

Sunseekers 3-Day Weekender

Two hundred and nine matured black women in one space taking over a business hotel? Well, you could only imagine. Our mantra was... *what happens in Bristol, stays in Bristol!*

Solicitors, magistrates, accountants, social workers, entrepreneurs, home makers, carers and high net worth business women – set off early one Friday Morning leaving from all different corners of England to meet up at a secluded spot in Bristol. Not a care in the world. We didn't need masks or anti-bacterial spray – we were heading off for a very delayed break – we didn't have a care in the world! Some of the women had made their own way to the venue and four coaches gathered one after each other at Sudbury Town station to rumble down the motorway to join them. Thank goodness there were no luggage restrictions. All the food and alcohol one could carry were on those coaches.

The comfort break for the coaches was a welcoming opportunity to catch up with faces not seen for nearly two years. It didn't matter the service station queue was long – there were enough stories to tell whilst waiting in line for either fast food or the toilets. Two ladies joined the long queue to the toilets and another woman was about to exit. The two women couldn't help staring at the other woman. It was clear she must have been in the same party because she turned and nodded in acknowledgement in the direction of the two women. The woman displayed an air of grace about her and had the most fantastic grey hair, styled to perfection as if she had literally stepped out of the hairdressers. Neat rows of curls just like from back in the day when your own mother went to the hairdressers - not a strand out of place. The two ladies looked puzzled. You could read the thoughts racing through their minds ... *what ah clock she get up tis mawning to put in all those curls or wonder if she had it done yesterday? If so, how she manage to keep them in tact fuh t'day?* The two ladies couldn't resist – they needed to find out how the silver haired woman managed to retain her neat locks. Having been asked the question so many times, Miss Silver Fox replied confidently that she doesn't have a man to disturb her at no time during the night. One of the two ladies looked Miss Silver Fox straight in the eye and said *"Is lie yuh ah tell – it nah guh suh – it mus' be de same man puttin' the two curl in yuh head"*. All three women fell about laughing. The women continued to bump into each other at every opportunity during the long weekend. They never did find out each other's names, neither the secret to the best kept hairstyle!

We were now in high spirits. We all felt more at ease once we had stopped for a comfort break. Continuing our journey, we settled down to sort out teams for the Sunseekers' games. On one coach, they went through the list of games and women "volunteered" names of the participants. A packed itinerary of fun games, exercises and keep fit classes galore were disclosed – many to our amusement.

Upon arrival, we were greeted by the staff waiting to welcome us - just like the staff do on the TV series, Downtown Abbey! We found our rooms, hung up our ball gowns and quickly changed into our team colour t-shirts for the first set of activities. One team, "Purple Reigns" must have had difficulty getting purple shirts because most of them were in lilac! "Smile Orange Blossom" and "Ever Reddy" managed to show up with every different type of top you could think of except for t-shirts and "Green Team" couldn't even come up with a team name. But guess which team won? The games were played with varying degree of success. The train track game was a total disaster – all the high-powered women in the room thought they would make up their own rules for their teams. Half an hour later and after a lot of heated deliberation, they worked out *how* the game ought to be played. But by this time, the games were over! They discovered that their made-up rules now matched the rules which were given to them in the first place! The best game was the knee trembler – the rules were a ball to be held in-between the knees whilst walking to drop it into a bucket at the other end of the room. The only thing was that some women couldn't differentiate between their &?>*& and their knees! Needless to say, those participants were immediately reprimanded.

The next day was a flurry of workout activity. The fitness instructors must have been prepped beforehand because most of the exercise classes had a Caribbean style going on. Imagine aqua aerobics jiggling to calypso and holding up your legs, bums and tums to reggae tunes. When you looked into the swimming pool, all you could see was a mixture of colourful swimming hats bobbing up and down to the sounds of splashing water as the ladies tried hard not to get their hair wet and careful not to fall over. We were pleasantly impressed by the twenty-eight year old Caucasian carnival fitness instructor - he couldn't help himself. He made us sweat and gasp for air to his fast energy calypso tunes; but it was also his opportunity to show us that he could whine and go down much further than us and in tune to the music.

Saturday Night – sophisticated and aptly named the Bling and Glam evening. The room was sparkling. 'Nuff scaffolding was happening under those sequins, but we smiled and periodically remembered to breathe in. The only extra attire we went into the ballroom with was our electric and hand-held fans and of course, flat shoes! The pre-entertainment crooners Starlene Bey, Bonito Star and Peter Spence gave us soothing soul & lovers rock tunes which was enough to get us in the dancing mood.

