

# 40 CHEAP DATES

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And Why You  
Should Take Them



JAMES DIVINE

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### DEDICATION

Honey, can you believe it has been 31 years since we first said “I Do?” I definitely got the better end of that deal. We had so many fun dates before we were married. In early marriage, we somehow forgot to go on dates. I’m glad we started back up in 1999 and have continued the tradition since. I look forward to our Friday night date nights and I love you more than you can know. Thank you, Susan Divine, for putting up with me, blessing us with four beautiful children, and for being a terrific grandmother to our grandkids. You are so much fun to be around!

Pssst...does this make up for forgetting to mention that you edited my last book?

### 5 IMPORTANT GUIDELINES FOR LIFE

Have fun

Eat more chicken

Say “I love you”

Say "I'm sorry"

Hug...a lot...then more

### **WAY BACK IN THE 1980S**

My wife and I started dating the summer before our senior year in high school. It was June of 1984. We didn't have much money, but we sure had a lot of fun. We didn't let finances hold us back from dating. Some things we did and the approximate cost in 1985 dollars:

Fries at Bennigans	\$2
Mexican fried ice cream	\$2
Long walks on the beach (isn't this what most women say they want anyway)	Free
Tennis	Free
Bike rides	Free
Bottomless ice tea at Po' Folks	\$2
Dinner at her parent's house	Free
Dinner at my parent's house	Free

You can see many of these dates had a food theme. Food can be one of the cheapest dates – and also the most expensive. You have to remember it's more about who you are with than what you are eating.

We married, I joined the Army, and when our first child came along 13 months later, we were living on an E-4 salary. But believe it or not, those days are some of the greatest memories I have. We graduated to picnics and trips to the park with our beautiful daughter. Church socials also filled the calendar. And back when gas was less than \$1 per gallon, we took many trips to Virginia Beach and Washington D.C., both of which were two hours away from where we lived.

The mountains of Virginia were also on our list. If we packed and brought a lunch, our cost was often only for gas.

We were amazed at the number of our friends who had lived in central Virginia all their lives and had never been to some of the sites we were seeing for free.

Us: Hey, have you guys ever been to Natural Bridge?

Ho-hum couple: No, it's too far.

Us: It's not too far! It was only an hour and a half away. It was free to get in and was absolutely beautiful.

Ho-hum: But then I'd miss Three's Company reruns.

Us: See you later...we're taking another trip.

We were the same way when living in Japan. Sometimes we would jump in the car and explore. We had a little more money at that point, and we had added another bundle of joy. Kids never stopped our wanderlust.

Go see what your local area has to offer. A two-hour drive is not too far to go. Pack a lunch; it's cheaper. Explore. Have fun. Get lost. On purpose. Turn off the GPS.

## **WHY DATE**

Some of you might say...

"I already found my mate. We don't need to date anymore."

That's not true! You need it now more than ever. We went through a difficult time in our marriage where we forgot this. We were too busy taking care of kids (did I mention we had added three and four by 1997), we were making less money again due to a career change (I left

the Army) and we had stopped spending quality time together. Our marriage was hurting. We went through an entire year barely spending time together!

We knew something had to change. We restarted a date night and have been faithful to it ever since. We didn't have much money, but we needed and wanted that time alone.

Even if you don't have kids, you need to date.

Even if you can't afford a babysitter, you need to date (trade with another couple)

Even if you work with your significant other, you need to date.

It's fun! It's a chance to get away from the stresses of life, to enjoy spending time with the one you love, to focus on each other.

Susan and I have completed at least 1,000 dates, but who's counting!

## **ON TO THE 50 CHEAP DATES**

For these listings, there will be a title, a short description or story, and a dollar sign listed (cost for a complete date with two people; if you are single and reading this book, you should ask someone to go...and if you are looking for a mate, read in "The Saxophone Diaries" of how lasagna can predict marital success.)

F = Free

\$ = Less than \$5

\$\$ = \$5-\$10

\$\$\$ = \$10-\$20

\$\$\$\$ = More than \$20

We were the master of the cheap date, but not all of our dates are cheap now. We have two incomes and the kids are all grown. As Dave Ramsey would say...

*"We lived (in the past) like no one else so we can live like no one else."*

We never went into debt to do fun things.

