

Have we finally had our fill of filler? + 3 needle-free ways to plump

# Women's Health

## Hello, Summer!

THE BUMPER ISSUE

Strength-building strategies

Fast-fuelling recipes

Glow-giving skincare

Quiet quitting, emotional mapping...

...should we all be more Gen Z?

♥ 'Couples were swapping partners by the pool'

Postcards from a sex holiday

WH INVESTIGATES

Why girls of colour are deserting sport

# Alessia Russo

is World Cup-ready

The Lionesses' star striker on a game-changing summer

9 772049 224983  
JULY/AUGUST 2023 £5.99

WomensHealth JULY/AUGUST 2023 | ISSUE 109 High society: Your body on microdosing (P.18) • Butter up: Sandwiches, unpacked (P.36) • Note to self: The science of self-compassion (P.53) HEARST UK | WOMENSHEALTHMAG.COM/UK



# Sex holidays are taking off



With restrictions on travel and hook-ups behind us, the dirty weekend is having a second coming. Only, before you snigger at the squeaking bedsprings of a well-romped seaside B&B, this time it's sexologist-approved. *WH* makes the case for the lay-cation



WORDS:  
GEMMA ASKHAM



# Sex holidays are taking off



With restrictions on travel and hook-ups behind us, the dirty weekend is having a second coming. Only, before you snigger at the squeaking bedsprings of a well-romped seaside B&B, this time it's sexologist-approved. *WH* makes the case for the lay-cation



WORDS:  
GEMMA ASKHAM



BEDDING IN

For Laura, it was living (and loving) in a small flat during the lockdowns that sank her sex drive into a sex drought. But for many, the intimate fallout from the pandemic went beyond feeling turned off. So says Madalaine Munro, a sexologist who specialises in sexual connection. 'I think the pandemic brought a collective existential crisis as people reflected on what freedom and purpose meant to them,' she explains. 'We saw it with the Great Resignation, where a movement of people began seeking more from work, and this wave is also taking place in sexuality and relationships. People are asking, "Is this really what I want [from a relationship]?" And, if it isn't, "What do I want?"'

Supporting the search for answers is a cultural shift that's reframing sexual experimentation into an act of empowerment. Munro credits TV shows such as *Sex Education* and *The White Lotus* for igniting longing and expanding people's ideas of what might be possible for them sexually, although there's another platform playing a role in this story, too. 'When people publicly share their sex and dating stories on TikTok, this rise in sexual vulnerability goes a long way to lessen shame,' she explains. 'Sexual experimentation is a huge catalyst

for increased self-worth, as through it you discover what you like, you learn to ask for what you like and you realise it's safe

to receive what you like. Benefits of finding your voice include more self-confidence, body acceptance and even healing past trauma.'

This resonates for Abby\*. Having been assaulted by an ex in her early twenties, she wanted to reclaim her sexuality on her terms. Bolstered by the current climate of sexual openness on social media and podcasts, the graphic designer booked a trip to a liberal sex club in Berlin with her boyfriend for her 36th birthday. 'I walked in the entrance and there was nothing



'The thrill of other people admiring us made for super-hot sex'

By day, the resort looks like any other harbour in the south of France, if you can get past the fact that no one has any clothes on. But by night, the promenade once packed with holidaymakers becomes a sexually motivated catwalk. There's a woman in crotchless PVC pants and little else, a man led along by a harness attached to his scrotum and... Laura\*, a 42-year-old business analyst dressed in a modest midi dress and willing her Aperol spritz to arrive. It's her first night at Cap d'Agde, a swingers' and naturist resort where clothes and monogamy are optional. But while Laura's outfit marks her out as a first-timer, there's nothing unplanned about her holiday.

