

'These aren't the type of people we want here'

Couple horrified to receive email from wedding co-ordinator asking boss how to 'put them off' after they try to make £10,000 booking

By Hannah Furness

AT £10,000 to cater for 30 guests, Stoke Park Hotel had a price tag to deter some couples from choosing it as a wedding venue. But after being shown round the five-star country hotel, which featured in the James Bond film *Goldfinger*, Pauline Bailey and Paul Carty decided it was ideal for their big day and attempted to place a booking.

There was only one problem. In the eyes of the hotel's wedding co-ordinator, the couple were far from its ideal guests.

In an email to her boss, which was sent to Miss Bailey by mistake, Michele Connelly complained that the pair were not the "type of people that we would want to have at Stoke Park" and asked how best to "put the wedding off".

Miss Bailey, 27, a counsellor and former law student, burst into tears after reading the message, which she said had left her and her 51-year-old fiancé, a Ministry of Defence engineer, feeling like "undesirables".

She believes that the couple were discriminated against because of Mr Carty's age and his pierced eyebrow.

The hotel, in Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, has since issued a grovelling apology and said that the member of staff involved faced disciplinary action.

Miss Bailey and Mr Carty, who plan to marry in June, said they had not "quibbled" about prices at the hotel, and even agreed to spend a further £1,000 on a fireworks display. Ten days after inquiring about making a booking, they had not heard back from Ms Connelly.

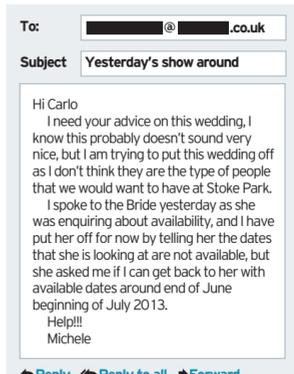
"We finally spoke to Michele, who apologised, explaining that she had been away on holiday," said Miss Bailey, from Luton. "She said she needed to discuss dates as provisional bookings had been made around the date we'd chosen."

"The next morning I was mortified reading her email, which she had forwarded to me by mistake."

The email, addressed to the hotel's sales manager, Carlo Zoccali, was signed off with: "Help!!!" It read: "I need your advice on this wedding. I know this prob-



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Pauline Bailey, with her fiancé Paul Carty, left, was accidentally forwarded the message, above, by Michele Connelly, right, after they had looked around Stoke Park Hotel, far left

ably doesn't sound very nice, but I am trying to put this wedding off as I don't think they are the type of people that we would want to have at Stoke Park."

Explaining that she had already told the couple that the date they requested was unavailable, she concluded by asking for advice on what to do next.

"I was horrified," said Miss Bailey. "Effectively she was asking her boss how

she could get rid of us. The suggestion was that we were undesirables, which we definitely are not."

"We're a respectable, middle-class, hard working, well-educated couple, who both speak well and were certainly not dragged-up, so to speak. It's clear to me that this hotel operates a policy of discrimination which is terribly wrong, unfair and deeply, deeply hurtful. Paul

and I can hold our own anywhere and in anyone's company. We are thoroughly decent people and didn't deserve this humiliation."

The couple have now hired a solicitor to discuss the possibility of bringing legal action against the hotel for defamation.

Mr Carty added: "We are normal people, our money is good, no better or worse than anyone else's. If we can afford it why

can't we have it?" Stoke Park's website describes it as "the perfect place to enjoy life in a friendly atmosphere" and the wedding co-ordinator as the "warm and friendly face couples see right from their first visit to Stoke Park".

A member of staff emailed Miss Bailey directly to "humbly apologise for the email which was sent to you by accident". "At Stoke Park, we welcome all who wish

to have their wedding with us," he wrote. "We pride ourselves on the highest quality of service and hospitality and if you would still consider us as a venue for your special day, I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss this further."

A spokesman for the hotel said yesterday that they were unable to comment further because the incident was the subject of ongoing legal dispute.

Planning a surprise trip? Give her eight days' notice

WOMEN may claim that they desire spontaneity from their man, but a study suggests they actually want eight days' notice of any "surprise" trip.

Three out of five women in the survey confessed to hating surprises and a third said they would hate it if their partner suddenly sprang a short break on them.

But that may be just as well, because the average woman is treated to just two romantic trips from their partner during the course of a relationship, the research found.

The typical woman wants seven days and 11 hours notice before even the shortest break, plus three shopping trips, according to the study of 2,000 women.

