

Payback time for happy singletons

Raise a glass - and a gift - to the non-hen do and celebrate the lives of your single friends, says **Helen Croydon**

THE guest list's done, I've found a funny photo aged 18 with cigarette and vodka bottle in hand (that's for the invite), I've discovered a quirky country venue. All I have to do is create my gift list. Hooray, presents!

I'm not getting married, thankfully. I'm having a non-hen do. Think of it as a hen do, wedding, engagement, baby shower and christening all in one, just without a reluctant boyfriend or a crying baby.

I'm part of a growing movement of happily never-marrieds demanding payback for all the couple-centric fanfare they've dutifully gone along with for years. We've had sologamy ceremonies in which people pledge love and loyalty to themselves, made popular by Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex And The City*. The non-hen do is less ritualistic. It's about getting your friends to celebrate your life choices, just as you have theirs.



Inclusive invites: Is it time for singletons to get in on the act too?

Event organisers Hen Heaven have seen a surge in non-hen do enquiries. Less than one per cent of their parties were unrelated to weddings in 2015. This year, it's more than six per cent.

'When we ask who the bride is, we get told there isn't one,' says Tom Bourlette, who runs the

company. 'They just want to "celebrate their singlehood". They usually want an activity-based domestic holiday.'

I don't blame them. As a child-free never-married, I'm fantastic value to my friends. I've thrown loads of parties but none have required a train journey to a far-flung rainy village or an outfit I'll never wear again. Nor have I had a pre-party requiring a flight to some Balearic island and a small fortune spent on plastic willies.

You may think hosting a non-hen do negates my prerogative to change my mind. But the idea of a wedding, and



marital life, has as much appeal as moving to Seoul right now. And anyway, I have friends who didn't bat an eyelid about throwing a second engagement party with their second 'The One'.

It's not just about the presents, it's about principle. We should afford the same precedent to all our friends' personal milestones. It is incongruous that in a modern, free-thinking society, the thing that attracts the most congratulatory comments is anything involving an engagement ring or an eight-week ultrasound scan.

Coupledom has become a vehicle for consumerism. Throw babies into the mix, and card and cake companies make a killing. I went to one first birthday party that, according to the proud mother, cost £5,000. But often the party invites start even earlier. Gender-reveal parties celebrate an event that has 50-50 odds before the baby is even born.

It is time for singletons to ask friends to celebrate their achievements too. Bought your first flat? I'll be there, girlfriend. Got that job you worked so hard for? Let's go to Vegas! Bagged that limited-edition handbag in the sale? Boom, let's have a Gucci reveal party.

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