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## Travel agent grants honeymoon wishes

Published February 6, 2006

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It is the trip of a lifetime -- the trip that most dream of taking someday, but hope to take only once. It is the honeymoon, and it makes for booming business.

Advertisement

As a romantic-destinations consultant for MacNair Travel Management in Alexandria, Harvey McGarry's job is to develop and sell these dream trips to couples in the Washington area and across the country.

"In my mind, there's no more important dream trip than that first important vacation that a couple embarks on after they're married," said Mr. McGarry, 39, who moved to Arlington from Bethlehem, Pa., where he was a customer-satisfaction agent for Travel Impressions. Both agencies are affiliated with American Express Travel Services.

When planning a honeymoon, Mr. McGarry first conducts a "needs analysis" with the couple.

"I investigate," he said. "What's important for them to do? What do they want to get out of the trip? What are their interests? How long have they been together, and where have they traveled together?"

Then, Mr. McGarry makes suggestions based on the couple's interests and expectations.

"It's something that, if someone just e-mailed you what they're looking for and you did it without doing a thorough investigation, you may give a perfectly good recommendation," but it may not be right for that couple, he said.

Current honeymoon hot spots, according to Mr. McGarry, include the island of St. Lucia in the Caribbean; the Riviera Maya and Los Cabos in Mexico; and Maui and Kauai in Hawaii.

"The classics are classic for a reason," he said. "They create the right atmosphere, and the resorts in general tend to always deliver [on honeymooners'] expectations."

Although destinations vary, most couples agree on one aspect.

"They don't want a very structured experience. People aren't looking to do necessarily crazy things on their honeymoon; they just want the element of romance, relaxation and free-flowing, unstructured time," he said.

Honeymoons are an \$8 billion industry, according to the Travel Institute, a Massachusetts trade group. In the Washington area, most couples spend about \$5,000 to \$6,000 on their dream trips, Mr. McGarry said.

One of his goals is to bolster MacNair's honeymoon business.

"I'd like to see it where we get a solid 50 percent or more of our business coming from this market because, of all the trips that people are going to take, a honeymoon is almost guaranteed."

Michael MacNair, president of MacNair Travel, praised Mr. McGarry's knack for designing romantic travel packages.

"Harvey has keen insight to many of the top honeymoon destinations and strong product knowledge of the best resorts in those regions," Mr. MacNair said.

Mr. McGarry said he enjoys the "vicarious rewards" of his job.

"You get to experience the excitement of someone planning a trip. Through their eyes, you get to visualize as they're telling you what they want to get."

He had one piece of advice for soon-to-be honeymooners in the Washington area.

"Use a travel agent. It doesn't matter if it isn't us. Do you make your wedding cake on your own? Are you making your own dress? You really want this trip to be as stress-free as humanly possible."

-- *Kara Rowland*

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