

KEEPING YOUR MARRIAGE ON TRACK WHEN THE TEMPERATURE RISES

With spring edging ever closer and finances finally recovering after the usual expenses of Christmas, you might just be turning your attention to summer holidays.

Thoughts of blue skies and even bluer waters, sipping cocktails by the pool, relaxed walks through old towns and along sandy beaches ... perfect.

But is your marriage up to it? According to Penny Raby, the divorce lawyer who specialises in keeping couples together, holidays can be 'make or break' for some couples.

"It's true that January is usually the busiest time for divorce lawyers because the pressures of Christmas come home to roost for many couples," she says.

"However, in my experience, early autumn can be just as busy because the strains on a marriage often become apparent during a fortnight away in the sun.

"Traditionally, holidays are seen as an opportunity to spend quality time together, either as a couple or with children. Sadly, the reality doesn't always match that perception."

With 25 years experience as a divorce lawyer, Penny has seen the highs and lows of both marriage and divorce, including her own, prompting her to set up *Marriage Makeover* with her second husband, Mike Gordon. The service is aimed at couples who want to work at their marriages and for whom divorce is an absolute last resort.

"Over the years, I've seen lots of couples heading off on their holidays, thinking it's going to be a healing fortnight of wedded or familial bliss. When they get back, you see the reality of heaps of quality time whilst away together has left the relationship in tatters.

"Never mind Christmas being a time of pressure on a relationship – I believe a whole fortnight away together can be just as stressful," she says.

She says there are three key reasons why relationships come under such pressure – unrealistic expectations, responsibility and stepping away from the usual routine.

"Firstly, lots of people attach very unrealistic expectations to holidays, particularly if a relationship is struggling in the first place. They can see it as an opportunity to fix all their problems which piles on undue pressure.

"Additionally, a family holiday is probably one of the single biggest expenses of the year so there is a huge expectation that it must 'work'. Those levels of expectation can lead to disappointment.

"Secondly, responsibility is attached to holidays. Typically, but not always, the wife organises the holiday and, unfortunately, that means she will be blamed if it isn't a roaring success.

"The third reason holidays result in pressure is that they're such a change from everyday routines. How many families typically spend 24-hours a day together, for two whole weeks, in a strange environment without normal, everyday distractions such as work or school? It's a potential recipe for disaster."

However, Penny believes there are some simple guidelines which can help keep a marriage on track when the temperature begins to rise.

Top tips for keeping your marriage on track in the sun

1 - Democracy rules. Sit the entire family down and make a joint decision about your holiday. Take into account that different members of the family want to do different things and plan accordingly.

“This avoids resentment,” says Penny. “It also encourages trust because there’s a shared responsibility between husband, wife and children.”

2 – Don’t expect perfection. Be realistic and realise that holidays rarely go without a single hitch –hiccups can even make a holiday according to Penny:

“Some of the best holiday moments are when things go wrong – you’ll be talking about the day dad forgot his swimming trunks for years to come!”

3 – Keep it real. Be prepared to spend time apart like you do in your everyday lives. There are no rules that say you should spend every moment of your holiday together.

“Doing different activities gives you a break and something new to talk to your partner and children about,” suggests Raby.

4 – Be prepared. A little practical preparation goes a long way so make sure insurance, first aid, etc are arranged before you set off.

“There’s nothing worse than a crisis to put extra pressure on a relationship,” advises Penny.

5 – Make it fun for everyone. After all, that’s the whole point of going on holiday.

“That might mean golf for the husband, a spa for the wife or the zoo for the kids,” says Penny. “Just make sure everyone’s tastes are catered for.”

Further information on Marriage Makeover can be found at www.marriagemakeover.co.uk

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