The two female DJ's, Ranking Merva and Lady Banton, hit the decks with a collection of tunes from back in the day. Even the crackle in the records were authentic. We knew all the words and sang along 'till 5.00 a.m. in the morning. MC Lee Drummond, the compère had to be a man - dressed in a glittering smoking jacket with embellished ponytail. Hair not long enough to adorn his shoulders, so he had to put it in a small bun. He showed off, continuing to stroke his partially bald head citing that he had no choice but to grow his strands during Covid. One lady had to remind him that the barbers are now open. We didn't need our flat shoes to change into because when the music got to us, we just flung them in a corner. We didn't have to worry about getting Uber to go home or if we had "vex" money to get home at all, because all we had to do was to hang on to each other and find our slow selves up to our rooms.

We ended the night (morning) in true soul line dancing style to the soulful voices of the Temptations and their hit *Stay*. Line dancing the Temptations Cha Cha was a perfect fitting to a brilliant evening.

Pat arranged two breakfast sittings: continental at 8.00 a.m. and brunch at 11.00 a.m. She couldn't understand why anyone would want continental at 8.00 a.m. after the night we had, but Pat made an announcement that those who ordered the dry bread, better turn up otherwise she'll name and shame them!

Mother's Day activities included Hazel, a Menopause Advisory Specialist residing in Bristol who told us things that definitely got our attention. It's like we have been given the information before but only hearing it for the first time. Oestrogen and magnesium were the key words for most of us women and we certainly came out of that session with a "to-do-list".

Later that evening, Kim Samuels, co-founder of The Renewal Choir from Bristol, joined us with some of her members ready to enrich our bodies with powerful song and prayer. We were delighted that her sister, Karen Gibson (The Kingdom Choir) and their mother was able to also join us. We were moved when invited to come to the front to be prayed for; tears of joy and sadness flowed throughout the service, but we took it upon ourselves to comfort each other because we felt safe and loved.

Later in the evening, we were introduced to traditional story telling by Latisha Cesar, a Haitian dancer hailing from sleepy Somerset. Women came dressed in their traditional dress and headwraps. Latisha choreographed some steps for us which we were able to follow to her rhythm-beat music. But in true black women style of a certain age, we had our own story. By the end of the evening, we had created a boy meets girl scenario, who then became a married couple. With the first pregnancy and kissing of the tummy out of the way, four more children were produced in quick succession. When wifey

couldn't tek anymore, she asked for a divorce, to which bad man hubby responded and said she ain't getting no divorce. In fact, *he* called out his "other women" hidden in the crowd – they didn't show their faces for fear of any reprisals. The couple and untold number of pickney acted out the play to screams of laughter and tears. This impromptu on-the-spot style of acting made the story even more hilarious and had us all in full belly laughs.

We didn't have time to compose ourselves because Sunseekers version of karaoke quickly followed. We had one lady starting off the session by singing "Silly Games" out of tune and the audience joining in – in harmony; and four groups who had practiced hard to put together dance moves to their chosen songs. The group of women who emulated En Vogue did a fantastic job of keeping us entertained, while two other women played out Dr Kitch's (*Lord Kitchener*) needle song, dressed up in a doctor's white coat and armed with a very large needle. We only hope that the needle was disposed of safely! Silly Games won the vocalist trophy, only because the singer was able to combine her dulcet tones with smouldering dance moves at the same time. All we needed were the lights to be lowered and the light bulb changed to a blue one!

The final day! We relished our last full English breakfast. *How often do we do this at home?* Some of the women had planned to make one lady's day very special – it was her birthday. The longest table in the dining room was showered with table decorations and prosecco to mark the occasion. Those in the room joined in and wished the lady a very 'appy birthday!

After breakfast, there was a quick dash back to our rooms to make sure we had packed the complimentary toiletries we never used and cleared out all of our belongings (but not the robes and mugs thou' – they were tempting). We gathered outside of the hotel and said our goodbyes to some of the women who were going to make their own way back to their humble abodes whilst the rest of us boarded the coaches heading for London. When we finally reached Sudbury Town station, some of us disembarked to meet loved ones who were there to meet our tired selves. We hugged, kissed and said au revoir – 'cause we know this isn't the last time we would meet up, although Pat says differently. In fact, it's just the beginning of something new for Sunseekers.

A 3-day weekender...