### **1) Sonic Happy Hour**

Delicious cold drinks with hundreds of flavor combinations...even the diet versions taste good. A chance to sit in the car and talk or listen to great music makes it a great "bad weather" date. Extra bonus if you have *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* by the Beatles playing and you actually hold hands!

\$

### **2) Dollar Menu**

There's not a true dollar menu anymore, but you can still eat for pretty cheap if you eat off what they now call the Value Menu. True, the food is not good for you, but you're not eating it every day. If you share the fries and drink, you can do this for a lot less even.

\$-\$\$

### **3) Dollar Theater**

These are usually older theaters found in some towns where they show movies after they have made their run in regular theaters and are not as popular. Some even have great values on their food/snacks. If it doesn't bother your conscience, you can even bring your own snacks from the Dollar Store which is sometimes in the same strip mall.

The seats won't be as comfortable here. Sometimes the floor might be a little sticky. And well, I won't describe the appearance of the bathrooms at times, but you get the same movie as everyone else, just two months later. Ours is no longer a true dollar theater, but it's just \$2.25, which beats the \$12 or more that the big-name theaters charge.

\$

#### **4) Dollar Store**

Since we are on the topic of dollars, the Dollar Store – for those of you who are uninformed, this is where you can buy overstock and other items, including food, and everything costs just \$1 – can be a great place to grab a cold drink or ice-cream cone. This date works best when it's a short walk from your home and you go on a cool summer evening. Make sure to hold hands and whisper sweet nothings into your sweetheart's ear the entire way. It might make her forget you are only spending \$2 on this date. Watch soon for my Dollar Store cookbook...I'm serious...no really...*How To Cook for Just \$2 a Meal for Two.*

\$

#### **5) Walk to The Park**

If you have kids, you probably already do this, but it's fun without kids too. You can enjoy watching other people's kids. I don't understand why, but it's sometimes entertaining to watch a kid throw a tantrum when you're not the one having to deal with it. It's even more fun when the parent is giving their kid whatever he wants instead of setting boundaries. Susan and I also like watching neighbors play with their dogs.

We don't have a dog. Dogs are like angels, except they stink and have bad breath. Cats are like demons, except you can usually recognize demons when you see them (not that I've ever seen one) whereas cats are disguised as cute, loving creatures. My daughter has a cat named *Midnight*. I've often accidentally called her *Nightmare*. She also has the sweetest dog. His name is *Remy*. He was once found hiding in fear after their home had been broken into. He is such an angel he cannot fathom someone doing something evil.

F

#### **6) Walk Around the Lake/Pond/Drainage Area**

Although this is similar to #5, it has a different vibe to it. At the lake near our house, you pass several parks with kids playing, there are dozens of people fishing, couples picnicking, boats on the water, even an area where we are 99% sure the people are drug dealers. Hey, they enjoy the lake too.

In a subdivision near the school where I teach, a resident stated that he was happy to have some waterfront property. Another resident pointed out it was drainage water, and hosted thousands of mosquitos in the summer.

Bring your favorite beverage, stop to enjoy the sights and sounds, AND get some exercise.

F

### **7) Redbox**

This is even cheaper than the dollar theater. Rent a DVD. Pair it with a homemade pizza. Pizza seem like too much work? Many grocery stores now have pre-made pizza dough for less than \$2. Put some sauce and your favorite toppings on it and you have a delicious easy meal.

In this age of microwave popcorn, I forgot how good “real” popcorn could taste. Real popcorn is when you place the kernels in some oil and pop them on the stove. My wife has become a master at it. It’s mouth-watering delicious!

\$

### **8) Pack A Picnic**

This is one of my favorite dates! It helps if one or both of you are good at cooking something, or buy something at the deli that is already prepared. Bring a special dessert and something tasty to drink. Drive somewhere scenic where you can be alone. Lay out a blanket or bring some chairs. Bring your camp stove and cook gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches. Be creative. You can also do this in conjunction with a hike.

\$\$

### **9) Go to Jimmy Johns**

They advertise free smells. Do it! I dare you. When they ask “May I help you,” take a deep breath in and reply, “No, I’m just here for the free smells.”

