students](#) kept activity ticking over, providing at least some work for the hotel's staff, most of whom are furloughed.

But it was only two months ago, when some of the empty rooms were turned into two-person dining chambers, that business really took off on weekends.

"The idea came because a lot of people were frustrated to stay at home," Vandewaetere said.

"We have plenty of rooms—so why not combine them with a really nice offer, to offer them the time of their life on a Saturday when half of Belgium wants to go out?"

The reaction was swift. "The comments that we receive from people were really: 'Finally, I had some time alone with my partner. Finally, I had some other walls to look at, not just my living room at home. Finally, we can go out again'," he said.

Other hotels in Brussels have followed suit, opening up the possibility to dine out while respecting social distancing rules.

The Qbic Hotel usually has 23 such private dining rooms set up for a Saturday night service. That means it has 46 rooms that can be occupied by couples: 23 for dining and 23 for sleeping.

On Valentine's Day weekend, though, 60 dining rooms have been configured, for both Friday and Saturday nights. And all but a couple of the Friday night slots are sold out.

In the hotel's bustling kitchen, chef Joao Silva said the idea has been invaluable in forging his new team and seeing what they could do.

Initially, he thought cooking and catering to two dozen separate dining rooms could be "a little bit overwhelming, considering the numbers that we might reach".

"But at the end of the day, we did our first month, and I have no regrets. It was just fluid, straight through and through. The staff are amazing," he said.

As he spoke, employees with facemasks darted between the kitchen and the rooms, carrying trays along hallways where music was punctuated by corks popping and intimate chatter.

For that brief period, the hotel appeared almost normal, almost like in pre-pandemic times—with only the facemasks to remind patrons of the here and now.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: Eat your heart out: COVID-safe Valentine's Day dining (2021, February 10) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-heart-covid-safe-valentine-day-dining.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--