

Travel

Couples — a great vacation

BY JOSIE PLIEGER

SYNDICATED TRAVEL NEWS - Splashing sounds and laughter are coming from the spontaneous volleyball game in the pool, twosomes lie sprawled on the beach catching the last rays of the day's sun, we've arrived at Couples. We order two pina colodas almost tentatively, not quite believing that we won't have to pay for them, let alone leave a tip. Even our cigarettes are free.

We've flown from Toronto to Montego Bay where we were somehow met in the bustling confusion of the airport. We've driven for two hours east along Jamaica's scenic north coast, the drive enlivened by "Couples Kisses" — a potent rum cocktail served en route.

Check-in was simple as we filed in a hotel registration card. We decided to wander around the hotel to give our bags a chance to be taken to our room overlooking the sea and a baby island with mock Martello tower off-shore.

Couples is one of the newest holidays in the Caribbean and it happens at a stunningly beautiful resort that used to be called Tower Isle. There has been extensive refurbishing of the hotel which gleams with sparkling white paint and achieves an elegant, tropical feel with plants everywhere.

The Couples idea is the latest in a string of new-style casual holidays in the Caribbean. But whereas other new holidays have been singles swinger oriented, Couples is quite different because you cannot go alone. So the hustling and sexual competition have been removed and that makes a very pleasant change.

There's plenty of social interaction but it's on the unstated premise that everyone who is at Couples is there with someone they came with. The net result is a degree of relaxed sophistication that makes everyone feel at ease while promoting a cheerful and genuine sociability.

The hotel was about half full when we were there in mid-March and we soon came to know almost all the other couples, as well as the charming staff. Family style dinners six nights a week help to break down our inhibitions as we share heaping platters of food served to miscellaneous table-groupings of two, three or four couples. But the complimentary wine, the superb food and the bright atmosphere of the dining room soon have us all talking and everyone seems to have an interesting story to tell.

Couples is one of those rare places whose organization is as unobtrusive as it is well-managed. The staff are friends and not servants. The girls behind the bar are

new to hotel work and smile enchantingly as they serve the complimentary drinks from about 9:30 in the morning 'till the last guest goes to bed.

The large thatched-roof patio adjoining the pool is the centre of activity during the daytime. Magnificent hot and cold buffet breakfasts and lunches are served here, if you can drag yourself away from the beautiful beach. There's always something to do, but never any pressure to do anything. We took a Sunfish out sailing, took a pedal boat across to the island and climbed to the top of the little tower for a superb view of Couples in its secluded bay. Some of the people we met went horse-back riding or played tennis avidly and yet the tempo of Couples always seemed relaxed.

One morning a bus took us into Ocho Rios, about six miles away where we shopped in the rather touristy straw market. We went on another 2 miles and marvelled at the picturesque Dunn's River Falls, crowded with people linking hands to climb up the rocks to the top through the clear, tumbling waters.

That evening at the hotel we were in for a treat after dinner. A computer-magician hypnotist held us spell-bound while he performed impossible tricks and convinced us all that the power of the suggested idea is very real.

Each evening brought some different entertainment, from the hilarious guest night to the haunting voice of P.

J. Clarke. A resident Jamaican band provides music for dancing and entertainment 'till about 12:30 every night. After that, the night owls repair to the intimate piano bar where an excellent pianist provides the right atmosphere for conversation, some quiet dancing and a few night-caps. The piano bar closes only when the last guests go to bed.

Everything we could do, including sports instruction, as well as everything we ate, drank or smoked was included in the price of \$1550.00 we paid for the two of us before leaving Toronto. You just cannot use money at Couples and you don't have to carry around beads or any other plastic necklace currency. To shop at the boutique, craft shop or duty-free shop you have to step out of the hotel lobby and around the driveway. If you want to play golf, the hotel is planning a free golf day a week where transportation, membership and green fees are all complimentary. The only thing that would be charged to your room would be long distance telephone calls.