F



### **10) Tour the Air Force Academy Chapel**

This one is really a Colorado Springs idea. The chapel is beautiful! The admission is free. The parking is free. And this can be combined with a picnic and even a short hike to get to the chapel. You may be too far to visit, but I bet there are historic sites in your area that are free. When we lived near Richmond, many of the Civil War Battlefield sites were free to visit. In Japan, the temples were free and often required a hike (up 525,600 steps) to get to.

F

### **11) The Beach**

We grew up in Virginia Beach, Virginia. We miss the beach. Long walks holding hands. Cheap ice-cream. People watching. Dips in the water. All of these – except the ice-cream – were free. And if you are willing to walk a few blocks, even the parking is free (I have always had an aversion to paying for parking)! There are beautiful beaches all across the country. They tend to be found on the eastern, western and southern coasts for some reason. Chicago's beach is also beautiful. Often there are places to window shop nearby.

F

### **12) Attend a College or High School Production**

These can be done in a very professional manner, can be entertaining, and you are supporting the local school by attending.

\$\$

### **13) Attend a High School or College Band or Choir Concert**

Some high schools have performances that are on par with a professional orchestra. The Pikes Peak Youth Symphony Association in my town puts on a performance that almost rivals the professional symphony for a fraction of the cost.

\$\$

### **14) Jazz Societies**

I belong to the Pikes Peak Jazz & Swing Society ([www.ppjass.org](http://www.ppjass.org)). Every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, we sponsor a concert with professional musicians. Most Wednesdays throughout the summer, they sponsor a free Jazz in the Parks concert. You probably have a society near you!

F to \$\$\$

### **15) Attend a Christmas cantata**

In the 1990s, the music director at my church had previously been in professional theater. He would stage these elaborate Christmas and Easter productions with professional musicians, great acting talent and hand-sewn costumes. The performances were wonderful and entertaining!

You can find news of these events through social media. There is usually no upfront cost. Churches often take what they call a "love offering," which means there is a collection plate. You are requested to put in what you are able or what you thought the production was worth. Don't be stingy!

However, if you really can't afford much, please attend anyway. One day you will be able to afford more.

F-\$\$\$

### **16) Take A Class**

Have you always wanted to learn how to create art? How to perform karate? Learn a language? Learn how to swing dance? Take a class. Many local rec centers, libraries and community colleges have classes like these, and many more. My wife started taking karate a number of years ago through our local rec center. She is now a certified black belt.

\$-\$\$

### **17) Go to a fountain**

In downtown Colorado Springs, we have an attraction called Uncle Wilbur's Fountain which runs throughout the summer. Every hour there is a small music show in which a fake tuba player comes out of the top of the fountain to play a 3-4 minute piece. When the kids were little, we

took them to play in the water. Now that they're gone, we like to watch kids and adults act goofy, get wet when they don't have their swimsuits, and have a great time.

Extra bonus if you get wet and act goofy with no swimsuit, although I recommend you keep your clothes on. This is a family book you know!

F

### **18) Make coupons for each other**

Get creative! Create a coupon book for your significant other. I did this for my wife one year for our anniversary. It was a big hit. Some ideas for coupons might be:

- 30-minute massage
- 45-minute shopping excursion where I didn't ask her, "Are we done yet?"
- car wash
- foot rub
- babysitting
- cooking dinner
- agree to watch a video you normally wouldn't watch
- a week of getting to pick the channel on the TV.

F

### **19) Turn in your change**

I keep a change jar in which I throw all my coins into. It's an old peanut butter jar. When we run out of money – or especially before we had any – we would sometimes cash the jar out and decide to use all of it for some type of date or excursion. We have had anywhere from \$30-\$80

in the jar. It's best to cash it out at your local bank for free. Many grocery stores have the machines that will count and sort for you, but they often charge 8% or more.

F

### **20) The Penny Arcade**

My wife used to like this one, but now she can do without it. We live near a touristy area. They have a video game/pinball arcade with dozens of vintage games. Some of the vintage games can be played for a nickel or dime. Bring your loose change.

\$

### **21) Slurpees at 7-11**

I'm still a kid at heart! If you and your date are kids at heart, a 7-11 slurpee makes a great summertime treat. So many flavors. So satisfyingly cool as it coats your throat.

