

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

This month, errant thoughts of romance flitted around the Red Couch, where the women discussed the codes of courtship. They've had their share of good and bad dates, as well as advice—some of which we hope they didn't heed. If you're still in the game, do take their cue, and maybe you'll be able to woo that special someone in time for Valentine's Day.

Q Describe the best date you ever had: Where did you go? What did you do?

IRIS: My favorite date was on my 23rd birthday. My boyfriend totally surprised me by taking me to a spa in Sonoma. I had never been to a spa, and getting my first massage and facial was complete bliss. It was especially nice that he planned it all ahead of time and never let me know the surprise.

JANE: A weekend trip to Malibu. It was the first time I'd been there, and since I'm an ocean lover, I was happy with romantic walks on the beach, the Getty Villa, and great food.

JOANNE: The best date I ever had was with my husband. It was New Year's eve 2000, and we had weekend reservations at a renowned golf resort in upstate Michigan. The resort was turned into a winter wonderland; fresh snow had been falling all day. The evening started casually as we took a sleigh ride in the glistening snow under a moonlit sky with four other couples. We arrived 30 minutes later to a small lodge with a large fireplace, which was tucked into the woods. There we had a personal chef cook a seven-course meal with special wine at each course. The entertainment was a couple that sang love songs during the meal. Afterward, we took the sleigh back to our chalet, where we changed into formal evening clothes to bring in the new millennium in the main ballroom. It was a magical time with my husband and friends. I'll never forget it.

THERESA: The night actually started on a sour note when my date and I had car trouble in the middle of nowhere. We ended up catching a ride with someone on their way to

a wedding. We had to make what we thought was going to be a quick stop at the wedding before they were able to drop us off at our destination. We ended up staying for the full wedding—not to mention the reception. We had the time of our life with a group of complete strangers. I still smile every time I think of that day.

Q What are your personal deal-breakers (i.e., signs that a date or relationship is suddenly going south)?

IRIS: There is nothing worse than a guy who constantly talks about himself or how much money he makes. I also carefully watch how a man treats other women who are close to him. A guy who doesn't respect his mother or sisters is someone to definitely avoid.

JANE: Boredom. If you're bored on the first date, it won't get more fun on later ones.

JOANNE: If the guy only talks about himself.

THERESA: Singing or serenading.

Q What should a man do to impress a woman on a date?

IRIS: I'm most impressed with men who are confident enough to truly be themselves on a date. It really shows when a guy is confident and has enough self-esteem to let down his guard. I think the most sensitive men I've met in my life are also the most confident.

JANE: Be attentive, be a good listener, and have a great sense of humor.

JOANNE: Show he cares about her—her ideas, concerns, interests, etc.

THERESA: It's really pretty simple: show basic compassion and consideration for others.

Q How did you and your significant other meet?

IRIS: We met while in medical school, and I was actually his senior medical student. The upper class students were supposed to take care of the incoming first-year med students. So I did a good job of taking care of him, and we married a few years later.

JANE: I don't have a significant other at the moment.

JOANNE: Through mutual friends.

THERESA: Seeing that I don't have a significant other, that's a tough one to answer. I'm always amazed, though, by my friends who end up dating people they have met in the most insignificant places—at the post office or in an elevator.

Q Has someone given you a piece of memorable dating advice?

IRIS: Someone told me that how a man makes you feel about yourself is a sign that he is a potential Mr. Right. If a guy can make you feel like a beautiful person both inside and out, then he is a keeper.

JANE: Don't try too hard to meet people. Pursue your own interests, and you'll meet people who share them.

JOANNE: Never pick up the check on the first date. Let the guy do it. If he wants to split the check, forget it. He's not the one.

THERESA: In all your relationships, make sure you are friends first. **SJM** Jodi Engle



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