

Charitable Wedding News

A forum connecting weddings, communities, and philanthropy

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Charitable Wedding News is sponsored by the I Do Foundation, a nonprofit organization that helps couples share some of the joy and generosity of their weddings with the charitable organization of their choice. Comments or written contributions can be sent to Lisa Jenkins, editor, at Lisa@idofoundation.org. www.IDoFoundation.org

1) **In Focus: Touring the World with the World in Mind--Socially Conscious Honeymoons**

Couples planning a socially conscious wedding don't have to check their ideals at the resort's front desk when planning their honeymoon. From the most active duo to the newlyweds who just want to relax on the beach, there are many ways couples can make a positive impact through their travel plans.

The tourism industry has seen a dramatic increase in the number of travelers choosing 'active' and 'adventure' vacations, where travelers immerse themselves in the environment and local culture of the areas in which they travel, and do so in a responsible manner. Socially conscious travel has expanded more recently to include options like staying at "green" hotels, making travel reservations that raise donations for charity, or engaging in a service project or volunteer activity as part of the vacation.

Before couples start packing their bags, there are a variety of options they can consider in order to bring a socially-conscious focus to their honeymoon.

Travel with Socially Conscious Businesses: Relaxing on the beach with a mai-tai is not out of the question when planning socially conscious honeymoon travel. Stay in a “green” hotel where hotel products are recycled, solar power heats the water and provides lighting, and reusable materials are used instead of disposable. Choose a travel agency that specifically uses environmentally friendly service providers, or one that helps to raise donations for charitable causes. For more information on green hotels, please visit the Green Hotels Association (www.greenhotels.com). For more information on socially conscious travel agencies, please visit Green Travel’s directory of organizations (www.green-travel.com).

Spend Wisely: Some travel agents agree to donate a percentage of travel spending to the nonprofit organization of the traveler’s choice. For example, couples making their travel plans with the I Do Foundation can raise donations of up to 5% of the cost of their honeymoon packages. Guest hotel bookings raise a donation of 4% (www.idofoundation.org). There are many other ways to make an impact with travel dollars. The Lonely Planet guidebook series suggests using locally owned restaurants and hotels, and buying products made by local people. Lonely Planet guidebooks have listings of local businesses, as well as summarized information on local customs and inside tips on traveling in different areas (www.lonelyplanet.com).

Participate in a Service Project: For couples seeking an active vacation that immerses them in the local culture with the added benefit of helping others, a service project may be just the right fit. Look for organizations that work with local people and have a history of positive community relations. Several examples of nonprofit organizations that organize trips to international destinations are: The Heifer Project’s Hands-On Study Tours (www.heiferproject.org); Habitat for Humanity’s Global Village Program (www.habitat.org); Global Volunteers (www.globalvolunteers.org); and the Earth Watch Institute (www.earthwatch.org).

2) Industry Leader: International Ecotourism Society

Ecotourism is becoming an increasingly popular honeymoon option for couples interested in traveling with minimum environmental impact, and maximum experience in natural environments. Founded in 1991, the International Ecotourism Society is a membership-based organization that focuses on educating and disseminating information about ecotourism. The following is a brief interview with Fergus Maclaren, the Director of International Programs at the International Ecotourism Society.

Q: Could you define and describe the trend of ecotourism?

FM: There are a number of definitions that are used. The one we use is: “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people.”

Q: What social trends led to the development of ecotourism as an option to traditional travel?

FM: I think that there are two main factors: the destinations themselves and the travelers. People are looking for more interesting destinations and more experiential type travel.

Now that you can get into countries like Vietnam and places in Africa and South America, people are taking advantage of these opportunities. Also, travelers are interested in exploring more unique areas. Shows like *Discovery* and *National Geographic* have opened people's minds about new places, so they are interested in exploring them.

Q: What has been the interest in ecotourism and what patterns or trends have you observed?

FM: I think [interest in ecotourism] is increasing in some ways because when you hear people talking about honeymoons they aren't just saying 'let's go to the Caribbean'; many people want more active vacations. I have seen more people on their honeymoons in Southeast Asia when I've traveled there, or South America.

