

Happy trails

Vacations can at times become stressful, so here are some handy hints for making your next couple holiday a happy — and not heated — experience.

By Elisabeth Lee



While travel brochures might hint at laughter-filled adventures and romantic scenarios, the reality can sometimes be quite different. For starters, not only are you trying to cope instantly with a new culture, you might be trying to negotiate a new language. You might also be jetlagged, or simply on edge from having to clear your work before your leave. And you might even be carrying the emotional baggage of a recent fight or disagreement.

All these can lead to an overseas meltdown for some couples when these stresses come to a head. According to a survey done by a British travel website, an astonishing 62 per cent of couples admitted to fighting on a daily basis while on vacation.

Here's how to make the best of your 'couple time' away.

BEFORE YOU GO

Set A Budget One of the biggest causes of marital disagreements is the issue of money. Avoid this by setting a budget before you start planning your holiday — agree on how much you want to spend on flights and hotels, and how you will divide up expenses while on the road. And of course, agree on where you're going. "Make sure your destination is somewhere you both actually want to go; the mode of travel is something you both enjoy; and the length of stay is what you both want," advises Dr Esther Hsiao, 31, a mother of one.

Agree On Standards

While planning a budget,

it might also help to discuss your needs and wants at the same time. You might be happy in a backpacker hostel but your spouse might prefer the luxury of a 5-star hotel. Before you book the accommodation, find out what amenities are non-negotiable for your spouse — for example, Internet access, hot showers or complimentary breakfasts, to name a few. Nothing's worse than fighting over something you've already booked and paid for!

Pack Light One source of travel stress is when you have to lug a lot of luggage around,

advises travel expert Audrey Scott, who co-authors a travel blog with her husband Daniel Noll. One of you can book the flights and accommodation while the other figures out the itinerary. After all, it's the shared anticipation that makes travelling with your significant other so much fun!

WHILE ON THE ROAD
Make Time To Do Your Own Thing
When it comes to planning your holiday,



“There’s no such thing as too much communication, and that’s twice as true when you are on vacation together”

especially if you're planning on taking a lot of public transport. Fighting while travelling might be unpleasant, but fighting while travelling and carrying huge suitcases is even worse. Newly-married editor Sophia Huang, 27, thinks women should be convinced of the merits of travelling light. “Don't bring the whole house,” she advises. “If you really need something essential like shampoo, chances are you can just buy it while on the go.”

Share The Burden The actual planning of a vacation is something that neither of you are likely to enjoy. Take the time to plan the holiday with your spouse. “Divide the tasks. Otherwise, one of you may feel unduly burdened and taken advantage of,”

don't forget to schedule some time alone for each of you — being joined at the hip for the entire vacation can lead to resentment or boredom, especially if you have different interests. If you're exploring a city, perhaps you could each do your own thing in the morning (for example, one of you can go shopping, while the other heads to the museum) before meeting for lunch at a pre-determined location. Just make sure you plan things beforehand, so neither of you is left wondering where the other is.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate There's no such thing as too much communication and that is twice as true when on vacation. To avoid a

misunderstanding that can ruin your holiday, first, be clear about your preferences — spell them out and don't assume your partner can read your mind. Second, speak out early and often — if you're unhappy, tell your spouse. Don't wait until you're ready to explode. Third, remember that effective communication includes being a good listener as well. Pay attention to your partner's words and emotions — there's often a lot more going on than what's being said.

Compromise Whenever Possible “This is the golden rule of travelling with your spouse,” says US etiquette and relationship expert Diane Gottsman, author of *Pearls of Polish*, an etiquette guide for the modern woman. “A couple's vacation is not for either one of you, it's for both of you.” Compromising can be as easy as taking turns when it comes to making decisions — why not suggest that one of you picks the activity, and the other picks the meal venue? For example, choose which museum you're going to visit and let your spouse select the restaurant. Sophia's preferred method of compromise is to simply book a packaged tour — that way, all the decisions are out of your hands, and you and your partner can simply relax and enjoy the trip. “Remember that your marriage vows included a promise to stay with each for better or worse,” says Esther. “Take that sentiment on holiday with you — focus on enjoying the moment, instead of getting your way in everything.”

If Life Hands You Lemons, Make Lemonade And if things go wrong, try and make the best of it, suggests Esther. “After all, unexpected vacation bloopers can make for the best memories!” A mix-up saw Esther and her husband having to rent a car and make alternate travel arrangements. While the last-minute scramble was stressful, they chanced upon some stunning scenery while on their unplanned drive. “We got lost a few times on the way to Wausau, Wisconsin but we laughed the whole way and at one point we realised that we were the only lights on the road so we pulled over, turned our headlights off and enjoyed the most beautiful starlit sky either of us had ever seen,” she recalls. What is important is to keep a positive mindset while travelling with your spouse. ●

TOP 10 REASONS WHY COUPLES FIGHT ON VACATION

A survey of 1,000 British people conducted by a UK travel website revealed the top 10 reasons why couples fight on vacation. “Everybody has their own idea of what makes the perfect break, and when you clash on these ideals arguments can break out. It's shocking to discover how much couples actually do argue when abroad,” shared Calum Macdonald, from the travel site.

Here's what made it to the list:

- 1 Distracted Husbands:** Men who don't pay enough attention to their partner.
- 2 Conflicting Activities:** While a woman might want to just chill out at a resort, a man may want to go out and do something
- 3 The Menu:** What and where to eat.
- 4 One Too Many:** Going overboard with alcohol consumption.
- 5 Getting Lost:** Trying to read maps and figuring out directions.
- 6 Lateness:** Getting to the airport on time.
- 7 Packing:** She tends to bring too much stuff while he brings too little.
- 8 “Rubber Time”:** Women taking too long to get ready for anything.
- 9 Buy, Buy, Buy:** Spending too much money.
- 10 Currency:** How much money to get and where to get it.