



The RISE of the STEN

Joint stag and hen celebrations have seen a surge in popularity - Y&YW looks into why

WORDS BY HANNAH DAVIES. PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES. *SURVEY BY AMERICAN EXPRESS

“A STEN CAN BREAK THE ICE BEFORE THE BIG DAY”

bigger group booking means that you can split the cost between everyone, making it much more affordable so your money lasts longer,” says Lucy. “With a joint hen and stag do, you’ll be offered cheaper accommodation,

How do you imagine your hen party? Given the range of experiences that have become available over the years, you could be picturing yourself doing anything from trampolining to a roller-blading disco. Chances are, however, that you can picture the people who’ll be there quite clearly: you, your best friends, and possibly your mum. But you might want to add a few more to that guest list – namely, your partner and his or her friends.

The joint stag and hen do is undeniably on the rise. “In the last two years, we’ve noticed a huge 250% increase in enquiries for a joint hen and stag do – now known as a ‘sten do’,” says Lucy Zarembski of events organiser Chillisauce. “Right now, a sten do may still only appeal to a relatively small number of our customers, but we’re expecting that to really grow.” So why are more and more couples casting off the traditionally gender-segregated pre-wedding celebration? “We just didn’t feel comfortable with the whole stag and hen thing,” says Katy, 31, who married Mark in 2018. “We met in our first year at university and we consider most of our friends to be joint friends. And anyone I met without Mark, like my school friends or former colleagues, he’s got to know anyway over the years. It felt a bit forced to separate everyone based on gender.” Laura, 28, is planning a “sten” with her fiancé Rhodri for similar reasons. “I get on so well with Rhod’s best friends and I would have felt left out if he didn’t want me to come along on a night out – and vice versa!” she says. “We don’t really do separate girls’ and boys’ nights out, so why would we make an exception for this?”

THE SMART OPTION

Even if you do have separate friendship groups who don’t particularly know each other, a joint celebration could still be the smart option. “A sten can bring the wedding party together to meet and break the ice before the big day,” Lucy points out. “It will create a better environment for not only the day of the wedding but also create a foundation for stronger relationships in the future, too.” There’s also a compelling practical

advantage. It costs £303* on average for each guest to attend a wedding. Given that they’re probably going to more than one such celebration that year, anything you can do to bring down their spend will be much appreciated. “A much

activities and nightlife.” Just remember that the larger the group, the more people there are to keep happy, particularly if you need to choose activities. After all, if your maid of honour has been eyeing up a hip hop class while the idea of dancing in public is the best man’s private hell, it’s unlikely that will end happily. When making the selection, it’s best to go for crowd-pleasers rather than anything too niche – see our suggestions below. If you absolutely had your heart set on doing something your partner would hate, you could always try a semi-sten – you each do separate activities with your friends, then all meet up for some serious joint celebrating. “We’ve hired a house in Dorset with all our friends, but we’ll be doing separate things in the daytime and then going out as a group both evenings,” says Laura. “Rhod’s excited about playing golf on the first day – he couldn’t do something like that with me, because I hate golf! But we haven’t divided the activities according to gender. Our friends just had to tell us in advance which ones they wanted to do, and we’ve ended up with mixed groups for all the activities.”

“IT’S ALL ABOUT WHAT SUITS YOU AS A COUPLE”

WHAT TO DO? Y&YW’s suggestions for sten-friendly activities

ESCAPE ROOM

Perfect for some bonding time, as everyone works together

DAYTIME RAVE

Also known as conscious clubbing, these are taking off in cities around the UK

GO KARTING

Brings out everyone’s competitive side!

COCKTAIL MAKING

Unless you have many teetotal guests, this is always a winner. For something a bit different, try a gin-making class

COMEDY CLUBS

Because who doesn’t like a laugh?

VOGA

Yoga meets voguing – it’s quite out there, but it’ll get everyone talking

COOKERY CLASS

Just don’t forget to check dietary requirements first! For a twist on this, look out for a foraging experience or butchery workshop

THINK ABOUT ORGANISATION

One of the secrets to a successful sten is being clear about who’s organising the whole affair. If you’d prefer to leave it to the groomsmen and bridesmaids, you need to be confident that they’ll work well together. “We found it easier to sort out our joint stag and hen ourselves,” says Katy. “I had four bridesmaids and Mark had his best man and four ushers – it would have been a case of ‘too many cooks’ if we’d left it to them.” You also need to be clear that this is something you both want to do, before you get too far into the planning process. “We’ve always said we’d have a joint hen weekend away, but recently my fiancée admitted she’s started to feel like she’ll be missing out somehow by not having her own hen,” says Kerry, who’s marrying Jessica in 2019. “I think we’ll still have a joint hen, then she’ll do something separate with her mum and sisters.”

Of course, there’s nothing wrong with wanting to stick to the more traditional hen and stag formula – it’s about what suits you as a couple. “I can’t think of anything worse than having a joint stag and hen with Tom,” says Liz, who’s getting married in summer 2019. “We live together, so we spend plenty of time as a couple anyway – I like having a chance just to be with my friends.”