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COULD THIS HOLIDAY SAVE YOUR MARRIAGE?

by Jane Fryer

OUR last family holiday was spent in a remote converted farmhouse in Burgundy. The weather was glorious, the view spectacular and the Charolais cows lowed gently in the surrounding fields.

Our days, however, were spent rushing round the local supermarket, cooking, entertaining guests, checking that aged parents were taking their medication, digging badly driven cars out of ditches, juggling screaming toddlers and snapping at each other enthusiastically.

On our way home — during a brief moment of *detente* — we vowed, for the sake of our marriage, our sanity, our family, our health, to do things differently in future.

Which is how we found ourselves at the Radisson Blu Resort & Spa, Sun Gardens, on the Adriatic Coast, just outside Dubrovnik, where things were very different.

For starters, it was just the four of us — me, my husband Miles and our two little boys, Freddy, three, and Sandy, who is two.

Also, we were in Croatia, just seven miles from the Unesco world heritage city of Dubrovnik, and we were in a fantastic hotel.

I always thought Radissons were where lonely businessmen propped up the bar on eternal work trips. But no, the Radisson Blu brand has undergone a makeover of late and this one was something else.

It was light, bright and sleek, landscaped with vast, billowing rosemary bushes and heady jasmine, and boasted an award-winning spa and an array of good restaurants.

But best of all there was a Scott Dunn Explorers Kids Club, where highly qualified British staff welcomed both boys with open arms and their own personal Evian bottles with laminated name tags.

I should be clear. I love my boys very much. But I also love my husband and occasionally pine for a silly rosé-fuelled lunch followed by a nice lie down in a shady room — without someone yelling for Thomas The Tank Engine. Or just yelling.

So for about three hours a day, they made sandcastles and

painted and went swimming and baked cakes and played football and pretended to be dinosaurs with the wonderful Amy and her staff. And we lazed in the sun. And read books. And larked about in one of the hotel's six pools. We did enjoy rosé-fuelled lunches *a deux*. We even laughed at each other's jokes.

After a couple of days, once we realised it was impossible to prise the boys from the joys of the kids' club, we went further afield — catching the boat into Dubrovnik.

Which is magnificent. An

extraordinary expanse of red roofs, flapping washing, polished marble streets, not a single Starbucks or McDonald's, and the occasional bomb hole (how the Serbs dared to bomb it in 1991 still astonishes).

Everyone told us to do a walking tour of the city, and they were right. Miles and I share a phobia of tour overload, but we needn't have worried.

Ana Orlovic's tour (laid on by the Dubrovnik Tourist Board) was fantastic, taking us back to the city's halcyon days as the

arch shipping rival to Venice, but also cheeky, fun, moving (particularly outside the old city orphanage) and brilliantly disdainful of the endless Game Of Thrones tours on offer.

The American fantasy series was filmed here by HBO, who apparently asked to shut down the whole city. 'We told them politely that, sadly, that wouldn't be possible,' said Ana crisply.

Another must is to walk the 1½ miles of fortified city walls. A must-not is to walk them between noon and 1pm, as we did in 34c

Classic beauty: Dubrovnik is a feast of delights. Inset: Jane with Sandy (left) and Freddy

heat. Our holiday euphoria had dipped slightly by the end. And then nosedived further when an excited fellow tourist mistook Miles for Alan Partridge.

The next day, the Kids' Club was shut and, with handsome Ivan at the throttle, we all zoomed off in our own private speedboat for a paddle and a splash and a greedy seafood meal on the nearby island of Lopud at Konoba Dubrovnik, where locals sell lemons the size of footballs and the lunch is the sort you remember for ever.

THERE were so many good things about this holiday. To find a family-friendly hotel — awash not with gaudy plastic, but with

big squishy cushions, thick taupe towels, several swimming pools and patient staff — was a dream.

And with all that just a 20-minute cab from Dubrovnik, you never feel like you're cooped up in a holiday complex.

Before we went on holiday, a friend with young children told me earnestly that Scott Dunn's Kids Club had saved their marriage ('Really, Jane, I'm not remotely joking — and it was cheaper than therapy!').

I'm not sure I'd be quite that dramatic, but it certainly perked things up a bit.

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TRAVEL FACTS

EASYJET (easyjet.com) flies from London to Dubrovnik from £55.47 return. Scott Dunn (020 8682 5080, scottdunn.com) offers seven nights' B&B at Sun Gardens for two adults and two children from £4,735 (low season) and £7,205 (school holidays). Includes flights from Gatwick, private transfers, and two places in the kids' club.



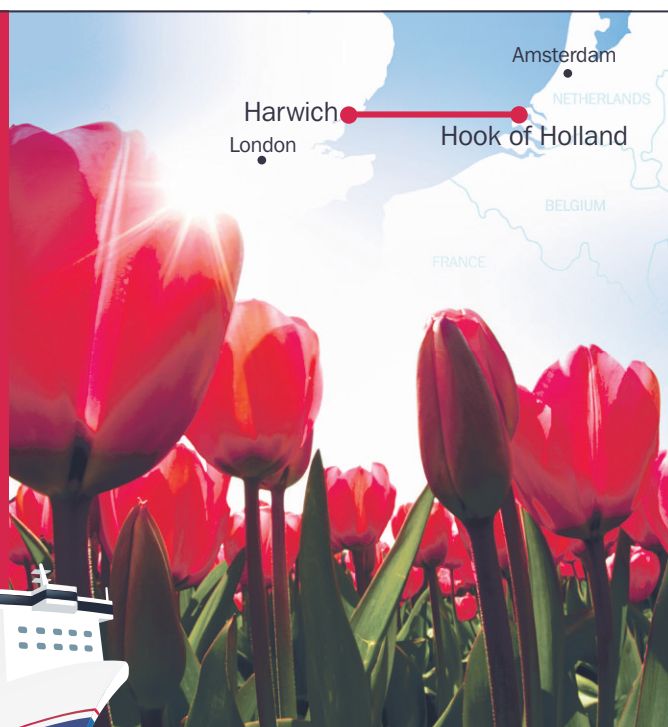
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