

CHRISTINE MADDEN

journalist | editor | dramaturg | literary translator



Heartbreak hotel

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Just broken up with your partner? Freshly single and having to face the misery of a lonely Valentine's Day? Help is at hand in the form of an alternative holiday for the heartbroken

*The heartache before the hospitality. Photograph:
Christine Madden*

HERE IT COMES again, that most dreaded day of the year. Bad enough if you or your partner have to be frogmarched into shelling out for flowers, perfume, chocolates, aftershave, sex toys and dinners in overpriced restaurants. Excruciating if you're single and think everybody else but you is having a passionate evening with a strings-heavy soundtrack. Devastating if you've recently broken up with your partner.

What can you do to escape the frilly, pink world of Valentine's when your heart has been sledge-hammered? Luckily, you're not alone when you're alone. There are lots of new ways to avoid it.

One of them lies nestled in an Alpine valley that looks like a picture on one of those chocolate boxes sold for the dreaded day. [Schüle's](#) hotel in Oberstdorf, a sport and health resort town in the southernmost tip of Bavaria, sits in the middle of a landscape that earns its right to the cliché "breathtaking". Just looking at the ridge of snowy peaks against the sky feels like a mental peppermint, natural beauty like an intake of crisp air. The hotel features the "Ich bin ganz bei mir" – "Time for Me" – holiday offered by [Liebeskummerer](#), a German counselling service for the broken-hearted.

Breaking up is a trauma. You feel like the earth has collapsed under your feet

The founder of Liebeskümmerer, Elena Sohn, first approached Schüle's about a year and a half ago with the concept. "At first, I had to smile," says Karl-Arnold Schüle, the director of the award-winning, family-owned hotel. But after discussions with the Sohn and the hotel doctor, he realised that it was a service his hotel was ideally suited to provide. What makes it different from just another relaxation holiday or detox? "We tend to each person individually," he says. The programme for each guest is tailor-made to suit their specific wishes and needs. And special touches are added for those still aching after a breakup, such as inspirational messages on cards left for guests on their pillow.

The Time for Me break includes a consultation with the hotel doctor, during which visitors can discuss which treatments would suit them best. These include a range of massages and Kneipp cure therapies, saunas, participation in Schüle's many hiking and indoor and outdoor sporting activities and personal counselling.

From the front, the hotel looks friendly, inviting but not unusual. But the back of the hotel opens out to a valley sweeping towards the towering Alps. This view graces almost every public and treatment space in the hotel – from the tranquil indoor pool to the various spa therapy rooms to the saunas. Schüle's also features a ladies-only sauna – open to men one day a week – and a "room of stillness": Zeitlos (English: "timeless"). Apparently this room is so well insulated, the glass triple-glazed, that you can't even get a mobile signal – so no chance of sending your ex a recriminatory text or scanning Facebook to see what they're up to.



*Ulrike Fohn, one of the Liebeskümmerer
therapists. Photograph: Christine
Madden*

"Breaking up is a trauma," says **Ulrike Fohn**, one of the Liebeskümmerer therapists who works with the "Time for Me" guests. "It comes suddenly, you feel like the earth has collapsed under your feet. You've got to release the shock, the fear."

Fohn is an alternative practitioner and healer of physical and emotional illness who lives and works nearby. Her voice is soothing, her warm smile full of empathy. The

window behind her opens out to sunshine glinting off the mountain snow – a panorama radiating majesty and peace.

Hidden in the crisis of heartache, there's an amazing opportunity to discover happiness

Many people traumatised by a breakup had focused their entire life and happiness on their partner. They feel like “the earth has crumbled beneath their feet”, says Fohn. “It’s like they’ve outsourced the fulfilment of their most important needs. Then their partner breaks the contract.”

Fohn treats her patients in hours-long sessions. “The key is: accept it,” she says. Struggling against reality isn’t helpful. She’ll assist you in recognising the unconscious thought and behaviour patterns that keep pushing you back into toxic situations and pain. Then, she says, “You have to treat yourself with understanding and love.” And not be afraid to seek help.

*Elena Sohn, author and founder of
Liebeskummerer. Photograph: Christine
Madden*

Liebeskummerer was the brain child of former PR consultant Elena Sohn. She launched the service after being left by her then partner in 2008 – “or maybe 2009, I’m really not sure anymore”, she says, indicating how far she’s come since then. At the time, however, Sohn was paralysed with grief. While visiting friends, she noticed that achieving distance was helpful. Why, she thought, is there a medical therapy for every little ailment but not for heartache? The name is a German play on words: *Liebeskummer* = heartache, *kümmern* = to take care of.

Based in Berlin, Sohn now says, “I would never suffer so much from a breakup again”. She has also written two books: *Schluss mit Kummer, Liebes!* (No More Anguish, Dear!), and *Goodby, Herzscherz* (Goodbye, Heartache). The latter describes her “*Glücksherz*” (happy heart) technique of getting over heartbreak – and never experiencing it so violently again.

But can you mend someone’s heart in a mini-break? “We no longer try to cure only

acute heartache, but work with you to change your perspective,” says Sohn. “I urge people to see that, hidden in their crisis of heartache, there’s an amazing opportunity to discover what sources of happiness there still are in their life.”

Sites such as Never Liked it Anyway and Exboyfriend Jewelry will help you sell and turn reminders of your ex into cash

The attention you receive is personalised and indulgent. When Petra Stein’s (not her real name) six-year relationship came to an end after a devastating breakup last year, she wrote to Sohn. Having arranged her escape, Stein staggered into Schüle’s for a four-day visit.