After a year in which she supported her mum through chemotherapy, experienced a close family bereavement and navigated a pandemic-paused sex life, Laura had her 'f\*ck it' moment. She booked the trip last summer and brought her boyfriend along with her to see if being surrounded by shagging could reignite their desire. It did. 'Hot tubs, red velvet, leather beds,' she says, reeling off the horny cues. 'Yes, it's all a bit cliché, but it works. It felt like we were in a permanent fantasy.' Save for the reception, bar and open areas, nudity was allowed everywhere - and with it, sex, with some couples swapping partners on the sunloungers by the rooftop pool. And while Laura and her boyfriend decided to opt out of the swinging sessions, the very idea of them was motivation enough to run back to the hotel room together. 'I've never felt more attractive or sexually confident in my life,' she recalls. 'The thrill of other people admiring us made for super-hot sex when we were back in our room. It reminded us that we were sexually attractive, not only to each other, but to other people. We'd planned to go for a couple of nights. We ended up staying for two weeks.'

BREAK FROM TRADITION

Booking a break that puts sex on top - or any position you like it - is on the up. Trend forecasters at Booking.com cited 'pleasure pilgrimages' as a key theme for 2023, with more than a third of the travellers it polled expressing a desire for a holiday focused on sexual wellbeing. A rise in both resorts dedicated to fetishes and bondage and polyamorous retreats is on the cards, too; Cruise Ship Mingle, a dating app that connects singles and couples-who-swap so they can, quite literally, be in the same boat, saw a 500% rise in members post-pandemic. Meanwhile, one of the more stimulating dates on the UK festival scene is Swingathon - a Glastonbury for the swinging crowd that launched in July 2021 and has little to do with 1920s dancing. Not that the exhibitionists are the only ones putting the 'lay' into playtime. Therapy service Self Space will host its first overseas retreats this summer, with workshops on relationships, sex and pleasure at Pikes Ibiza and Nobu Hotel Ibiza Bay - both bougie enough to tell your line manager about.

That holiday horn is having a moment might surprise you in light of recent headlines; studies put current levels of sexual activity in

the UK on a downturn reminiscent of the economy. But some travel insiders foresaw the pleasure boom. In 2020, boutique hotel directory Mr & Mrs Smith - founded on the principle of the 'naughty weekend' - worked with trend forecaster The Future Laboratory to plot the next decade of romantic travel. They predicted that by 2030, romance will encompass a more expansive view of sex, with polyamory becoming more mainstream. Think: hotel rooms with three beds and 'polymoon' packages alongside traditional honeymoons. Expect to find CBD lube on bedside tables,

breathwork exercises at the breakfast buffet and sensory hotel suites that offer guided erotic play journeys via aural and augmented reality simulation.

While there's still seven years to go to see if there will be three bathrobes in your hotel room instead of two, Richard MacKichan, editor-in-chief at Mr & Mrs Smith, is seeing hotels mounting the trend already. 'A post-pandemic desire for closeness, intimacy and escape has placed a renewed emphasis on hotels being a sexier prospect,' he tells WH. 'A growing crop of forward-thinking, culturally

attuned hotels are making a more concerted effort to be more sexually open - and in cooler, less gimmicky ways than in the past.' Take Sinner in Paris, which has replaced the £5 pack of Pringles in the wardrobes with riding crops and peepholes. Soho House stocks high-end lubes in its minibars, Puglia's Castle Elvira hosts nude life-drawing classes, while Big Sur's Post Ranch Inn has been known to slip a tantric couples' massage on to its spa menu.



## Sun, sand and sex

outlandish, but downstairs was a different story.' Among the scenes in the rooms below was a man dancing the two-step in nothing but a pair of glasses and another in full military uniform leading a woman wearing a dog collar. 'It was like being in *Alice In Wonderland* or *Cirque du Soleil*. The atmosphere was fabulous – everyone minding their own business and being who they are, or who they wanted to be for that night.' As people had sex on swings and beds, Abby and her boyfriend joined in. 'We didn't get involved with others, only ourselves in the middle of a room full of other people enjoying pleasure. It felt liberating to express this part of myself,' she says, before adding one caveat regarding the, er, fluids. 'If I think about the reality of it, god only knows what you're lying on.'

