

FIRST PERSON

Bed-bound on honeymoon – for all the wrong reasons

*Newlywed **Arthur House** thought a gentle tour of Italy wining, dining and enjoying beautiful art would be perfect. But a cold soon cooled his ardour...*

My wife's favourite places tend to be hip and modern, clean and tidy. Places like Japan, for instance, or Norway. By the time I had this revelation we were already in a taxi from the airport to the hotel, passing graffiti-clad tenement blocks and macabre shrines. Perhaps Naples wasn't the best place to begin our honeymoon, I thought. But it was too late to go back now.

Honeymoons, like weddings, have changed over the years. My parents went camping on the French Riviera and in Italy, spending their first night as man and wife in separate bunks on a cross-Channel ferry (good one, Dad). One set of grandparents headed for the Swiss Alps in summer, while the other, having met and

married in wartime Alexandria, went to Luxor. The classic honeymoon was somewhere warm and vaguely cultural: a dash of the Grand Tour to ease newlyweds into the unfamiliar business of cohabitation.

But then something odd happened. Couples suddenly decided that celebrating marriage meant doing strange activities that they'd never normally consider fun, like marooning themselves on a desert island or chasing dangerous animals around Africa. A bit like war,

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modern honeymoons sound either very boring or very stressful. What if the infinity pool gets a bit samey by Day 3? Or if bumping around in a 4x4 all day turns out less romantic than you hoped? Sometimes, once-in-a-lifetime can be one time too many.

The 21st-century honeymoon, unencumbered by tradition or practical purpose (we lived together for years before getting married) should really be whatever you want it to be. We decided ours should be a fancier version of what we already liked doing together, namely, wandering around looking at interesting things and eating nice food. It had to be Italy. Having got married in October, we delayed the honeymoon until May for the best chance of good weather. I planned a nine-day trip to Naples, Capri, Amalfi and Rome. Our 21st century honeymoon, it turned out, would be rather old-fashioned.

Ivana had never been to southern Italy, but as a cinephile, she didn't need much convincing. It would be like *The Talented Mr Ripley*, I said, but without the murder, or *Two for the Road*, without the adultery – or the driving, for that matter. There would be no driving on the honeymoon, I insisted, because Italian roads can strain even the strongest of marriages. And because you still don't have a driving licence, she replied.

The blood of San Gennaro, Naples' patron saint, had miraculously liquefied the day before our arrival, which I took as a good omen. Italy goes wild for public holidays in the weeks after Easter, so most of the boutique hotels were booked up. Luckily the Romeo Hotel, a sleek, modern establishment by the port, offered an oasis from the scruffy Neapolitan streets. Its interiors were even Japanese-designed – hardly characteristic of Campania, but Ivana was happy. And then even happier, as we tucked into freshly baked sfogliatelle on the hotel rooftop with a panoramic view of Vesuvius.

The food in Naples was always on hand, whenever a baroque ceiling got too overbearing, a third century catacomb too exhausting. We scoffed pasta alla Genovese at a backstreet trattoria, washed down with a flagon of falanghina. We gorged on pizza – just the right balance of stretchy and scorched – in La Sanità, followed by flocchi di neve – pillowy cream buns topped with icing sugar – at the pasticceria opposite. Ivana said I shouldn't feel I have to eat everything, but I happened to disagree. Weighed down, we abandoned our walking tour and headed back to the hotel for a spa session and an early night.

Naples had been a success, so the rest would surely be plain sailing. Our hotel in Capri was designed by Le Corbusier and overlooked the Faraglioni rocks. By the time we sat down to a tasting menu at its Michelin-starred restaurant I admit I was feeling pretty smug about the way the honeymoon was going.

But hubris is a terrible thing. After a day of fluctuating temperatures in Capri – a sweaty hike, a bracing swim, a baking lunch, a frigid ferry trip – I pitched up at Amalfi harbour that evening in the first throes of a dreaded *cambio di stagione* – the notorious spring cold that sends Italians scurrying for their rosary beads.

Amalfi was supposed to be the sweet spot of the honeymoon, a three-night stay where we'd get to properly unwind. I spent much of our time there confined to my bed, but not for the reasons I'd imagined.

The hotel had lush stepped gardens cut into the cliff and dazzling views across the Bay of Salerno. The setting couldn't have been more romantic, but I felt more like a convalescent retiree than a virile newlywed.

For the next couple of days I wheezed and groaned, pottering around the hotel's lemon groves while Ivana sipped rosé by the pool. It wouldn't have been a bad place to end one's days, I suppose. In desperation, I dragged myself to Amalfi Cathedral to visit the shrine of St Andrew, the patron saint of protection against sore throats.

We took the fast train to Rome, where it rained. Not that it mattered a great deal. One advantage of cultural holidays is that they're not entirely dependent on the weather. I was glad to have booked the Galleria Borghese in advance, where we admired the Berninis as the rain poured down outside. I discovered that when you're not feeling your best, an audio guide can act as a handy stand-in for conversation.

Still, there were romantic moments. In the world's most romantic city, you are guaranteed a few. We dodged the showers, flitting from salumeria to gelateria. On our final day the sun came out and I began to feel better. We reflected on our trip over aperitivi at Il Palazzetto, as the Spanish Steps glowed in the last of the light.

I'd got ill, but I'd learned a lot. Isn't that the point of travel? I'd learned that you should listen to your wife when she tells you to take an umbrella. That it is perfectly possible to pack light for nine days – if you leave out warm clothes altogether. That you shouldn't buy, and

attempt to eat, a rum baba at a busy train station while wrangling two sets of luggage.

I can't pretend that our honeymoon went exactly to plan. Colds are not known for their aphrodisiac properties. But marriage can't all be a beach holiday – or an over-water villa, for that matter. To get ill in Paradise would have been so much worse. We'd still had the views and the food and the art. My grandparents would have approved.

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NEED TO KNOW

◆ The hi-tech glass and steel **Romeo Hotel** set by the harbour in Naples, has rooms from £282 per night based on two adults sharing on a B&B basis (telegraph.co.uk/tt-romeo-hotel).

◆ The Le Corbusier-designed Punta Tragara on Capri offers a sublimely romantic spot with panoramic views. Double rooms from £573, based on two sharing on a B&B basis

(telegraph.co.uk/tt-punta-tragara).

◆ Grande dame of the Amalfi coast, the Hotel Santa Caterina promises a seductive combination of luxury and top-notch service. Double rooms with breakfast from £302 (telegraph.co.uk/tt-santa-caterina).

◆ Hotel Hassler, set atop the Spanish Steps in Rome, offers rooms from £715 on a B&B basis (telegraph.co.uk/tt-hotel-hassler).



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