

**How you could shop around to find your true love**  
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Life Style Susan Lee talks to a dating doctor about the peaks and pitfalls of that first date

IT'S January and that means we're in for record numbers of sweaty palms, moments of wardrobe anxiety and awkward conversational pauses covered by too many gulps of red wine.

According to on-line dating service parship.co.uk this is the most popular month for first dates thanks to a combination of post Christmas loneliness and New Year resolutions. The study revealed Britain's singles will go on a staggering 8 million first dates this month - twice as many as any other month of the year.

So just how do you go about securing that first date and making it a success?

Makng the first move

"IT'S a numbers game," says Dating Doctor Peter Spalton. "The more people you meet and engage with the more chance there is of finding the right one.

But forget cliched chat ups. There's nothing easier, or harder, than saying 'hello' to a stranger.

The best way is to pick up on something unusual about your potential dating target. Are they standing next to a strange piece of art in a gallery? Is their basket full of horror films?

"You've got to use your eyes and use the information you get," he says. "It's better than a chat-up line because it says, 'I'm interested in you and what you're doing'."

Next comes a fairly short conversation or email exchange. Listen intently and pick up on the other person's cues. "When you get to a point when you think the conversation's flagging off a bit, that's the time you leave.

"You need to leave them with some anticipation and then you ask them for their phone number. Say: 'It's been wonderful to meet you, I really enjoyed talking about whatever, I'd like to see you again, can I have your number?' The worst you can get is no."

Places to pul

SO where are all these elusive singletons? The answer might not be what you think.

**BARS:** Forget them, Peter advises. "People aren't on their own there often. They're with a group so you've got the inter-group dynamics to handle." Plus, it's noisy

**PARTIES:** Parties are good because they tend to be quieter, it's more informal, it's less competitive and you can go up to someone at a party and just say 'hello'.

**SUPERMARKETS:** "Supermarkets are fantastic for starting conversations with people because there's so much information," Peter says. "Stuff on the shelf, stuff in their trolley, you can see whether they've got a bottle of champagne, or a cat and a dog."

**ONLINE/PERSONALS/AGENCIES:**

Despite the technology, the strategies stay the same. "You're making a connection and then you're talking to them in exactly the same way - you just use email or text messages or letters instead."

Firty fist dates

YOU'VE got their number and they've said 'yes'. What now?

WHERE TO GO: Don't go to the cinema because you won't talk' don't go to somewhere with a live band because you won't be able to hear each other' don't go and do an activity because then it could get competitive.

A quiet wine bar or pub is a good choice and lunch is ideal.

WHAT TO WEAR: Avoid wardrobe extremes. Business suits are not right unless you've just come from the office, but neither are combats. Steer clear of anything remotely too tight.

WHAT TO SAY: A good starting point is the other person. Ask about their work, interests and ambitions, and remember to always be yourself in response.

HOW IT ENDS: With a peck on the cheek if you don't see a future in it. A passionate kiss is fine if there's a definite chemistry. If you're not interested, let them down gently - it's kinder than letting them wait for a phone call that will never come. If you do want a second date, don't push for it then and there. Call the next day

And remember, nobody finds Miss or Mr Right the first time round!

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