

Brilliant LOVE ADVICE YOU haven't READ before

Sorry, psychologists, we've tapped into a new source of relationship know-how. And it makes a lot of sense. Here are the tips from the *other* people who see couples daily. Estate agents, barmen, cabin crew... spill! By **Gemma Askham**

THE SALES ASSISTANT

"I always overhear women struggling with what gifts they should buy men. I have the advantage of being able to see what guys get for themselves, and there's a simple formula: buy an updated version of something he already owns. A wallet in a new shape or colour, a leather iPad cover, new headphones or the latest fragrance from a fashion designer."

Emma Stevens, section manager in the Peter Jones branch of John Lewis

THE CABIN CREW

"Want to boost your chances of chatting to a cute stranger on a flight? Ask for a seat in the aisle, somewhere near the toilet. You'll get noticed every time people get up to stretch."

Nicola Sturt, cabin crew for British Airways

The restaurant manager

"The sign a guy wants to go Dutch is when we put the bill on the table and nobody touches it."

Maiko Spencer, general manager of B-SOHO pizzeria, London

THE ESTATE AGENT

"The main thing that catches couples off guard when they're house hunting is how different their priorities are. They're used to seeing eye to eye about things, but I notice a real divide between the sexes. Women like to be near family, men rarely do; women prioritise an en-suite, men want quick broadband. The main conflict is money: women will tend to go over budget for a property they love, but men won't budge. So decide how much you have to play with – an absolute we-cannot-top-this sum – before you look at a single property. Calculate the stamp duty, solicitor's fees, mortgage payments and the deposit. It's so important to get the exact cost of moving before your heart is two steps ahead of you."

Anita McKeogh, director at Atkinson Stilgoe Estate Agents in the West Midlands

THE TRAVEL AGENT

"People try to book a romantic trip in the same way they'd book a last-minute holiday with girlfriends, but spontaneity doesn't work for couples' breaks because expectations are so much higher. People call me up wanting the world – but if you fancy an amazing hotel, at a discount, and you want to go next week, well, you'd have to be phenomenally lucky. Or famous. I can't say the word 'plan' enough. Confirm your budget and activity wish list well in advance, and book any special restaurants before you go (nothing kills an evening quite like finding a restaurant is fully booked). Tell them it's an important occasion (even if it's not) and ask for their best table – it's never romantic sitting beside the kitchen doors."

Tamara Heber-Percy, co-founder of boutique travel agency Mr & Mrs Smith

THE BANK MANAGER

"When couples come to discuss their finances or secure a mortgage, we always ask what would happen in worst-case scenarios, such as redundancy or sickness. It's difficult for people to imagine they could get ill and have to stop work, or that one of them could get the other in debt, and it's easy to spot the changes in body language when people start to close up. But you have to look at income and expenditure to highlight any areas you need to be careful with. Don't feel uneasy; the goal is to check you can still afford your lifestyle on one salary should a major change, like redundancy, happen. It will make you feel more in control at a time when you need to come together as a couple."

Hannah Hill, branch manager at Halifax in Leicester and a volunteer for Money For Life, which offers money management advice

The hotel concierge

"Organise one activity every day you're away. It's when couples leave their days open that we hear rows, like 'Why didn't you plan anything?' A pre-agreed plan still leaves room for spontaneous fun."

Hannah Cheston, director of Hoxton concierge service at The Hoxton hotel, London

The nurse

"'Never go to bed angry'. That was the advice of an old lady I looked after when her husband died. She often cried when she looked back on their life together. One day she explained that when they had children, she had to give up her job, and always blamed him, even though it was normal in those days. Her lifelong regret is the time she spent being angry with him."

Sophie Gillott, former residential carer for Care UK

THE BARMAN

"Men would find dating easier if women gave off stronger signals. In truth, most guys would like to see a flashing neon badge. If you're out in a bar with a view to meeting a guy, don't huddle in a corner. I always see groups of women doing this, but even the most confident guy will find it too intimidating. Eye contact is king: catch it across the room and if he starts to approach you, position yourself somewhere hidden from his friends to make him feel more at ease."

Ben Newton-Syms, bar manager at Anise cocktail bar, London

THE HAIRDRESSER

"The thing men ask me more than anything else is how to resolve a fight. They always want to make peace, but they don't know how to do it because they're scared of making things worse. Don't mistake his silence for not caring, it's usually the opposite – he's just trying to work out the right thing to say."

Angela Dolan, artistic director at Regis Salons

Illustration: Philippa Williams, b-soho.co.uk; connells.co.uk; mrandmrsmith.com; moneyforlifeprogramme.org.uk; hoxtonhotels.com; careuk.com; cinnamon-kitchen.com; regissalons.co.uk

