

# Get caught short by romance

Finding love in a crowded cubicle may not sound romantic but one dating website is hoping its members will do exactly that.

Helen Croydon lifts the lid on **Toilet Dating**

**W**E start inside central London's swankiest public toilets, where admission is a pricey 50p. The Jubiloos, on the south bank of the Thames, clean themselves after every use and cost £22,000 a year to run. I am introduced to my 19 co-singletons, all hoping to find love over a lavatory. There is an equal split of men and women and they are mostly professionals aged between 25 and 45. I'm glad to say this is the first time I've eyed up a potential suitor inside a public convenience.

Then it's over the river to Victoria Embankment which, I'm now equipped to tell you, was built to house London's sewer system as a result of The Great Stink of 1858.

The population of London had nearly trebled in 50 years and the hot summer caused the Thames to smell so bad that Parliament could only meet behind heavily curtained windows. The construction narrowed the river and we still use the same system today.

We do a quick whistle-stop at a space-age pop-up urinal called the Urilift, designed by a Dutch company in 2000 to provide an alternative to the bushes. There are several of them throughout cities in Britain but you may have missed them. They look more like a Tardis than a toilet.

And then it's underground into a glitzy cocktail bar and cabaret club, called Cellar Door, which used to be a notorious public men's toilet frequented by Oscar Wilde, Joe Orton



Take the plunge: Doingsomething.co.uk members can find love in the most unusual places, in Helen Croydon's case the toilets at Aldwych's Cellar Door (above), The Knight's Templar on Chancery Lane (left) and the South Bank's Jubiloos (far left)



and Sir John Gielgud. The Aldwych venue marks this claim to fame with unisex toilets with fully see-through doors (until you lock them).

Over cocktails I have the chance to meet the other revellers. For some, the sanitary backdrop is a romantic

notion: 'I'm fascinated by bathrooms,' says Sarah, a twentysomething fashion designer. 'Everywhere I go I always visit the toilet. I want to know how clean it is and how imaginative they've been with decorating it. It's an obsession.'

For Robert, a 34-year-old physiotherapist, this was his third singles

event. 'I like the idea of meeting other single people but without the pressure of having to sit and drink for a whole night with the only focus being each other. This seemed quirky and I thought it might attract interesting people. Even if I don't meet a date it's good to make new single friends because most of my existing ones are married.'

That's exactly the goal of the organisers, doingsomething.co.uk. It styles itself as a dating site where what you do is more important than the date itself. Users state what activity takes their fancy that particular day and update it regularly like a status on a social media site. So if you fancy a museum expedition but don't have any history-minded friends, you can ask a date to go with you.

Matt Janes (below), who founded the site, says: 'I was an internet dater myself and I got tired of the treadmill of drinks in mediocre pubs. If you have a drink in a bar and there's no connection, that's a night of your life you won't get back. The aim of our site is to get people doing things. If romance comes out of it great but if not, you've still had fun. A date is always destined to be awkward

because it's two people forced into a conversation with no context other than basic information about each other.'

Past expeditions of doingsomething.co.uk have included a party on the London Eye, where each pod was decorated with a different theme, and a ping-pong party on top of the O<sub>2</sub>.

There were two other pubs on our toilet tour, including The Knights Templar in Chancery Lane, a former bank whose spacious toilets, with sofas and swanky art deco mirrors, are located in what used to be the bank vaults.

No one on the toilet tour left me feeling flushed (pun fully intended) but at least I picked up some tips and tricks for locating free public toilets and what to say to the owners of a pub or cafe if I get stopped.

Oh, and guys, if you really do have to go up against a building, you can learn to spot exactly which walls to avoid. Beware, because some are designed to send the stream straight back on to your feet. Definitely essential information if you're about to meet a hot date.

Toilet Dating tours take place on the first Friday of every month in London and are set to be rolled out nationwide later this year. Visit [www.doingsomething.co.uk](http://www.doingsomething.co.uk) for details.

## POTTY FACTS THE HISTORY OF THE PUBLIC TOILET

- Organised sanitation arises when the population of an area grows dense enough that natural biodegradation can't keep up.
- The practice of waterborne sanitation dates back to 1500BC.
- Underground toilets were popular in Victorian times. Many still remain as toilets or have been converted into bars, shops and houses. Most were only for men, though (pictured). Provision for women didn't happen until well into the 20th century. There's no requirement for the Government to provide toilets. It often gets handed



down to local government, which leads to a diverse range of schemes.

- In Britain, 40 per cent of public toilets have closed down in the past ten years.

● The British Toilet Association campaigns for decent 'away from home toilets'. **Vicki-Marie Cossar**

[www.britloos.co.uk](http://www.britloos.co.uk)