

There's one sure way to find out if you're with the right person – go away together. Ivan Smith reckons if you go away with anyone other than The One, you may as well pack your bags. Now.



"OK, there's no way you can watch that footy game from here..."

Can your relationship survive a dirty week away?

There's nothing better than a holiday together. The chance to get away, forget about work, lie on a beach and worry about nothing beyond the arrival of the next ridiculous cocktail... Except it isn't that simple.

Next time you ask a bloke the question, "Why don't the two of us go away somewhere?" watch for the brief blank look that comes over his face, just before he says, "Good idea, sweetheart."

For a bloke, this is a significant event, a rite-of-passage. Oh, not a big one, like losing your virginity or getting his first chest hair; but it's the first holiday without the boys. That blank look means he is weighing up their probable reaction to this piece of news. They'll see it as the beginning of the end for the old crew. There's a strong chance "the old crew" are bonded by little more than drinking heavily and talking about other times when they drank heavily ("Remember when Dave got so wrecked he tried to get it on with a tree?" etc). But the fact that you are subtracting their mates from this summer's equation is a big deal.

I once tried to compromise by having a boys' island holiday – and asking my girlfriend to come along as well. It was never going to work. My girlfriend made it through by being very chilled and keeping herself to herself. My five mates were very well behaved.

Which was the problem. Against all the rules of blokes' holidays, they kept the

swearing down to a reasonable level, didn't try to have intercourse with everyone they met, and didn't drink until they were rushed to casualty. In fact, they only spoil things by occasionally knocking on our wall at night and inquiring whether we were "doing it". My girlfriend's main comment at the end, was that we "talked a lot of shit".

“For a young bloke, this is a significant event, a rite-of-passage... it's the first holiday without the boys.”

For a bloke, being with a girl on holiday takes a lot of getting used to. On a date, we are on our best behaviour; when we are alone again, we can relax, scratch ourselves, look at girls (we may be going out with you, but we can still look), read comics on the toilet, and act like the slobbs we are. On holiday with you, we have to be on our best behaviour all the time.

Suddenly, your boyfriend is faced with the possibility of having to be an adult for two weeks. He has to pretend he never even sees the amazing blonde messing around with a beach ball right in front of

his eyes. He has to go outside and fart quietly. He has to drink out of glasses, get up before 2pm, and occasionally be sober. It's hard work.

This works the other way, too. On a date, she turns up the acceptable 10 minutes late, looking great, and he doesn't give a thought to the "getting ready" process that got her there. On holiday, we get to see the whole mechanism. There's no avoiding it.

The first time I saw my girlfriend's after-shower routine, I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. The thing is, I could have had a shower, gone for a walk, drunk a beer and had a nap, and she'd still be working her way through 16 small and mysterious jars of cream.

The bathroom looked like a chemist had opened up for business. The underwear and bikini bits on the floor seemed to be breeding and multiplying. Every time I thought we were ready to go, we weren't: it was actually T-minus half an hour, instead. Before a man goes on holiday with a woman, he knows almost nothing about the private part of her life. On holiday, he sees it, but is no closer to understanding it.

What I'm trying to say, is even though you are there to relax, you are still spending an awful lot of time together, and not much apart. The routine might be little more than sunbaking, drinking and going out, but it still involves difficult things like compromise, understanding and patience. Things that blokes take, well, a while to learn. Just give him a bit of the same when that blonde runs past with the beach ball again... ■