

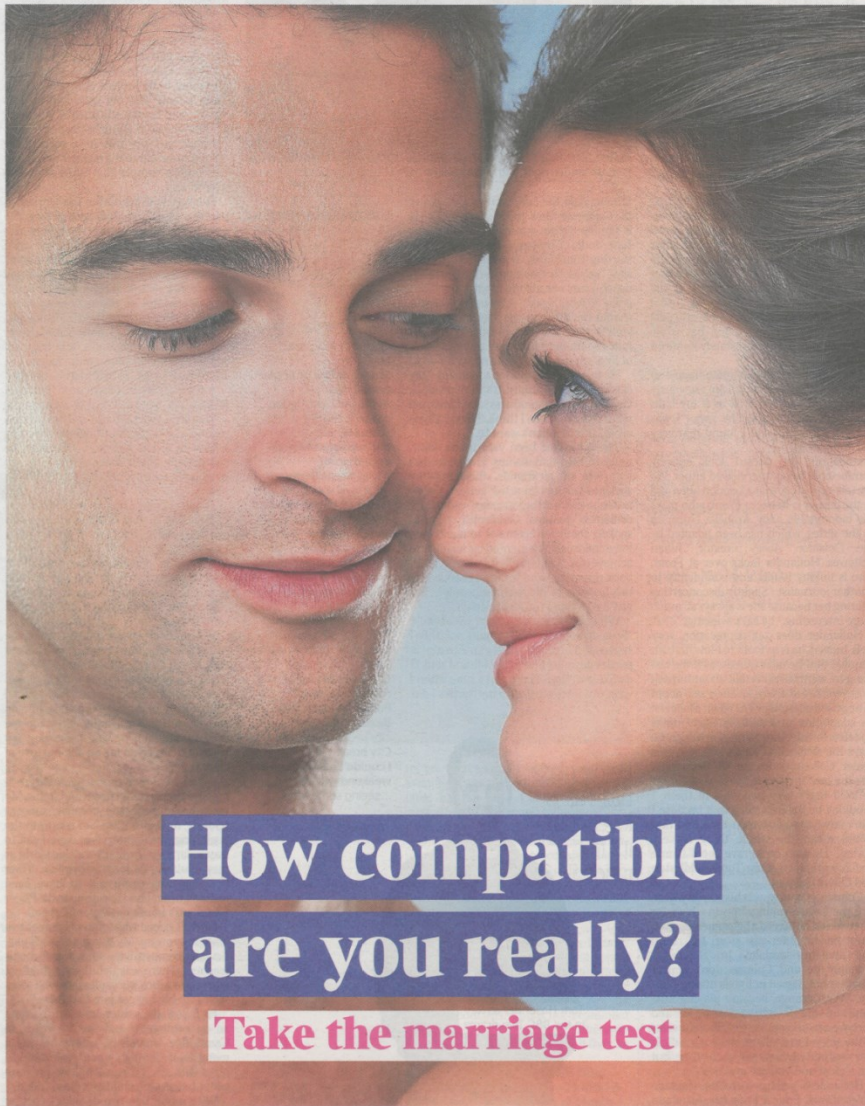


'I haven't met the right person yet'

Tom Hollander on being single at 48

Weekend

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Travel tips



New hotel in Puglia
The baroque town of Lecce is a stunning part of Puglia, so it's good to hear that a swish new boutique hotel is opening near by on March 24. Masseria Trapanà has only nine suites, with private courtyards and outdoor bathtubs, and is set in 60 hectares of olive groves – but is only ten minutes from Lecce. It's the same distance from the Adriatic coast and has teamed up with several of the region's stylish beach clubs. It costs from £284 a room each night (www.trapanacom.com).

The great Finnish bake off
Calling all *Bake Off* fans – you can combine baking with an activity holiday in Finland this September. Over eight days, learn how to bake dark rye bread, cardamom buns, traditional cakes and Finnish pasties, then cycle and walk off those calories in the beautiful Finnish Lakeland – and don't forget the Finnish saunas each night. The tour, which leaves on September 3, costs from £1,275pp, including flights, transfers, accommodation, most meals and cycle hire (regent-holidays.co.uk).

A Wicked Mother's Day
Don't just take your mum for lunch on Mother's Day – take her for a two-night trip to London, with tickets to *Wicked*, the musical, included. Arrive at the Ibis Styles London Excel on March 4 for the weekend, which costs from £117pp on a B&B basis. (superbreak.com).

