

Going Out

LOVE BITES

Valentine's Day dining guide

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Shop in the name of love

Given up on romance? Keep trying, the experts say - and take your time. **Mathew Scott** reports

Here are two words sure to send a shiver down the spine of those more used to an empty pizza box for company than anything living and breathing: Valentine's Day.

And if you've already started to sweat, the Hong Kong government hasn't eased the pressure any, at least not where single women are concerned.

Did you know, ladies, that if you are single and aged between 30 and 39, competition is getting tougher? Your numbers have risen by about 14 per cent over the past decade, if the official statistics are to be believed.

Longer working hours mean less time for romance, apparently. And even the rapid rise of social networking has its drawbacks.

"Most of those friendships remain in the virtual world and are actually quite far from a lifelong commitment," says Jacky Hung, founder of MyLoveMatching.com.

"But Hongkongers are famous for their long working hours. So many people find it difficult to spare time for a social life.

"If they've failed to find a partner among their classmates and schoolmates, relatives' friends, childhood friends or colleagues, they

must find new ways to do so. Matchmaking companies are perhaps a more popular method among younger age groups, particularly for those who have decided not to stay in front of the computer and are tired of the virtual world."

It seems these days that the "virtual world" means most of the mystery is gone when it comes to dating, because the likes of Facebook and FriendFinder lay out all our secrets for the world to see. And if someone doesn't tick all the boxes, then the click-and-drag generation simply moves on - instantly.

However, Violet Lim wants us all to take a little more time - and says Valentine's Day is the perfect time to start.

Lim's dating company, Lunch Actually (www.lunchactually.com), has been serving the needs of singles in Hong Kong and other parts of Asia since 2004. And such has been the demand that Lim has also kicked off the online speed-dating site Eteract.com.

"Some singles give up too easily," she explains.

"After a few dates that they feel did not go their way, they declare that all good men are either dead, married or gay."

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Violet Lim, a founder of dating site Lunch Actually

"What you focus on will come true, so it will inevitably become a self-fulfilling prophecy."

So, the message is: embrace Valentine's Day - don't run away and hide.

"Be open-minded and positive," Lim says. "Many singles judge too quickly. They go on the first date and decide the person is not right for them. By giving the other person a chance, you are giving yourself a chance to get to know him/her better."

"Also, when you go on a date, it's extremely important to be positive. In a survey that we conducted a few years ago, that's the biggest put-off on a first date: someone who complains about everything."

Since helping start up Passionately Yours (feelpassionately.com) two years

ago, Kat Leung has been in a unique position to see what's going on when it comes to romance in Hong Kong. As well as serving the sex toy needs of the city, Passionately Yours hosts workshops and parties where Leung gets to hear first-hand the state of play out there in Singletown.

"In Hong Kong, it's as if love takes place at hyperspeed," says Leung. "We have access to so much information about other people's likes and dislikes, what they look like, common acquaintances, that we can pretty much skip all traditional first-date small talk."

"In most cases, we can determine if we're attracted to a person solely based on their online profiles."

"But perhaps we also miss the exclusive joy of discovering somebody else bit by bit, layer by layer, as so much of that information is already public."

So slow down, she says, and don't forget to first get your own act in order. "My advice to someone looking for love is to first love yourself," she says. "There's an attractive confidence that comes with being happy in your own skin and taking care of yourself. People gravitate towards positive energy."

"Also, be open-minded, as love can find you in the most unusual places."