

18/12/2008

## Courting in the credit crunch: Pocket-friendly local date options in Berkshire and Surrey

1. Join the glitterati.. Posh 'n' Becks have visited Blackbushe, Europe's largest outdoor Sunday market, and so should you. Admission to more than 1000 stalls costs 50p. This British Car Auction site also features vehicle auctions three times a week.
2. Get fresh. Support local producers at the farmers' market held in Guildford High Street on the first Tuesday of the month.
3. 'Fore-plays'... Preview productions destined for the West End at Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud Theatre which frequently shows performances before they go to London.
4. Reflect. Put the recession in perspective seeing the how the poor and destitute lived in Edwardian times at Reading's 'Spike'.. A costumed guide is included in the £3.50 admission on Tuesdays and Saturdays.
5. Fantasise. The Astolat pub shares the legendary name given to Guildford in Sir Thomas Malory's romance Le Morte d'Arthur, and was the home of the tragic 'fair maiden' Elaine who died of her unrequited love for Lancelot. The same Elaine is the inspiration for Tennyson's poem The Lady of Shallott.
6. Get passionate with healthy debate and read the papers together. Journalist Michael Buerk, whose reporting of the 1984 Ethiopian famine inspired the Band Aid charity record, lives in Guildford ..
7. Take in some open space. Painhill Park in Cobham offers free entry every Wednesday in January and February 2009. It is a unique landscape park dating back to 18th century with a grotto, Temple of Bacchus and exotic North American plant exhibition.
8. Get switched on by the secrets of engineering excellence within Mercedes- Benz World in Weybridge. Free to visit and includes pit-stop and design simulators plus viewing of the latest vehicles and innovations. Open seven days a week.
9. Forget fine-dining. Award-winning Guildford fish' n' chip shop Seafare is open seven days a week and regularly fundraises for the local hospital.
10. Engaging with your surroundings. Guildford Tour Guides run a winter walk on the first Sunday in the month until the end of March. Costs £3 per person for 1.5 hours.
11. 'By the same artist..': Free guided tours of the acclaimed Lightbox gallery and museum in Woking, designed by the creators of the London Eye, are available on the first and third Tuesdays of the month and explore the design and architecture of this gold and silver-coloured building.. Pre-bookable.
12. Sand gets everywhere. Enjoy from a distance and gaze at the unusually golden sand on the banks of the River Wey where it cuts through the sandy outcrop just south of Guildford.
13. Convenience relationship. For an unusual twist on the gallery motif appreciate a former disused ladies toilet in Kingston and how one man brought art to the suburbs for £12.50. Award-winning, avant-garde and inspirational.
14. Excite the taste buds on a budget. Frugal Food is the latest from Woking-born Delia Smith - but you can view many several of the recipes included, as well as tips for money-saving shopping, for free at [deliaonline.com](http://deliaonline.com).
15. Query: Monthly Thursday evening meetings of the Philosophy Café at the Rose Theatre in Kingston address a range of fascinating and challenging philosophical topics seriously and rigorously, informally and sociably. All welcome.
16. Booty Call: One of the more unusual sights in Kingston is several disused red telephone boxes that

have been tipped up to lean against one another dominoes fashion.

17. Customs and courtesy: Relive the age of romance at the ruins of Reading Abbey's Inner Gateway, originally the home of the Abbey School attended by Jane Austen.
18. Get 'grrrr' with a visit to 'the largest lion in the world' in Forbury Gardens, Reading. It is one of the world's largest bronze statues and the largest standing lion sculpture - erected as a war memorial to the Royal Berkshire Regiment who fought in the Afghan wars.
19. GSOH: Reading-reared comic Ricky Gervais is currently making a film 'Men at the Pru' inspired by the 'concrete glamour' of the town in the 1970s and telling the story of two clerks working at the Prudential headquarters, formerly located on the site of the Forbury Square development. Spend an evening in with a DVD Gervais-a-thon.
20. Get continental without the cost. The world's only copy of the Bayeux tapestry is viewable for free in the Museum of Reading. . .
21. For some exotica, a 2.6m wide Amazon water-lily, Courtney the Dwarf Crocodile and free-roaming basilisk lizards are among attractions at The Living Rainforest in Thatcham - get unlimited visits for a year with an adult ticket costing £7.95 .. plus 10% discount in the shop if you arrive by public transport.
22. Back to nature: Moonlight 'Howl Nights', spent in the company of nine wolves, are run by the Wolf Conservation Trust in Reading and take place in January, February and March 2009. Cost is £10 and pre-booking required.
23. Cheap conversation starter. The Hobgoblin pub in Reading features walls covered in beer tap plaques from the 3000 different ales they claim to have served over the years. Stare away and see if you can spot two the same!
24. The Joy of Freedom: Oscar Wilde was imprisoned in Reading Gaol for two years in 1895 for his social 'indiscretions'. His last writing was the Ballad of Reading Gaol. A memorial walk takes in the gaol, an ornate gate and railing opening onto Chestnut Walk.
25. Mate for life? Ponder monogamy when feeding the group of more than 100 swans who regularly congregate just behind the Caversham Hotel between Caversham Bridge and Reading Rowing Club. Cost = crumbs.