F on 7/11 most years - \$ at other times

### **22) Take a drive to Cripple Creek**

Cripple Creek is a local gaming town about an hour from where we live. We once drove there just to look around and do some window shopping. We had packed a lunch. We ended up watching a presentation for a timeshare. We earned a free steak dinner just for watching. We had a spare quarter with us, which we converted to nickels, played the nickel slots, won, then cashed in when our earnings had reached \$5. Started the day with peanut butter sandwiches and 25 cents, ended the day with our stomachs full on a steak dinner and \$5. You may have a similar area near you. (disclaimer...I loathe gambling and think it's a waste of money and addicting to some people...use discretion)

F

### **23) The Flea Market**

Admission is just \$2. You get a chance to see another man's trash. Sometimes you find a treasure. Better yet, clean out your house, gather your unwanted belongings to sell, spend the day at the flea market and the earnings on a date.

\$ to look

\$\$\$\$ if you find that treasure

+\$\$\$\$ if you sell your treasure

#### **24) Historic downtown areas**

We have an area close to us called "Old Colorado City." It's a great place to go for a stroll, do some window shopping, and sometimes grab an ice-cream cone or go out for dinner. The shops range from unique gifts, outdated trinkets, shirts with amusing sayings, and specialty stores. Just reading the sayings on the shirts can be an adventure.

F to \$\$\$\$

#### **25) Riverwalk**

There's something about the water! The town of Pueblo has created a miniature version of the famed San Antonio Riverwalk. It's a great place for a stroll, a snack, or a meal. You can also ride the boat (for two blocks) or catch a free concert in the summertime.

F to \$\$\$\$

#### **26) Bottomless Tea**

Or bottomless soda, or bottomless fries (if you do the fries, you won't be bottomless for long). When Susan and I were dating, there was a place called Po' Folks that had the best iced tea. We would sit there and chat for hours, often after doing something that made us sweat, like hiking or tennis. Leave a good tip!

\$

#### **27) Feed the Ducks**

Not sure if most locations allow this anymore. Ducks have to eat too. Bring some left-over bread type of food. If you are worried about their health, go for the whole grain stuff. Or just visit and drive the ducks crazy. They will surround you thinking you have food. Talk to the ducks.

F-\$

### **28) Sing in a Choir**

A choir is a great place to meet new people, practice a skill, and bring joy and merriment to others. You may find one at your local church, or find a community group to join. These run the gamut from beginner to semi-pro. Some may require an audition.

F

### **29) Learn How to Play an Instrument**

Many doctors and lawyers studied music. Some play semi-professionally as a hobby. There is something about playing an instrument that teaches you stick-to-it-iveness. It's a slow process fraught with many challenges. Look for local groups that allow beginners if you have never played before. New Horizons Band (<http://newhorizonsmusic.org/new-horizons-groups/>) has groups all over the country that you can play with. They usually have groups from beginner to advanced available.

F to \$40,000 for a professional bassoon

### **30) Volunteer at an Event**

Many high-priced events will let you attend for free if you volunteer. Jobs may include helping at the merchandise table, controlling access, monitoring the refreshments. Work it together, learn together, and spend time together.

F

### **31) Village Inn Free Pie Wednesdays**

This is a date idea I stole from son and daughter-in-love. When they were young marrieds still in college, they had a standing date night every Wednesday at Village Inn, where you received a free slice of pie with any purchase. Their purchase was the ice-cream to make it a la mode.

Delicious and delightful. Hopefully they are now going to Village Inn and making bigger purchases (he's a lawyer now). Please leave a big tip. Especially if you do the ice-cream version. Wait-staff need money for dating too.

\$ to \$\$

### **32) Teach a Class**

We are all experts at something. Some say you become an expert once you read three books on a subject. I mostly agree with that. Find something you are an expert in and teach a class.

Your outlet may be the local community center, where you won't have to do any collecting of money or advertising, or you might just teach the class out of your home and make more money. Find something you are both experts in. The added bonus is that the money you make can be put towards more dates.

F

### **33) Garage Sale**

My mom – at times – was a very content woman. Give her time to cook, pour lavish praise on her for her Italian cooking, and let her out of the house once a week to go garage-saling, and she was a very happy woman. This can turn into two very different types of dates.

1) You go to garage sales and look for bargains or fun items, or just go to window shop.

2) Hold your own garage sale. You earn extra money for dates!