### THAT HOLIDAY BUZZ

Ignoring the stickier parts of the human experience, one aspect of the sex holiday that seduced both Laura and Abby was anonymity. Abby had dabbled with sex clubs in the UK, but always felt on edge. 'At Killing Kittens [sex-positive parties in London], there was always a risk I'd bump into someone I knew. But being in a foreign country and not speaking the language made for a liberation bubble.' Munro believes that identity is built into your surroundings and the responsibilities you have within them. A change of scenery can activate different parts of your character, increasing sexual freedom. 'A sex holiday may lower your inhibitions to try new things, as the shame associated with surroundings or roles is diminished,' she says. In other words, 'Mummy' being handcuffed feels less confronting in a German sex den than it does beside a pile of just-ironed school uniforms. Then there's the obvious break from routine, which doesn't just apply to work and supermarket runs, but the once-a-fortnight missionary. 'Sexual habits build like any other habit and the neural pathways are deeply formed over time,' she adds. 'Holidays can help your sex life because they interrupt

the repetitive nature of your patterns – even in bed.'

Someone else fluent in breaking bedroom habits is Lacey Haynes, a sex and pleasure coach who you may know from the wildly popular *Lacey & Flynn Have Sex* podcast, where she and partner Flynn Talbot do it (yes, *it*), on air. The podcast ended in December 2022, but Haynes and Talbot have packed the nuggets that took them from a largely sexless long-term relationship to doing it on air into a book called *Come Together: The Secret To Deep, Meaningful, Elevated Sex*. Holiday sex is a key pillar. 'When you're busy, pressurised and stressed with daily life, you're in a state of physical contraction – which is why women sometimes have issues with penetration and enjoying intercourse – and you're mentally closed off from each other,' Haynes explains. Ironically, on holiday, you leave the baggage at home. It's this, she believes, that's the secret to sexual satisfaction. 'Sexual connection is *all* about presence and showing up; if we want sex to be good, we have to be in the moment, not in our minds. And that's so much easier on holiday, when you feel open, playful and free.'

### BEST LAID PLANS

So, if you want to plan a lay-cation, what's the advice that Thomas Cook won't tell you? First, drop your sex expectations. 'If you put a lot of weight on something as emotional as sex ("in three months' time, we're going away to have the best sex of our lives") the chances are it won't happen,' says Haynes. 'It's like Christmas: when there's so much riding on it, stress and tension take over.' She's speaking from experience. Last July, she and Talbot planned a trip to Greece with the very specific goal of having lots of anal sex. What actually happened was lots of time spent with kids and grandparents, and absolutely no window for the bum. Instead, one day they stopped the car to take photos and ended up having impromptu sex at the top of a remote mountain (which, Haynes

'If we want sex to be good, we have to be in the moment, not in our minds'

believes, was even better than the sex they'd originally planned).

Next, don't expect to have wild sex the instant the hotel door closes behind you. 'If your life has been fraught with stress and busyness just to get on holiday, there's going to be a requirement for unwinding and maybe clearing the air with each other. When you first get on holiday, reconnect: lie on the bed together, take a nap, maybe give each other a massage.' Oh, and once you're *having* the good holiday sex, make sure you bring it home with you. 'If the sex and intimacy experienced on holiday *isn't* integrated into life at home, it can lead to resentment and create disconnection,' says Munro. 'Instead, think: how can this experience be a platform for upgrading our relationship?' If it sounds insurmountable, it comes down to nailing what's getting in the way of feeling intimately connected at home, be that spending too much time scrolling or too little time in each other's company.

Back home from Berlin, Abby's still coming down from the high. 'It was such an enlightening and refreshing experience, something I wanted to do for myself. I'd definitely keep an open mind if other opportunity for a sex holiday came up.' Meanwhile, Laura is getting plenty of mileage out of the two outfits she bought in Cap d'Agde. 'One was an Aubade lace bodysuit and transparent slip. The other is a bondage-style basque and the kind of heels that I'd normally dismiss as being tacky, but actually made my legs look great.' Helpfully, both outfits have become shorthand for: let's have *sexy* sex. 'I might put a piece on as a surprise, or he'll leave one out on the bed and we'll reminisce about the holiday and how hot it was.' While the souvenirs go some way to keeping the holiday alive in their bedroom, Laura has a dirty secret. 'We're thinking about going again this year.'

