

Out of my comfort zone, wandering around Harrods in the wrong trousers

I've rarely felt as adrift from my comfort zone as I did last week when I found myself wandering slack-jawed through the gilded halls of Harrods in the wrong trousers.

As soon as I walked through the heavy metal doors I knew it wasn't the place for me. Beautiful men with perma-tans, artfully sculpted facial hair and teeth as white as their crotch-hugging jeans strutted the halls like they owned them. Some were so dazzled by their amazingness that they had to wear sunglasses indoors. Armies of perfectly made-up women looking like – I imagine – Kardashians struggled with bags from designers so exclusive I'd never even heard of them.

We headed for the food hall. "I'm not feeding my children Kobe beef or Russian caviar," I muttered as I swerved us past heavy marble counters groaning under the weight of gleaming ice crystals and a meat counter offering a platter of "baby chicken, half duck, lamb cutlets and Merguez sausage" for £100. Harrods is a most confusingly laid out shop with lifts that go to random floors and stairs more suited to an Escher print. After several wrong turns, which took us repeatedly through a diamond hall maze where staff looked through us, I had to do a thing I hate doing. I had to ask someone for directions to somewhere other than the food hall where food might be found.

We were directed to the tea rooms and after more wrong turns, found a brassy lift which agreed to take us there. As we waited for a table, I'd cause to regret my wardrobe choice. The skanky shorts and t-shirt combo was wrong for a place where stooped men of advancing years gently vacuumed red velvet sofas as beautiful people in sharply cut waistcoats delivered morsels of sharply cut sandwiches to bored diners.

I hid my shorts of shame using my family as a shield and we were shown to a table under a flowering tree. I felt more comfortable when another family arrived and I noticed the solitary man in their party also wearing shorts. My comfort turned to more shame when I realized they were Irish. "What will all these men in tight white jeans, Armani loafers and ankles untroubled by socks make of us Paddies who can't even afford trouser legs," I thought.

After lunch we explored the children's clothes section, walking floors covered with carpets richer and thicker than minor royals. The stock prices horrified, amused, depressed and outraged me to varying degrees. I looked at my gorgeous little baby in her Penney's leggings and M&S t-shirt covered in drool and lunch and wondered if I'd failed at life because I couldn't afford a handwash-only cashmere onesie to cover her perfect skin.

Then I felt indignation. Much to the mortification of my family, I marched up to a shop assistant and asked who in their right mind would pay 300 quid for a romper suit? The question clearly caught her off guard but rather than calling security she smiled. "Oh you'd be amazed. There really is a market for this stuff. And it is really good quality and... No, you're right," she said. "They're just paying for brand names because they can."

Adapted from: Conor Pope, The Irish Times, 29 August 2018