A fifth of those who had been whisked away on a surprise getaway felt that their enjoyment had been affected because they were not given

enough notice. Necessary activities before leaving home included planning outfits, packing, sorting out work and cancelling other arrangements.

Women said at least nine outfits were needed for a short break. One in four said forgetting something in the hurry to leave had spoilt their time away.

The research, commissioned by British Airways, found that women needed more than 12 hours to get ready to go away.

But one in four said a romantic trip away "just wouldn't cross their partner's mind".

The same proportion claimed their partner's idea of being spontaneous was getting a takeaway meal.

Abigail Comber, the head of brands at British Airways, said: "This research empha-

sises how much importance women place on getting preparation for a trip exactly right.

"The element of surprise is clearly a dividing issue among British women.

"But what has emerged is the enjoyment of going away is enhanced if they feel they have been given enough time to get excited.

"They want to leave knowing things will be OK while they're gone."

Sophie Bailey, 33, from Southampton, Hants, who was whisked away to Morocco by her boyfriend, said: "It was a really sweet idea to celebrate our first year together but really I hated it.

"He packed my bags so I had all the wrong clothes and my hair straighteners had been left behind.

"I had to grin and bear it because the trip showed he cared, but it was awful."

Fertility benefit of a little housework

By Stephen Adams
Medical Correspondent
in San Diego

DOING housework can dramatically increase a woman's chances of getting pregnant, a conference has heard.

Being physically active tripled the likelihood of conception, fertility specialists found.

Going to the gym was not necessary to benefit: vacuuming, cleaning or gardening helped too.

Encouraging women to stay active could help couples avoid spending thousands of pounds on IVF, the annual conference of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine in San Diego was told.

Experts at Chapel Hill Infertility Centre at the University of North Carolina examined pregnancy rates among 108 patients with an average age of 35. The women's activity levels were assessed several months before they began IVF

treatment, using a questionnaire which looked at how much exercise they built into their daily lives. It looked at four areas: household and family care, occupation, active living habits such as walking, and sport. Each woman received a score out of five for each area.

The researchers found that those with more active lifestyles than average were three times more likely to conceive during their first cycle of IVF than those with less physically demanding routines.

While only about a quarter of the less active women got pregnant, three-quarters of the more active patients did.

Dr Kathryn Calhoun, a gynaecologist, said exercise could enhance the quality of women's eggs. "We think too much insulin is harmful to the development of eggs," she said. "Exercise is really beneficial for maintaining insulin sensitivity."

The male pill? Men would forget to take it

By Stephen Adams, Medical
Correspondent, in San Diego

A CONTRACEPTIVE pill for men appears to be edging ever closer, but a survey has revealed that the vast majority of women have so little faith in their partners remembering to take the drug that they would continue using their own contraception anyway.

A pill that men could take once a day, a week, or even a month is in development.

When a team at the University of Kansas Medical Centre interviewed 300 people in relationships, they found 92 per cent expressed interest in a male pill.

But three-quarters of women said they would keep using contraception if their partner was given the pill. The findings were presented to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine in San Diego yesterday.

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Forget the 'staycation', now it's the 'nearcation' as travel costs rise

A HOLIDAY or weekend away that involves travelling no more than a couple of hours from home is becoming increasingly popular as a way of keeping down costs, research has suggested.

Holidaymakers have created a new travel trend for getting away from it all - by not getting too far away from it at all. Analysts have nicknamed it "the nearcation" because the break usually involves a destination within a couple of hours from home.

It could be a weekend away for couples, urbanites escaping the city for a couple of

days, or an overnight trip to the seaside with the family.

Rising petrol prices and rail fares mean that long trips to resorts within Britain - the so-called "staycation" - are too expensive for many families on a budget, said Mintel, the market analysts.

As a result, the staycation has evolved into the nearcation. It does not involve travelling too far or too expensively, unlike many staycations which for many are now the alternative big summer break.

A family driving five hours or more to spend a week in the summer in Cornwall or

Scotland can sometimes end up spending as much as if they had gone abroad.

Short breaks now make up 44 per cent of the holiday market in Britain, up from 40 per cent in 2011 - from 39.3million to 42.3million.

According to Mintel, about 60 per cent of Britons took a short break within the country in the past 12 months. Three quarters of all domestic holidays in Britain are taken by car. A spokesman for Mintel said: "If petrol prices stay high and rail fares continue to rise, staycations may increasingly evolve into 'nearcations'."