

SPENDING

Skip the Toasters. Help Us Pay for a Trip to Italy.

By JANE L. LEVERE

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WHEN they married this year, Brooke and Curt Hinkle of Fort Worth honeymooned for eight days in an oceanfront room at the Mauna Lani Resort on the Big Island of Hawaii. They enjoyed spa treatments, a helicopter tour and a private, candlelit dinner near the beach.

Mrs. Hinkle, who is 30 and the owner of a yoga studio, said that she and her husband, 36 and a dentist, would never have been able to afford this luxurious trip on their own.

Their benefactors were, in fact, their wedding guests, who underwrote 80 percent of the trip's cost, excluding air fare, through Distinctive Honeymoons, an online honeymoon registry. (Another guest gave them the plane tickets, acquired with frequent-flier miles.) "Because it was the second marriage for us both, we didn't really need material items, so we just preferred to take a trip instead," Mrs. Hinkle said.

The Hinkles are among a growing number of couples who are choosing to honeymoon courtesy of their guests, with the help of Internet-based registries.

Wedding registries, particularly for traditional gifts like silver, crystal and china, have been around for many years. But the Internet has revolutionized the business. In a customer survey in 2001 by WeddingChannel.com, 71 percent of couples said they registered for gifts; the number climbed to 89 percent last year.

The Internet has also encouraged development of new types of registries, including honeymoon registries, which first appeared in the late 1990's. And couples' interest in online registries is rising: in a survey of readers by Bridal Guide magazine this year, 43.6 percent said it was very important that their registry be available online, up from 24.8 percent in 2002.

Contributing to the popularity of honeymoon registries, experts say, are the changing demographics of newlyweds, many of whom are older, do not need to furnish their homes or have previously been married. The Fairchild Bridal Infobank says the average age of a bride is now 27, up from 20 in 1960. For grooms, it is 29, up from 22.

"A lot of couples live together and own a lot of things today, particularly older brides," said Millie Martini Bratten, editor in chief of Bride's magazine. "And honeymoon registries give guests lots of choices, in terms of the gifts they can give. They can go into a lot of different price levels, contribute to the air fare or massages."

The vast potential of the honeymoon market, which totaled \$7 billion of the \$120 billion wedding industry in 2002, by Fairchild's estimates, is also encouraging the registries' growth.

Travel companies are capitalizing on the trends. In May, Starwood Hotels and Resorts created a honeymoon registry on WeddingChannel.com, joining Sandals Resorts, which has offered a registry there since 2002. The island of Aruba has also started a registry on its Web site, www.aruba.com, for honeymoon visitors.

Other newcomers include Distinctive Honeymoons, part of Protravel International, and HoneymoonWishes.com, which creates registries and provides its services to honeymooners at Couples Resorts. They join older honeymoon registry companies like TheBigDay.com, TheHoneymoon.com, HoneyLuna.com, and MoonRings.com.



Jonathan Heiliger

Jonathan Heiliger and Germaine Yokoyama went to Venice on their honeymoon, which was paid for by their wedding guests.

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QUICK READ

If you'd rather have a night in a resort hotel than two soup bowls as a wedding present, look into honeymoon registries. Here are some considerations:

SHOP AROUND for a registry that provides the best services for your honeymoon needs and charges reasonable fees.

MAKE SURE you understand whether the registry deducts a service fee from the gifts you receive, and whether it charges for honeymoon planning or other work. (Gift givers should also check whether a service fee is added to the price of their gifts.)

DIVIDE big-ticket items like hotel stays into small parts on your list, to accommodate your guests' differing budgets. For example, request 10 gifts at \$100 each for a five-night hotel stay costing \$1,000.

DO NOT include an announcement of your honeymoon registry in the wedding invitation. That would imply that participating "is the cost of admission to the wedding," said Millie Martini Bratten, editor in chief of Bride's magazine. But it is proper, she said, to include an announcement in a shower invitation.