



Women just wanna have fun

Posh hotel offers a pajama party package for gals only

By JOANNE RICHARD, Toronto Sun

Beth Duncan and her gal pals got together recently for a night out -- only it was "in." They had a sleepover, which is really nothing out of the ordinary, except they're all in their 30s and married with children.

"It was so much fun and such a great break from our routine lives -- we got to spend time together, which is a rarity. We never laughed so hard and ate so much," says Duncan, who says they have vowed to make it an annual get-together.

It's a twist on the traditional pajama party and a growing trend among busy women everywhere.

The pals stayed at the Fairmont Royal York in Toronto, which offers the innovative Royal Pajama Party package. "Reminiscent of the pajama parties of one's youth, we want women to return to a time when lounging in comfy PJs, enjoying simple comfort foods and laughing until your stomach hurt was at the heart of female camaraderie," says Alka Patel, of the Royal York.

With the hectic and fast paced lives of today's women, finding time for themselves as well as for close friends is almost impossible, says Patel, so an overnight stay with no responsibilities offers women an easy way to indulge in friends, fun and comfort food in comfortable surroundings.

Recharging and connecting is essential and healthy, says therapist Marilyn Belleghem: "Connecting to other people, sharing, laughing, empathizing and then feeling we are not so alone is good for our mental health.

"Many women need adult conversations that are not about solving problems," says Belleghem, a registered marriage and family therapist and author of *Questing Marilyn: In Search of My Holy Grail* (Quest Publishing).

According to Belleghem, women tend to function from an emotional centre and want to create relationships and environments where there is joy and harmony. "In order to do this, their own nurturing often gets neglected. Looking after others needs and wants has traditionally been women's work."

She explains that when we look at religious teaching, we are constantly being told that the last will be first and that to be self-sacrificing is a virtue. "It is a hard belief to confront and break."

Shifting gears is a learned skill, says Belleghem, "so it takes practice but once learned it is a very valuable tool."

And the Royal York is the perfect place to practice slowing down.

"I love the part of having a PJ party right in downtown," says Belleghem. "It often takes a trip to a country spa to sit around in a robe and slippers and unwind. This takes the travel time away and opens up the opportunity to many more women."

Belleghem fondly recalls her own adult sleepover experience: "I went to a PJ party with a group of my women friends and we even played dress-up. It was a great time and we still laugh and talk about it years later."

She adds that for women who were over-responsible children and who came from homes where this type of party never happened, it can be part of finding our lost child. "In therapy terms, it is called doing inner child work. Once we free our playful child it is impossible to get it fully back in the box again. Play, like sex, is a great stress release."

According to Patel, a PJ party at the Royal York lets women indulge in the opportunity to relax, rejuvenate and re-connect amongst friends. "Aside from the luxurious surroundings in a landmark hotel right in the heart of the city, and the appetizing cuisine from The Fairmont Royal York culinary team, the Royal Pajama Party package is great deal at \$389. For up to four people, it's chock-full of value -- friends enjoy a Fab Fairmont Deluxe Room, a welcome gift of Flare magazine, an in-room On Command movie, the staples of comfort foods and a buffet breakfast in York's Kitchen.

"It's a great alternative to the traditional girls night out."

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