

Flirting Across Europe

5 The Belgians and Dutch play it cool, France gets excited about speed dating while Cologne opts for fun and sociability...

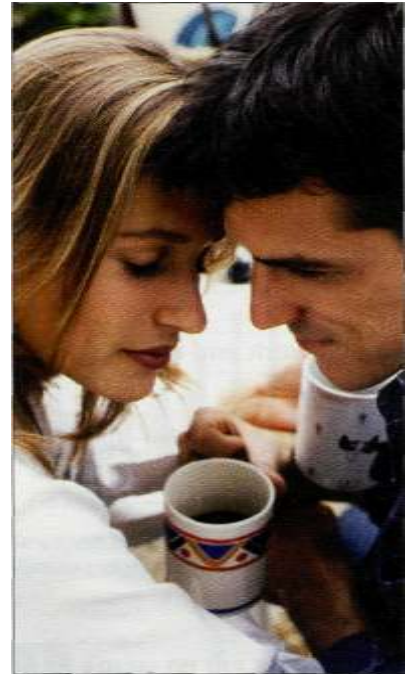
10 Whether it's a means of communicating, as in the North, or of boosting one's ego, as in the South, the way seduction works depends on which country people come from. Just as the codes and techniques used depend on local customs¹. But all over Europe, it's usually the man who makes the first move.

15 Fun-loving Cologne can claim to be "the German capital of seduction and flirting". In a Gewis Institute survey, 33% of Germans said occasions for meeting people were far better there than in Munich and Hamburg. To begin with, there are student parties in the university canteen all year round. Catering² for up to 3,500 people, new faces abound³ and the atmosphere gets pretty wild. Mixing people and cultures has become a credo in this "city with a heart". Conviviality is what counts. Just look at the riverside café and restaurant terraces in spring to get an idea of its Mediterranean nature... which makes life a lot easier for singles.

20 Dutchmen have a direct approach to the love game. No flattery or long-drawn-out courtship⁴ here, but a quick chat to get to know the other person... Golden rules? Avoid being in a hurry, too intellectual, looking desperate or weird⁵. Smile, keep things light-hearted. Where do people meet? At parties, in clubs, bars, on the canal side or at work. Never in a supermarket, at a tram stop or in a cinema queue: opening gambits⁶ made here would be rejected. "Always keep a certain distance, so as not to intrude⁷ an another person's space," says Femke, 28.

30 Nearly a million single people live in Paris; or one out of two homes have single occupants. "In a romantic city like Paris, where people like to party, it's incredible to see how many of them are lonely," sighs Pierre, a Bastille barman. Which is perhaps why he organizes speed-dating evenings once a month. Anne-Laure, 27, a more conventional lonely heart, prefers music festivals or late-night openings in museums. Which shows just how highbrow⁸ and complicated love-play in Paris has become... and maybe explains the statistics.

40 Despite being at the crossroads of Latin and Anglo-Saxon countries, Belgium is very "Nordic" in its approach to romance. When it comes to the opposite sex, people are reserved, even in the circles they mix with. Private parties may be popular, but otherwise, courting is done in stages. A drink in a bar first, then maybe a disco. Some establishments try to hurry things along. "A pleasant ambiance and being able to invite someone to dinner AND dance are ideal for beginning an *affaire du Coeur* when one lives in a town not reputed for its torrid atmosphere, like Brussels," says Alain, 29. "People are wary⁹ and don't break the ice easily, even in clubs."



Adapted from *Thalyscope*, summer 2003