Q: What would you recommend to couples who are interested in environmentally friendly travel?

FM: They really need to research and become educated about the travel opportunities out there. There are many different types of environments, and one aspect of [ecotourism travel] is the destination. It's also very important to look at the operators, their mission statement and how they run, whether they are certified, and how they function in the country in which you wish to travel.

To learn more about ecotourism and the International Ecotourism Society, please visit <http://www.ecotourism.org>.

3) Links: Travel the Globe with the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is a leader in outdoor vacations and environmentally focused service projects. With more than 300 trips a year, the Sierra Club offers everything from trekking in Tibet to conservation activism in Yellowstone National Park. From whale watching to bird watching, white water rafting to glacier gliding, the Sierra Club has over 100 years of experience offering environmentally friendly adventures.

To learn more about Sierra Club Outings, please visit www.sierraclub.org/outings.

4) Nonprofit Spotlight: ACCION International

Highlighting effective nonprofits to support with charitable wedding activities

The mission of ACCION International is to give people the tools they need to work their way out of poverty. By providing small or "micro" loans and business training to poor women and men who start their own businesses, ACCION's microcredit affiliates help people work their own way up the economic ladder with dignity and pride.

In Their Own Words: "Every day, millions of enterprising women and men struggle to better their lives by opening tiny businesses. They work exhausting hours yet they barely scrape by. What they need to break free is a little credit - a loan as small as \$75.

ACCION is dedicated to bringing financial services to these smallest of small business people - street vendors, seamstresses, sandal makers. ACCION's 'micro' loans can make the difference between mere survival and a decent life. With capital, people can grow

their businesses. They can earn enough to afford basics like running water, better food, and schooling for their children.”

ACCION International also offers delegation trips to several of their over-seas programs for those interested in learning more about a sustainable approach to micro-finance.

For more information about ACCION International and their delegation trips to Uganda, Ecuador, and Mozambique, please visit www.accion.org.

5) Couple Profile: A Whale of a Honeymoon

Karin Nelson and Andy Smith spent their honeymoon on the beach, but instead of sunbathing, they were watching orcas.

“We just thought it would be a really wonderful experience, something that neither of us had ever done before,” Karin said. “It was something incredibly special to see together.”

When the San Francisco couple started planning their honeymoon trip to British Columbia they wanted to combine an outdoor adventure with some more relaxed touring. Karin and Andy started in Vancouver, spent four days camping and sea kayaking with the whales, and then toured the San Juan Islands, staying in quaint bed and breakfast inns along the way.

According to Karin, the four day eco adventure was one of the best parts of the honeymoon. Traveling in a small group lead by trained guides, the couple kayaked in the Johnstone Strait to a beach side base camp right along the edge of the famous orca preserve. Every morning and evening, the whales would come as close as 20 feet to the shore to play and jump, and also to observe the humans observing them. During the day, the couple went seakayaking around the edges of the preserve, taking in the area’s beautiful scenery.

While the couple was camping, the guides did the daily cooking and cleaning. The camp was maintained in an eco-friendly manner, using things like biodegradable soap to ensure that the human impact on the area was as minimal as possible.

“It was such an intimate experience being so close to the orcas,” Karin said. “We’d get to see these huge cruise ships going by in the distance, and you would realize how little experience they were actually having with what’s out there.”

I Do Foundation

The I Do Foundation is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, whose mission is to bring a charitable focus to special life events. The Foundation helps engaged couples raise charitable wedding donations through three channels:

Gift Registry: When couples register with our partners—including Target, Linens 'N Things and Amazon.com—up to 8% of all spending is donated.

Travel: The I Do Foundation's partner, Carlson Wagonlit Travel, donates 5% of all honeymoon packages and 4% of guest hotel lodging purchases.

Donation Registry: With our flexible Donation Registry, guests can make a donation directly to charity in place of, or in addition to, traditional gifts.

Favors for Charity: The Favors for Charity program allows couples to make donations in honor of their guests in place of (or in addition to) traditional favors.

To learn more, visit www.idofoundation.org or contact info@idofoundation.org.

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