You might also specialize in hard to find or collector's items like comic books, certain toys, etc.

F or \$ or \$\$ or \$\$\$ or \$\$\$\$

If you sell, +\$\$\$\$

\*\*\*tech update, the new version of this option may be selling items online on a community page

### **34) Rollerskating**

Not for the faint of heart or those who are fragile!

When I was a teen, my mom bought me what I thought were cool roller skates. They resembled a cheap pair of sneakers on wheels. The local small grocery store was called Belo's. They had a rack of very cheap sneakers that we dubbed "Belo Bombers". My skates resembled the sneakers. I was the laughingstock of the neighborhood. Those skates went into hibernation in the back of my closet.

Fast forward approximately 20 years. My own kids were into rollerblades. I didn't much care for them. They were hard for me to balance on. I pulled my roller skates out of hibernation to play with my kids. The young teens in my neighborhood said, "Wow! Where did you get those cool skates?" How does one go from being uncool to cool? Do we just have to wait 20 years for that to happen?

When the kids were younger, their schools sold cards for the summer that would let you get in to skate for \$2. We spent many a summer day roller skating. It brought back many memories of our teen years spent at the roller rink.

\$\$

### **35) Go to a Pool**

My mom made a point of renting apartments that had pools when my sister and I were growing up. We spent entire days soaking in the water, having breath-holding contests, diving for coins and then going inside for a delicious lunch cooked by our mom. Since we couldn't afford air-conditioning, the swimming helped keep us sane, we exercised and got a tan for free!

Sidenote...when I was a kid, my mom had this crazy belief that if you burned and wanted to keep the tan rather than peel, you had to go out again the NEXT DAY after liberally applying CLEAR BABY OIL to your skin. This was like sitting under a magnifying glass in the sun! How we survived that I'll never know.

When I was in the Army, every post we were assigned to had a pool. At the time, they were free to those of the rank E-4 and under. Our first home in Colorado Springs was part of an HOA that included a pool. We have many fond memories of time spent in the water, in the sun, having picnics and teaching the kids how to swim. It may also be a time to bring a book, but with small



kids sometimes there's a tendency for them to drown, so it's hard to completely relax, but you can be vigilant AND have great conversation.

No pool in your area that you can afford? If you're really adventurous, you can stealthily use the pool at an apartment complex near you.

F to \$

### **36) Library**

My daughter in law does this well. Libraries are not just about books anymore. They have magazines, DVDs of first run movies and even games that you can check out.

F

### **37) Bake brownies**

I don't even need to say anything about this option! Delicious. Time spent together. Yummy. Cheap. Scrumptious. Want to make them healthier? Substitute pureed black beans for about half the oil. The strong flavor of the cocoa masks the flavor of the black beans.

Watch out for Colorado brownies!

\$

### **38) 3 Cookies at Subway/Grocery Store**

Walk to your local Subway restaurant or grocery store. You can often buy three cookies for just a buck or close to it. You pick one, your lovely date picks one, and then you pick one together that you can share.

\$

### **39) Be creative...come up with your own free option**

F

**40) Be creative...come up with your own dream option.**

**Dream big!**

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**About the author:**

I feel so privileged! God blessed me with a beautiful, special woman who loves me, loves others, and has helped me become the man I am today! We have been married thirty-one years and counting. Dated for two and a half before that. I have also been employed in the music field for 31 years, first performing, now teaching. I love my job. I love my students. I even love most of the parents (some are Satan in disguise. Maybe they are really cats?)

When I have extra time, I get to perform, record, speak and write. Maybe you want to have me come and speak at your event? I would love to! You won't regret it. Send me an email at [jamesthedivine@gmail.com](mailto:jamesthedivine@gmail.com). Call me at 719-238-4193. If I don't answer right away, I'm likely on a date! Just leave me a message.

Visit my website at [www.jamesdivine.net](http://www.jamesdivine.net). Buy some of my music, or one of my other books. The funds all go to a good cause. A date with my wife.

**Other books by James Divine**

***Forgive: One man's story of being molested...and God's redemption***

***40 Ways to Make Money as a Musician***

***A Stroke of Bad Luck***

***Go Ahead...Make My Day: 39 Ways to Make Someone's Day***

***The Saxophone Diaries: Stories and tips from my 30 years in the music field***