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Babymooning: Get pampered before it's time to pamper

By **Wendy Bulawa**/ Pregnancy

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You're pregnant, glowing, and enjoying all the excitement that surrounds you and your partner as that bulge in your midsection expands. Amid a flurry of activity, cribs are purchased, walls painted, curtains hung and closets filled with adorable clothing big enough for only a doll to wear, while limitless toys begin to occupy every corner of your home.

It is at this very moment when many expectant couples realize that within a few short months (or weeks), a little baby requiring constant care will enter their lives. Those last-minute weekend getaways to the Cape or sail up to Kennebunkport may no longer be as easy to corral. Where is a couple to turn when this unexpected panic sets in? The answer is... the 'babymoon.'

A trend in travel that began sweeping the country last year, 'babymooning' has stirred interest and action from the hospitality industry thus ushering in a series of specially-designed pampering packages for expectant parents. Couples massages, 24-hour dining services, golf retreats, and romantic meals set amid candlelight top the list.

The birth of babymooning

Ashley King, a 27-year-old mompreneur and founder of babymoonfinder.com, said that just like all great ideas, necessity spurred her desire to dive-in and launch her Web site that helps locate resorts, spas and bed and breakfast destinations that cater to expectant couples. When King was researching a babymoon for herself and husband Trevor, she was surprised to learn that no Internet resource existed that compiled such valuable information. Since then, babymoonfinder.com, which has in one year received more than 500,000 hits, has assembled hundreds of babymoon packages-including several in New England. In fact, many inns, hotels and resorts are now contacting King directly to promote creative and memorable babymoon packages.

"Babymoon packages are typically geared towards rest and relaxation for the mom and dad-to-be," she said. "The most popular packages include something for both parents such as spa services for mom, golf for dad, gifts for baby and tokens of the trip to take home."

For Revere resident Kerry Moschella, travel to exotic destinations for vacation was one of the more luxurious gifts she and her husband gave each other once or twice a year. Now nearly seven months pregnant, Moschella has realized that her annual adventures may need to be toned down for a while.

"We've ended up spending more time on Cape Cod this year than Turks & Caicos," she said. "I think given that we're on a budget, we'll look for weekend getaways to places we can drive to, places that will pamper us and will simply give us an opportunity to relax."

April Masini of <http://www.askapril.com/>, the author of several best-selling books on dating and relationships, suggests that babymoons have positive psychological benefits. "A babymoon allows a couple to acknowledge that the relationship is changing-forever. Should parents not have an opportunity to acknowledge the change, they become susceptible to depression and disappointment." She adds that celebrating 'coupledom' before baby arrives provides an opportunity to romantically celebrate the pairing of two people.

Destinations for your last hurrah

Expectant parents researching destinations will quickly note that packages are diverse-- with some focusing on rest and relaxation -- while others deliver a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Liberty Travel, for example, offers destination packages titled "Sandcastles and Sunshine," ideal for couples who just want to relax on the beach; the "Carpe See 'Em," for couples who want to see places that may be difficult with an infant or toddler in tow; and the "Spas the Limit," for the ultimate in spa services and relaxation.

For New Englanders who would much rather drive than fly, several regional properties offer unique babymoon packages including:

Topnotch Resort and Spa (<http://www.topnotchresort.com/>) This Stowe, VT-based getaway packages an executive room, breakfast in bed for two each morning, romantic dinner for two at Norma's nightly, couples massage, sparkling cider or champagne upon arrival, and chocolate covered strawberries or chocolate truffles.



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Cape Codder Resort and Spa in Hyannis (<http://www.capecodderresort.com/>) offers a babymoon package incorporating lodging, box of chocolates at turndown, gift for baby and couples spa services highlighting massage, pedicure and facial for both mom and dad.

Hotel Hershey in Hershey, PA (<http://www.thehotelhershey.com/>) No babymoon could be complete without the presence of chocolate, and the Hotel Hershey ensures that both mom and dad revel in the benefits of the world-renowned treat before baby arrives. The dynamic property encourages parents-to-be to enjoy a free trip through Chocolate World where they can pick up their baby's "My first Hershey T-shirt" before heading to the hotel's Circular Dining room to indulge in chocolate bread and chocolate butter prior to devouring cocoa-seared scallops and grand chocolate desserts. The hotel also maintains combination golf and spa packages so that both mom and dad can enjoy relaxation activities at their own pace. (Important Note: Although a chocolate spa service sounds too tempting to miss, they are not recommended for expectant mothers as chocolate spa treatments alter body temperature and could be harmful for moms-to-be).

