

QUICK POLL



MAKE A STAY-AT-HOME HONEYMOON SPECIAL

Which British beauty should Prince Harry date next?

- Emma Watson
- Pippa Middleton
- Cara Delevigne
- Elizabeth Hurley

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Men

between

25 and 45

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SEARCH

Most couples are eager to relax after getting married — so why bother with a passport, tickets or luggage if you don't have to? Here's how to plan a romantic, home-based honeymoon instead.

By Matt Schneiderman

As the economy wobbles unpredictably and the TSA continues to handle our bodies more intimately than doctors do, Americans are becoming less and less enthusiastic about the expenses and hassles of traveling — and this includes their honeymoons. Whether you're looking to save money, avoid the stress of planning a vacation trip, or just relax at home after your wedding, a "staycation" is an ideal way to celebrate your new life together. Here's how to enjoy your marriage's new beginning — without ever having to leave your ZIP code.

A staycation allows you to be a tourist in your own city.

1. Spend time with friends and family

Of course you'll want to carve out time for just the two of you after the wedding, but how likely are you to have all your out-of-town friends and family in the same place again anytime soon? Before you cocoon yourselves in romantic isolation, make the most of this special occasion with dear ones. "Host a brunch or informal gathering at parents' or a friend's home," suggests Philadelphia-based wedding planner Stacey Halstead. "You will be so relaxed now that the wedding is done that you will actually be able to catch up with everyone." Afterwards, you can go into blissful seclusion.

2. Focus on each other and on your relationship

Living happily ever after together will take some getting used to, so take time to

decompress and adjust to your new roles as partners. April Masini, author of *I Think & Date Like a Man* and *Romantic Date Ideas* (a how-to manual for newlyweds), says: "Weddings are overwhelming, and honeymoons are rife with pressure. Take away the traditional honeymoon trappings and you can have what a honeymoon is supposed to give you — the space and time to celebrate the wedding, your marriage, and each other." This is also an ideal time to focus on your new life together. "I've counseled couples who have had staycations for their honeymoons," says Chicago-based psychologist Dr. John Duffy. "It speaks very well of a couple that it is willing to forgo having a vacation to prioritize working on [their] relationship. They can talk about living together and [make] plans for the future, including children."

3. Get to know your hometown together

A staycation allows you to be a tourist in your own city — to enjoy its attractions at your leisure. Discover a beautiful hike that you wouldn't find otherwise or eat at a restaurant you haven't had time to try yet. This is especially apt for couples that include one or both partners relocating for the marriage. "We spent two weeks for our stay-at-home honeymoon discovering our new American home, exploring museums and having picnics in the park," says Padraig, 26, and Sarah, 28, of Charleston, SC, who celebrated their honeymoon in their new home town. "We also took cooking classes and a wine class together." These activities and spots will have additional significance when you revisit them later on. As a bonus, you will also be supporting local businesses. "A stay-at-home honeymoon is a way to funnel money into your community that would otherwise go to the economy of your travel destination," says Kate Harrison, author of *The Green Bride Guide: How to Create an Earth-friendly Wedding on Any Budget* and founder of www.greenbrideguide.com. "It's a way to support non-profits like the zoo, theaters, and museums, as well as green businesses and organic restaurants."

4. Go off-line

Just as you wouldn't spend two weeks in Paris or Puerto Vallarta inside an Internet café browsing Facebook, don't heed the siren calls of emails and voicemails received during your stay-at-home honeymoon. "A rule I have come up with for my staycation honeymooning couples is: no cell phones, no computers," says Duffy. "Otherwise you're just staying home." Even better, make yourself scarce: "Tell people you're going to a destination abroad where there is no communication — that way, they won't show up at your door," says Harrison. "Give them an emergency contact and leave an outgoing voicemail that says you'll return calls when you get back."

5. Eat out, order in

To further differentiate your home-based honeymoon from any other typical weekend, let someone else do the work of feeding the two of you. "What makes a vacation is not having to cook," says Harrison. "Eat out at every meal, order in, or prepare a bunch of food ahead of time. Just

A stay-at-home honeymoon doesn't mean business as usual in bed, either.

because you're home doesn't mean you should have to do the same things you'd do at home." If a nearby bed-and-breakfast is within your budget, go there for a night — or several.

6. Pamper yourselves

You don't have to travel halfway around the globe to treat yourself to a bit of R&R. Halstead says, "A spa day is a must! Schedule a couple's massage at a local salon and enjoy a completely indulgent afternoon." Two tips: First, schedule your treatments for a Tuesday (the spa will most likely be quiet); and second, let your wedding party know that this is something you both want. "They might buy it for you

your wedding party, which also ends in something you both want. They might say, "Let's do as a shower or wedding gift," says Halstead.

7. Ask friends to help out

Another advantage of staying close to home for your honeymoon is having access to a volunteer pool made up of your friends and neighbors. Remember how Bert the cop and Ernie the cabdriver served as George and Mary Bailey's doorman and limo driver for their wedding night in *It's a Wonderful Life*? Harrison says, "It's become common for couples to ask friends to pitch in for the wedding, so why not ask friends to help out with the honeymoon? They can help with the cooking, walking the dog, watering the plants... They could also run errands and chauffeur you around so you can both drink."

8. Recreate a honeymoon suite in your home

Flowers, candy, scents, and candles are just a few of the items you can have on-hand to add romance to your marital home. "Have in-room wine, champagne, fruit, candy — whatever your special pleasures are," says Sharon Gilchrest O'Neill, marriage psychotherapist and author of *A Short Guide to a Happy Marriage*. You can also go one step further to up the erotic quotient: "Splurge on a few things like massage oil, comfy new robes, and a how-to book on massage," O'Neill suggests. A stay-at-home honeymoon doesn't mean business as usual in bed, either. "I have yet to work with a couple that staycated that didn't maximize the physical aspect," says Duffy. "It's an exciting and sexual time." And don't forget about all your new goodies you'll get to try for the first time together. "Make a point to schedule time to sit down together and open all the wedding presents — and then use them!" says Halstead. "Cook waffles with the brand new iron, brew coffee with the new maker, and eat off your new china."

9. Read to each other

Make evenings more intimate by sharing a book. "For my then-fiancée Sarah's bachelorette party, the maid of honor flew in a published sex therapist to answer all the women's questions," says Padraig. "Sarah bought his book at the beginning of the honeymoon and we read it aloud to each other — and did the first half. We promised to do the second half for our first anniversary." Certainly even a novel or collection of poetry or short stories will allow you to connect under the sheets on another level.

10. Take pictures and record video

Capture a variety of images and record videos of yourselves (just as you would on a typical vacation or honeymoon) to create lasting memories of your special time together.

"Everyone always has elaborate wedding photos," says Masini. "Make your honeymoon photos just as special. Make a movie, be a star. I'm not talking about making a sex tape — although couples may be inspired to do so — but about creating in-home photo shoots."

New York City-based freelance writer Matt Schneiderman has written for Stuff and Sync.

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