As soon as she arrived, “the Schüle family took me into their care”, Stein says. Frau Schüle accompanied her on group hikes in the mountains. She had treatments and massages, revelled in the tranquillity of the hotel and its Alpine location and ate her fill every night at the restaurant. Before she got there, she says, “I hadn’t been able to eat for weeks and lost 16 kg”.



*Special tub for a luxury bath at Schüles. Photograph:
Christine Madden*

Stein also partly met two other Liebeskümmerer clients who were visiting at the same time. They shared their stories, propped each other up – and continued to stay in touch after they left. Now close friends, they’ve since been back to Schüle’s for a return visit, and spent New Year’s – that other notorious holiday for making singles feel ostracised – together in Berlin.

After the huge popularity of the (body) detox, the concept of an emotional detox feels like the next big thing. It could be a way of reaching people who might not normally come for help, surmises [Kate Curtis](#), a therapist practising just outside of Dublin, Ireland who has extensive training in various healing practices, such as reflexology, acupuncture, Celtic herbalism and holotropic breathwork. “I think it’s very clever, because it’s taking away some of the stigma attached from some of the psychology treatments that people might need to go for, that people would resist because of that stigma,” she says.

“A breakup is a huge shock,” says Curtis. “But it can be the catalyst for opening up the gates.” She cautions, however, that you should choose a practitioner very carefully, and follow it up. “You need to take care of yourself in the weeks afterward. Once a gate is opened, it’s important that it stays opened. It can contract a few days later, and that can be painful.”



On the way to Schüles, the Alps framing the landscape.
Photograph: Christine Madden

At [Chewton Glen Hotel](#) and Spa in the UK, [Denise Leicester](#) – qualified nurse, aromatherapist, yoga teacher and yogic healer – also conducts emotional detox courses. “We are ‘feeling beings’, yet staying emotionally balanced and learning how to restore ‘emotional wellbeing’ is not often supported or even acknowledged,” says Leicester, who is also the founder and CEO of [ila](#), an organic skincare, spa product and treatment company. “The emotional detox is offered as a gentle way to become more in touch with oneself and to enable toxic emotions to be released, restoring harmony and happiness.” The [ila](#) retreat at Chewton Glen “can offer space, support and nurturing in a healing environment where emotions can be released and balance restored.”

Although cohabitation seems to be reducing the divorce rate somewhat, it still remains high – there were, for example, still an average of 13 divorces an hour in England and Wales in 2012. There aren’t any statistics for breakups, but sales of ice cream, chocolates and Adèle albums have certainly not flagged. All fodder for the burgeoning breakup industry and its trailblazing services. The [Breakup Shop](#), for example, will send a letter, email or text to your soon-to-be ex. In their shop, you can also order your ex a present, such as a Netflix gift card or box of cookies. (Their Poo Smell Card is currently sold out.) Facebook is currently trialling a new [Take a Break](#) tool that will help screen you from your ex’s feed (and your ex from yours) to help you achieve distance. Sites such as [Never Liked it Anyway](#) and Exboyfriend Jewelry will help you get rid of physical reminders of your ex by helping you sell and turn them into cash. Or you can donate them to the Museum of Broken Relationships (see panel below).

But maybe it’s best to start at Schüle’s with a caring, indulgent break as an antidote breakup. As you enjoy the five-course dinner with a book, take note of your surroundings: you might see that the couple at the next table hardly exchange a word. Maybe being single isn’t such a bad thing after all.

Other destinations for the dumped

Different phases of breaking up call for different antidotes. Feeling hungry? Adventurous? Or gleefully vengeful? Try a break at one of these locations

Museum of Broken Relationships

When Croatian artists Olinka Vištica and Dražen Grubišić ended their relationship, a joke about what to do with the object left behind turned into a [museum](#). Since starting up in 2006, it's gone on tour all over the world. Next tour starts this month [February 2016], or visit the museum in Zagreb.

Tuscookany – cookery holidays in Tuscany

Now that your ex, who always did the cooking, is gone, it's time to learn how to make fantastic pasta yourself. Where better than in a [cooking course at a villa](#) in gorgeous Tuscany. Get occupied, learn something new and bring back a skill to make your friends (maybe even the ex?) jealous.

Anti-Valentine's Party

Want to turn sad into mad? Dry your tears and head for the annual [Anti-Valentine's Party](#) at Birds Café and Bar in LA. They serve food and special drinks – such as blackheart martinis – and previous parties have featured male and female piñatas to bash and possibly voo-doo dolls. Having fun is the best revenge.

The Chocolate Museum, Cologne

Need to indulge? Short of taking a bath in chocolate, you can visit the [Chocolate Museum](#) in Cologne, near its famous mediaeval cathedral. Take the tour, overwhelm your senses with the sights and smells, let one chocolate after another melt across your tongue, visit the cathedral and expiate. Then start over.

Exotics Racing / Nürburgring

To get your heart racing again, why not drive an exotic luxury car around the Nevada desert? At [Exotics Racing](#) in Las Vegas, you can drive a Lamborghini, Ferrari, Porsche and more – or be driven in one. In Europe, the [Nürburgring](#) racetrack offers a broad

palette of motoring experiences, including watching racing or speeding down the track yourself.

Gelato Museum

All wrapped up in a duvet to eat ice cream by the pint? Soothe your heartache the classy way and visit the [Gelato Museum](#) just outside Bologna. After learning about the history of ice cream, getting introduced to the art of Italian gelato, sample the artisan product and melt away.



Schüles Hotel, Oberstdorf, Germany: a winter paradise.

Photograph courtesy Schüles Hotel



Serenity: the care put in by the Liebeskümmerer.

Photograph: Christine Madden



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