

She Says... **Holidaying**
With Your Man

They're never as idyllic as the holiday brochures promise, so when it comes to finding the ultimate romantic moment on vacay, Aoife Stuart-Madge is throwing in the (beach) towel



There are several advantages of going on holiday with your man. For starters, there's the heady effect of the sunshine-induced hormones, which immediately make you both feel more frisky and less stressed. And you always have someone to apply sun-cream to your back, to carry the heavy bags and to tip the bell boy. Not to mention the extra space in his near-to-empty suitcase (fortuitously, his two pairs of boardies and four tees don't take up much room) which you can use to smuggle home foreign finds without fear of getting stung for excess baggage at the airport. But, I'll be the first to admit, my recent vacay a deux in Mexico wasn't quite as romantic as the brochure (depicting a maniacally grinning couple walking hand-in-hand along a deserted shoreline) led me to believe.

I'd imagined moonlit strolls on the beach, feeding each other milk from a fresh coconut and swimming in crystal blue waterfalls, before collapsing in a blissful heap on the powder white sand, where we'd watch the sunset as we roasted our catch of the day on the open fire. Pretty much like *Return to the Blue Lagoon*, with me as Mila Jovovich – all tanned skin and flowing beach locks – frolicking on the sand in a dainty, yet uber-flattering two-piece I'd fashioned from some old rags and some seashells.

Soon after we touched down in our beach paradise, however, I remembered that my hair frizzes up like Tina Turner circa 1984 as soon as it comes into contact with salt water. Then there's the aching patches of sunburn I have to endure on the chamomile-paved road to a glowing tan*, which I had also conveniently overlooked during my reverie.

Girl Interrupted

Determined not to be defeated, I slipped a stylish kaftan over my bikini (shop-bought, as I couldn't find the right shape shells for a DIY job à la Mila) popped my bonkbuster and a bottle of SPF in my beach bag and tottered to the pool to nab us one of those couples' cabanas I'd seen in the brochure. Give me a comfy lounge and a juicy Jackie Collins and I'm happy from sunrise to sunset. My man, on the other hand, gets antsy. So I'm cosied up

next to him and only a couple of pages into *Hollywood Wives – The New Generation*, when he wants to go and 'explore'.

Half-way up the cliff face ("The views from the top will be worth it," he'd promised) I'm ashamed to admit, I was wishing my towering Miu Miu wedges (bought especially for poolside posing) were (eek!) Crocs. Mental fashion crime aside, when we returned to our room hours later, I had aching feet, bright red skin and a serious case of sunstroke. What's more, I was mad because I'd been forced to give up the cushy spot on the cabana, and he was peeved that I'd moaned all afternoon. Not exactly conducive to romance. *Humph.*

Tacos With A Side of Romance

Still, I reasoned, we had the evening ahead of us. A candlelit table for two under the stars listening to the waves crash against the rocks would surely thaw the atmosphere. At the restaurant, however, it seemed we weren't the only couple with romance on the mind. Like Valentine's Day on heat, the beachside restaurant was packed with loved-up couples, making goo-goo eyes at each other across the table. Some were even spoon-feeding each other with one hand, while holding the other across the table (FYI: not an easy feat, as you need a free hand to wipe your mouth in case he misses and you dribble). I felt like I'd inadvertently stumbled upon the resort's Most Vom-Inducing Couple contest, with extra points for baby-talk,



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footsy and staring into each other's eyes. And in my opinion nothing kills romance faster than competitive petting.

But we still had a city stopover in the Big Apple to go, during which I was determined to redress the romance balance. I had high hopes for late night drinks at some trendy rooftop bar, where we could ogle the twinkling lights of one of the world's most famous cityscapes, while chinking glasses and toasting our fabulousness. What's more, with no poolside cabana to distract me, I was more than happy to sign up for some daytime sightseeing. I'd even ditched my wedges for comfy flats (though I still draw the line at Crocs) and I was ready to do some serious walking.

It quickly transpired that we both have very different ideas about what constitutes an iconic New York sight: for me, it was Carrie Bradshaw's stoop, for him, the Apple store. I also discovered we have very different ideas about what constitutes shopping: for me, it's examining every item on every floor of Bergdorf Goodman, before settling in to the shoe department to try on every pair, while for him, it's nipping into the Yankees store for a baseball cap.

Chasing Chuck Bass

Oh, and that trendy rooftop bar, with the twinkling lights? For some unfathomable reason, he didn't think the traipse across town and the average mojitos were worth it just to sit in a bar that had once featured in the first season of *Gossip Girl* (no matter how many times I protested, "But Chuck Bass has sat right there *on that sofa.*")

To make it up to him for the involuntary *Gossip Girl* tour, I agreed to go to a Yankees game (I secretly hoped I'd bang into Cameron Diaz cheering on A-Rod) where I immediately realised why everyone there – including my man – was wearing a baseball cap. The sun was beating down relentlessly, reigniting my Mexican sunburn, just as it was about to turn tan*.

But I had to look on the bright side, at least I still had someone to rub my after-sun in. And I knew just how I was going to get those five pairs of new shoes from Bergdorf Goodman home, too... ■
 (*Slightly less pale skin with a hint of rouge)