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Holiday weekend forecast: plenty of squabbling

By Wendy Leung

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We asked experts how you can improve the odds of having a fight-free holiday weekend with your partner

You're determined to have the best summer break ever, and your travel partner is too. The trouble is, you can't agree on a single thing, from what to pack to what you'll do once you get there.

Worse, reams of studies and surveys suggest the odds aren't in your favour for having a squabble-free time together this August long weekend. We asked the experts how you can steer clear of common holiday hurdles.

Their suggestions? Set a budget. Grit your teeth and give in to your partner every once in a while (it's called compromise). Remember it's healthy to occasionally split up and do your own thing. And above all else, relax and have fun already.

How to pack

You're bringing everything but the kitchen sink. Meanwhile, your partner has yet again forgotten to bring a toothbrush, extra underwear and other essentials.

You're not alone. According to a poll of more than 1,290 participants by the British online travel agency www.sunshine.co.uk, the majority of male vacationers admit to taking only three pairs of underwear for a weeklong vacation, while most women say they pack 10. A separate survey by the British travel insurance firm The Co-operative found women tend to pack twice as many clothes as they need, the Daily Mail reported recently.

"[Women] may pack more than they need, but I think they always have everything they need, whereas guys tend to leave it to the last minute" and realize they've forgotten items, says Toronto-based relationship and sex expert Josey Vogels, author of *Bedside Manners: Sex Etiquette Made Easy*. "What often happens ... is women get frustrated that men don't do it the way they want to do it, and men get frustrated because they're constantly being hounded to do it the way she wants him to do it."

Ms. Vogel suggests each should just relax. "Let him pack whatever he thinks he needs, and if he's without he'll learn quickly."

Overzealous packers will also wise up when they have to lug bulky bags everywhere.

How to get there

You're certain you should turn left. Your travel partner insists your destination is in the opposite direction. Thank goodness for GPS, right?

Wrong. According to a 2009 survey by Australian insurance agency SGIC, two-thirds of the drivers polled blamed global positioning technology for getting them lost. Drivers aren't eager to admit their own mistakes. In a survey released this year, the same agency found that 45 per cent of drivers think they're great behind the wheel and are never guilty of frustrating others.

Driving is a major cause of holiday strife, Ms. Vogels says.

"It's dangerous enough [when] you're driving on the road and you're trying to concentrate. To have someone commenting, criticizing, yelling things at you or being tense in the seat next to you, it's not good for anybody."

Instead of getting defensive, those behind the wheel can diffuse the tension by making a joke about their back-seat drivers, she suggests. Meanwhile, passengers need to lighten up. "Recognize your partner hasn't killed you yet. They've got this far in life alive driving, so they're probably going to be okay."

How to take in local colour

Can't agree on whether to kick back and watch a live band or strap on your dancing shoes and join a salsa class? Thankfully, you can't go wrong.

A study from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology found that men and women who participate in cultural activities feel healthier, enjoy life more, and tend to be less anxious. Men, however, are more satisfied and get more of a perceived health benefit from doing passive activities, such as taking in a concert or an art exhibit, than women do, the study found.

"I guess guys tend to be a little more, generally, introverted - until you get a few drinks into them," Ms. Vogels says.

Compromise is the key, she says. If you're the reserved type, step out of your comfort zone a little for the sake of your partner. And if you're the more active one, respect that your other half might feel uneasy.

As Ms. Vogels puts it: "If you don't compromise, you're going to have a miserable vacation. So which option do you prefer?"

How to shop

You're frugal. Your partner is a shopaholic. It's a recipe for disaster when you're visiting markets, shopping malls and outlet stores together. Unless you're buying for someone else.

A study from the University of Michigan last year found people spend less than they intended when they anticipate the psychological pain of coughing up money. When that pain is amplified, such as when the buyer is forced to pay cash, tightwads spend substantially less. But when the pain is diminished, like when buying gifts for others, the gap between spending by tightwads and spendthrifts narrows.

"It may be that spending money on someone else lessens the pain of making purchases," marketing professor Scott Rick explained in a press release.

Arlene Stiles, a registered marriage and family therapist with the Ontario Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, suggests setting a budget you both can agree on.

"I would encourage all couples to have her money, his money and their money," she says. "Everybody needs some pocket change that they can just spend however they want."

How to unwind

You can't wait to see *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*. Your travel companion is dying to see *Friends with Benefits*.

When it comes to film preferences, the latest research reinforces gender stereotypes. A survey of more than 2,000 adults by the British-based insurer Direct Line found that men are drawn to movies with action sequences, car chases, nudity, sex and war. Women seek tear-jerkers, musicals and romantic comedies.

Though the findings couldn't be more clichéd, there may be some truth to them, Ms. Vogels says. "There is a reason why we use the term 'chick flick' and I think that there are certain genres that are aimed at women and other genres that are more so aimed at men."

Sure, you could take turns suffering through each other's movie choices. (Refrain from groaning or sniggering, though, please.) But there's nothing wrong with parting ways for an evening.

"That can be healthy for a relationship," Ms. Vogels says.

You could take comfort in agreeing on what film *not* to see. According to the poll, moviegoers, regardless of gender, were turned off by an over-complicated plot, an unbelievable storyline and talking animals.

"You loathed *Zookeeper*, too?"

See? You have something in common after all.