Couples is an excitingly different sort of place to go on holiday. If it were just another inclusive holiday resort it would be very good. But it's more than that with a special atmosphere engendered by the couples and the staff. Couples really is the sort of place you'd dream of taking a loved one, or of being taken by someone you're particularly fond of. Couples is one of those rare places that consistently and delightfully exceeds your expectations whether in the quality and presentation of the food or the happy, social ambience that exists. We didn't see anyone drink the whole time we were there. And contrary to some people's apparent pre-conceptions, there were no "gay" couples.

Travel footnotes:

Miniskirts, hot pants are no-no's in Malawi

also barred. Sports and swimming attire is allowed only in designated areas along the shores of Lake Nyasa, one of the

chief attractions of the former British protectorate called Nyasaland. Violators are deported as "prohibited immigrants," applied to include tourists.

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BY NIGEL FOSTER

SYNDICATED TRAVEL NEWS - Go to any airport in the world, and you can see them.

A few, disconsolate figures, standing staring at the near-empty luggage carousel, as if they can will their missing bags to suddenly appear.

As if the solitary, broken ski that's revolving slowly will magically be transformed into a complete set of matching bags, full of their own personal belongings. Of course, what happens is that the owner of the broken ski turns up, swearing and cursing at the stupidity and clumsiness of the airlines. Or occasionally looks first resigned, and then rather smug — some one who's bothered to take out baggage insurance.

"Oh well," the original watchers and waiters mutter as they wander off, "at least the airline will pay compensation."

As indeed most airlines will — but never for the amount that the claimant thinks is fair, and only after exhaustive enquiries.

Mind you, there are other things that can happen to baggage and personal effects. They can be stolen, or destroyed in a fire. Some evil minded baggage handler can take perverse delight in systematically destroying all your holiday souvenirs. You can leave a briefcase in a taxi in Port of Spain or Puerto Vallarta, and just try claiming from that driver.

For the worst — remember Murphy's Law: anything that can possibly go wrong, will. Which means insurance — and no, you're not automatically covered by Household and Personal Effects, and even if you are it's probably not for the amount you need.

Bringing us to Voyagaur Travel Insurance, who not only have policies covering Flight insurance, World Wide Travel insurance, Holiday Package insurance, Hospital/Medical Expenses insurance (that you didn't know travel was so fraught, did you?) but Voyagaur also have a policy simply called Worldwide All Risks Baggage and Personal Effects Insurance.

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Worldwide — you're cov-

ered in Timbuctu as well as Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. In fact, you couldn't go anywhere where this policy doesn't apply — assuming you're not holidaying in a war zone, but more about that in a moment.

Your baggage and personal effects are covered, whether they're stolen from your hotel room (no, you don't need a witness to the actual theft but you must make an official report to the police) lost or smashed in transit, or washed overboard. The actual wording says: "Includes rough handling, theft, burglary, fire or transportation hazards, anywhere in the world." Which is more than comprehensive, isn't it?

Okay, what doesn't this policy cover? Again, a direct quote: "This insurance does not cover animals (birds, cats, dogs, etc.), self propelled conveyances, household effects and furnishings,

contact lenses, artificial teeth and limbs, money (remember — use travellers cheques), tickets and documents, professional or occupational equipment, antiques and collectors items, loss in consequence of war, civil war, hostilities (whether war is declared or not).

Cost? Reasonable in the extreme. You have a choice of insuring for as little as

\$100 (\$6.50 for two weeks) up to and including \$3,000 (\$55.00 for two weeks). At that, the minimum time period is three days, the maximum 180 days.

Oh, and one other thing. Did you notice how the direct quotes from the policy were in plain, simple English? No, that wasn't a translation job — the policy is actually written that way. Which is just one more example of the sheer professionalism that Voyagaur and Lloyd's displays.

At the same, you don't have to make a special trip to take out any of Voyagaur's policies. All you have to do is talk to your travel agent, who has all the necessary forms and policies. You don't have to fill out and sign your own policy. Voyagaur allows your travel agent to do this for you.



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