



Who says that long-distance relationships have to be all heartache and horrific phone bills? **Leo Bear** lives 15,000 miles from her boyfriend and she's never been happier

So far, so good

My best friend Emily, 31, has been invited to the Bahamas by a man she finds devastatingly attractive. He's tall, dark, half-French and works in advertising. He seems to possess all the qualities she's been looking for in a man and never found. But she doesn't want to go. Why? He lives in New York and she lives in London. "Why bother?" she despaired to me over the phone. "We'll have this great, romantic time, and then what? I don't want to fall for a guy who lives in a different country, there's no point."

Wrong. Some of the happiest people, myself included, are in long-distance relationships.

I met my boyfriend when I relocated to Los Angeles. Our apartments overlooked one another across a palm-filled courtyard (very *Melrose Place*). Both from London, we discovered we had more than just friends in

common, and before I knew it I was pacing my balcony hoping to catch a glimpse of him returning from work each night.

At weekends, he showed me the local markets, took me hiking, introduced me to his friends, and tracked down a little convertible car for me. I was smitten.

Then, after two blissful months of hotfooting back and forth across the courtyard, came his (rather shaky) announcement: "My American office is closing, I'm being sent back to the UK and I've got three weeks to pack up." I felt like I'd been hit by a Hummer.

That was nine months ago. Since then, we've pretty much seen each other every six weeks, taking it in turns to fly across the pond. We spent his birthday in Hong Kong and New Year's Eve in Paris. You see, with the money we're saving living apart and working like maniacs, we can

afford to splash out when we're together. It's nerve-wracking seeing each other for the first time when we re-meet, but once the slightly awkward greetings are over, we can't wait to get properly re-acquainted! It feels like the honeymoon period has never ended.

Undeniably, what we have isn't a full-on 'proper' relationship,

“NINE MONTHS ON, IT'S LIKE THE HONEYMOON NEVER ENDED”

but one day it will be. And who needs all those mundane disputes and paranoias that often come with day-to-day relationships? There just isn't the opportunity for habit forming or nit-picking when you live hundreds of miles apart. There's no "Where have you been?" or "How come you're back late?". My friend Andrea, who's 28 and lives with her long-term boyfriend, confessed to me

recently, "I went to a party and got antsy when Tom left the room to hang out on the balcony. I kept checking to see who he was with".

But if you're going to be leaving your man alone night after night on the other side of the world, you simply have to trust him. And him you. There are fewer question marks over commitment when you do long-distance, because your future is something you simply *have* to discuss. And, frankly, if they're willing to fly long haul, you know they're in it for the long haul.

Charlotte, 29, is an actress based in LA with an Irish boyfriend who divides his time between LA and India, where he does most of his business. She concurs, "My ex-boyfriend used to live around the corner from me, and if he didn't want to spend all weekend with me, I'd get paranoid about what was wrong. Long-distance is so much less stressful - and I get so much more done when he's not around!"

Of course, there are nights when you'd do anything for a cuddle, and times when you desperately want a chat but it's 5am his time, but with my boy out of sight, it's true to say that, in the nicest possible way, he's pretty much out of mind.

I'm amazed at how much more I can fit in now that former 'essentials' like hair straightening, leg shaving, grocery shopping and preparing proper meals aren't part of my daily agenda. My relationship affords me the luxury of two-hour gym sessions, afternoons spent wandering around art

galleries, marathon *Sex and the City* sittings, and eating wholewheat pasta four nights in a row if I choose to. It's heaven!

And when my man's in town, I'm like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon - refreshed, radiant, and at the top of my game. Though admittedly, I do catch myself gazing across the courtyard some evenings, still hoping to catch a little glimpse of him. ●