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My first honeymoon was a trip to Puerto Rico back in 1973. Hot tropical sun. Beautiful beaches. A rainforest. El Morro, a historic fort in Old San Juan. Nightclubs. Rum drinks.

It was wonderful.

My second honeymoon was a trip to historic Essex, Connecticut, and Newport, Rhode Island in 2007. An inn dating back to 1776. An evening singing sea chanties. Antiquing. A white-washed cottage on the ocean. Walks through magnificent Vanderbilt mansions. Fresh seafood. Cold beer.

It was wonderful.

Granted, there was a span of 34 years between the two trips, which certainly colors my reactions, but both were wonderful weeks in my life and I would not trade them for anything.

Still, I think it is important for soon-to-be-marrieds to give thought to the honeymoon before rashly deciding on a trip to a place “where all our friends have gone.”

The first decision is whether to take a big trip now, or to go someplace quieter and closer, and plan on doing something more involved in a few months, or in a year’s time.

There are two schools of thought, beginning with the one that says: You only get one chance at a honeymoon. (Or in my case, two.) I can’t argue with that thinking.

The week or so after a couple exchanges their wedding vows is one of the most special times in their lives—no matter their age, no matter whether they have been co-habiting for five years, no matter the size or scope of their wedding. It is that time when two people finally sit back

and realize: “Hey, we did it! We’re married. You’re my wife. You’re my husband. We are going to live happily ever after.”

Advocates of the “you only get one honeymoon” thinking have all of this to back up their argument.

And yet...let’s face it. If you have endured months of wedding planning, showers, bachelor and bachelorette parties, and the Big Day itself, you are really done in by the morning after. Grabbing your bags and heading out to an airport with its exasperating security measures and the lack of comfort in those airplane cabins, plus the stress of getting to your hotel in a strange place, and trying to sightsee...well, it can be exhausting.

This supports the argument of experts who advise “postpone the big honeymoon and just enjoy each other’s company and the romance of it all.”

One answer--and this is the one I chose on my second honeymoon--is to go someplace closer and quieter for that week or two, and postpone a bigger trip until later.

When my husband-to-be asked where I wanted to go for the honeymoon, I knew our options were limitless, We are both Anglophiles and buffs of European history. It would have made sense to head to the coast of Italy or the Alps or the Cotswolds.

But I was already stressed from planning our wedding and from life in general, and so I mentioned I’d like to just take a leisurely drive to New England and then go to London later in the summer.

Our week in Essex and Newport was bliss, and there was no unwinding time needed after any airplane delays or lost baggage, nor did we feel compelled to see everything

there was to see on this visit. We knew we'd come back in the future, so we just let the rhythm of each day lead us to historic buildings or quaint cafes or sleeping late. One morning, sitting on the deck of our cottage, where a waiter had just served our breakfast, I sighed: "Aren't you glad we didn't have to worry about passports and money exchange and finding a taxi?" This from a woman who prefers traveling above all other pursuits and would pack a suitcase at the drop of a hat (or airplane ticket)!

There was a time when the honeymoon was perhaps the only trip a young couple could look forward to in their lives, what with mortgages, babies, limited vacation time, and lack of finances. Today's young people, however, tend to travel far and wide (often having already done senior trips and spring breaks to exotic locations), so the idea that the honeymoon is their only shot at seeing the Caribbean or Hawaii or Alaska is unlikely.

Now, back to the first theory: This is your honeymoon, that special time when you want to show off your shiny new wedding band and kick up your heels and snap photos to show your friends back home. Proponents of the big trip honeymoon can still have it their way—by postponing departure for a day or so. Many reception venues offer the bride and groom a complimentary suite on their wedding night. Take advantage of this and book a flight later in the day after the wedding, giving you time to rest and have a nice breakfast or lunch before rushing off with your baggage to the airport.

Regardless of the choice you make—and there are some honeymooners who think rock climbing or hiking the Grand Canyon is a great way to spend their time together—try to pace yourselves so that you do not return home exhausted and cranky, which is not a good way to spend your second week or two of married life!

Here are some choices for both options:

Close and Quiet

THE POCONOS. It's right at your doorstep. Honeymooners from far afield come to the Poconos, and it's just a short drive for you! The accommodations vary from quaint to glitzy, from busy to serene. There is skiing in the winter and whitewater rafting in the summer, and everything in between, including cozy restaurants and sparkly nightlife.

NEW ENGLAND. It was my choice, and it was great. We could choose from historic places such as Mystic Seaport or the mansions on Bellevue Avenue in Newport, or between gourmet French restaurants and little lobster shanties. There is sailing in Narragansett Bay and whale watching tours and strolls along the beach where the Astors used to play.

THE JERSEY SHORE. You can lie on the beach or play

the slots in one of the big casinos. Enjoy clams for lunch, or see big name entertainment at night. Atlantic City is Vegas East, and Cape May is Victorian, and you can find everything in between.

THE FINGER LAKES. This is a breathtaking area of New York States located just two hours away. Each lake is prettier than the other (Skaneateles is my current favorite, but Canandaigua and Seneca are lovely, too), and there is lots of recreation available in the summer and winter throughout the area. There are pretty inns and B&Bs--- and don't forget the many wineries which offer tours and tastings.

Far and Away

HAWAIIAN. They are far, far away, but worth the hours to get there. You'll be enchanted by the beaches, palms, and fragrance of plumeria blossoms, and once you have recovered from a bout of jet lag, you'll be ready to explore what each island has to offer. Granted, Honolulu is a city, but what other metropolis has Diamond Head looming in the distance or outrigger canoes offshore? Maui is full of glamorous resorts with gorgeous beaches. Kauai is green and lush, while the Big Island offers what few other sites can—lots of lava and occasional volcano eruptions!

DOWN MEXICO WAY. Except for Mexico City and Acapulco, Mexico used to be a sleepy kind of place, but that has all changed drastically in the past few decades, and resorts such as Cabo San Lucas, Cancun, and Puerto Vallarta draw millions of Yankee tourists and honeymooners each year. In addition to the sandy beaches, you can climb Mayan ruins and sample authentic Mexican cuisine that is not all tacos and enchiladas.

THE CARIBBEAN. This is not one destination, but many—each with its own flavor and rhythm. There is Spanish-flavored Puerto Rico, and schizophrenic St. Maarten which is one-half Dutch and one-half French. There is the shopping paradise of St. Thomas, and the pristine beaches of St. John and Aruba. There is the calypso music of Jamaica and the all-inclusive resorts which are so popular on most islands. (Farther north, in the Atlantic, is the very British isle of Bermuda.) Look over the brochures and take your pick.

EUROPEAN VACATION. Castles in Spain. Skiing in the Alps. Lavender fields in Provence. A villa in Tuscany. Czech beer. German wurst. Strolls along the Seine. The Tower in London. Isles in Greece. Beaches and ski slopes and palaces. Pasta and Cognac and fish-and-chips. Shopping for Waterford and French lace and Belgian chocolate. The possibilities are endless.