Adventurous couples may want to consider a babymoon package from:

Kiawah Sanctuary in Charleston, South Carolina (<http://www.thesanctuary.com/>)

The Westin New York at Times Square (<http://www.westinny.com/>)

Arawak Beach Inn (Caribbean) (<http://www.arawakbeach.com/>)

The Babymoon for the 'Already-a-Parent' Crowd

Even parents for the second, third or fourth time around have interest in escaping baby preparations for a bit-yet most want to enjoy the company of their current brood. As such, vacation destinations and resort properties have augmented standard babymoon packages to satisfy the needs of parents --as well as their children. Some examples include:

Mohonk Mountain House (<http://www.mohonk.com/>) "Hello Baby!" babymoon package includes a daily maternity massage for mom and choice of massage or facial for dad, chocolates at turn down, a welcome gift for baby, three meals daily, afternoon tea and cookies plus access to all-inclusive resort activities such as guided nature walks, hiking and yoga.

Atlantis, Paradise Island - Bahamas (<http://www.atlantis.com/>) Through a partnership with Johnson & Johnson, Atlantis has launched the "Gentle Travel" program, complimentary to families traveling with babies. The program, created by board-certified and renowned pediatrician Dr. Jennifer Tractenberg, combines a menu of baby equipment and baby products, plus tips from calming babies down to baby turn downs, a lullaby CD and nightlight for families traveling with babies and toddlers.

Kerry Moschella, who hadn't heard about the babymoon trend until becoming pregnant herself sums it up best, "I'd like to convince my husband now that a babymoon is mandatory."

Resources

According to a survey recently released jointly by Liberty Travel and BabyCenter(r), 59 percent (%) of new parents have taken a babymoon and more than two million babymoons are taken by U.S.-based parents-to-be each year.

Babymooning on a budget

After buying a crib, diapers, pacifiers, onesies and bottles, some couples find less money to spend on themselves-or on a babymoon. Babymoonfinder.com founder Ashley King recommends that couples on a budget create their own babymoon. With a little research, expectant parents can uncover hidden gems nestled right in their backyard or within driving distance-- to keep expenses to a minimum. King notes that most local spas offer pregnancy packages and prenatal a la carte services-while nearby community colleges may schedule a couples cooking or massage class that can make for a fun adventure.

Brette Sember, author of "Your Practical Pregnancy Planner:Everything You Need to Know About the Legal and Financial Aspects of Preparing for Your New Baby" provides travel tips for expectant moms and dads:

Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water during plane or car trips.

Move frequently. Do leg lifts, stretches and get up and walk while on long flights. If traveling by car, get out of the car and take a walk every time you stop, even if it is only briefly.

Pack water, snacks, a light blanket and a small pillow for neck or back support. Slippers also are nice since already swollen feet may appreciate getting out of your shoes. A small bottle of hand sanitizer is a good idea, as is a small bottle of lotion to keep skin hydrated.

Before flying in the last trimester, research the airline's policy on pregnant women as a doctor's note confirming due date may be required. It is safe to fly during the 6th and 7th months and early 8th month, but the concern on airlines is the length of time it might take to land and get you to a hospital should mom enter preterm labor.

If the baby arrives early outside the US, parents will need to obtain documentation of the birth

from the hospital. Contact the local US embassy to determine the paperwork necessary to return to the US with the baby.

If purchasing travel insurance, check first to make certain that they'll insure pregnant travelers.

If traveling by road, map out rest stops in advance and locate hospitals along the way-just in case!

Keep a copy of mom's medical records handy-- as the Obstetrician's phone number-since with babies, you just never know!

Freelance writer **Wendy Bulawa** is a North Andover resident and mother to a one-year old baby girl. She is an avid fan of weekend getaways in New England who enjoyed two baby moons with her husband at both the Mt. Washington Resort in New Hampshire and Acadia National Park in Maine.

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