Kids set sail
Take the family on a special children's sailing week around the Aegean and Mediterranean. You'll pay half-price for children up to the age of 16, and they'll have plenty of activities and games geared towards them. The trips, from March to May and in the first half of June and October (including Easter holidays and May half-term), are on yachts that sleep 6 to 16 people, with captain, chef and crew. It costs from £720 an adult for a week, including most meals and drinks, and from £360 a child. Book at scisailing.eu
Jane Knight



Negombo Beach, Sri Lanka



Travel doctor



Q We are a Leeds-based family of ten looking for an activity holiday to mark a special occasion over Christmas. We are fit and active, with ages from 11 to 70, and have a budget of up to £2,000pp. What can you suggest?
C Hirst, via email

A Sun or snow? If it's the latter, Best Served Scandinavia (020 7838 5869, best-served.co.uk) has a five-day holiday to Finnish Lapland that should keep everyone happy. It's based at the Hotel Harriniva, which has saunas and outdoor hot tubs as well as its own farm – home to 400 huskies. A husky safari and a snowmobile safari are included and you can book ice fishing, skiing or snowshoeing, or add a night in an igloo. It costs £1,200pp, including flights from Manchester via Helsinki and four nights' half-board. However, if it's sun you're after, Families Worldwide (familiesworldwide.co.uk) has a nine-day Active Sri Lanka trip with an optional two-day beach extension that ticks your boxes. Playing cricket with the locals, climbing the Lion Rock Fortress, white-water rafting, Negombo Beach and a national wildlife park are on the itinerary and it would cost about £2,000pp, including flights, nine nights' B&B (plus three lunches), activities and the services of a tour leader.

Q I will be making my way to India from Thailand or Burma in May and would like to join a group tour to explore the country. Can you recommend one that would take in as many of the sights and regions as possible in three to five weeks, with a maximum budget of £3,000?
Ely McCausland, via email

A G Adventures (gadventures.com) has some well-priced small group (maximum 15) tours that should suit you. Its 28-day India Encompassed trip covers most of the leading sights, from the Taj Mahal to the backwaters of Kerala (where you'd have a homestay), and you would sail along the Ganges in Varanasi, explore Abhaneri's carved stepwells in Rajasthan, fly south to search for tigers in the wild and sniff spices on a plantation tour in the Cardamom Hills. There's space on the May 8 departure and it would cost £1,599pp staying in "tourist class" accommodation.

Q My granddaughter has been ill and I would like to take her and her family away in the summer. We need three-bedroom self-catering accommodation in a resort with a pool and gym or in a villa with public facilities near by. I was hoping for the Languedoc region of France, close to the restorative sea.
Cair Pavell, via email

A If you're set on Languedoc you'll find that coastal resorts are generally low-key campsites, but most will have pools. Le Palais de la Mer (palaisdelamer.com) in Sainte Marie la Mer has air-conditioned beachfront bungalows. There are two pools, a gym and a restaurant. A week in a three-bedroom "oceanique" bungalow in July costs £712. If you'd rather stay somewhere more chic, albeit a 30-minute drive from the sea, the Château St Pierre de Serjac (serjac.com) is a family-friendly wine estate with glam villas. An infinity pool, spa and small gym are on site, plus a kids' club and tennis courts. A week in a three-bedroom property starts at £3,052 in July. If you'd consider Provence, a three-bedroom villa in the Château de Camiole Resort (45 minutes from Nice airport) would cost £1,967 for a week from July 23 through James Villa Holidays (0800 0740122, jamesvillas.co.uk). There's a kids' club, pools, spa and a gym.
Julia Brookes is the Travel Doctor

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Don't put up with this

Large admin charges for driving violations

In June we stayed at the Albergo San Martino in Lucca, Italy, booked via booking.com. We drove to the hotel, dropped off our bags, the hotel staff then took us to their parking area and we left the car, walking back to the hotel together. We left the car park a further four times. Since this trip, I have been contacted four times by my car-hire company. The municipal police in Lucca asked them who was driving the car and they supplied my details, at an administrative cost of £45.02 to me for each offence. From what I can gather, the hotel and car park lie within a restricted zone in the town and I drove into it illegally. Nowhere in the booking.com site or the hotel literature does it state that authorisation is required to visit the hotel, and the hotel staff didn't inform me of this. It appears there will also be a £75 fine for each violation. Can you help?
Nick Duddleston, via email

The Albergo San Martino is not in a restricted zone in Lucca; it appears you drove the wrong way through the city to reach it. The hotel says it sends details on how to get there and anyone using booking.com or expedia.co.uk to make a reservation has to tick that they've seen these on the confirmation page. It was an expensive mistake; you're liable for the traffic fines and the administration charges from the car-hire company. There is hope that you can swerve the former. The hotel will send you a document confirming your visit and you can fax this to the municipal police. The hotel says this should do the trick.

Contact us . . .
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