



The Greatest Gift list?

If you have enough household wares already, why not ask your wedding guests to contribute to your honeymoon instead?

Debbie Ward explores the various options on offer

There was a time when family and friends would have contributed to a dinner service to mark your big day, buying their gifts from a bridal registry you had placed with the likes of John Lewis or M&S. Nowadays, many brides and grooms would rather enjoy a sunset cruise on a catamaran than unwrap a gravy boat and, if you are among them, a honeymoon gift list service could be the answer.

HOW THEY WORK

With more couples living together before marrying and already well stocked up with homewares, honeymoon registries are booming. There's plenty of choice but how do they work? Some gift list services simply give your wedding guests a facility to contribute cash towards your big trip. You then knock your total loot off the cost of your honeymoon. Other services will help you price out individual treats like a romantic dinner, a snorkelling trip or an upgrade to business class flights and your loved-ones pay for them in the same way as they'd reserve you a toaster on a traditional gift list.

Registries may be linked to one particular tour operator (handy if you already know which honeymoon you want to book) or give you a choice of several. If you use a travel agency registry or a service you have to pay for, you may get a wider choice of where to spend your cash. Travel companies' own registries are usually free while fees are

attached to many dedicated gift list services. Where there's a cost, companies will either ask for a one-off admin payment or charge your guests a percentage on top of the cost of their gift. Some also make a charge if payments are made by credit rather than debit card.

Let's look at some of the different options available...

WEB SERVICES

One of the best known services, Honeymiles.net comes free but is exclusive to those booking a honeymoon with W&O Travel, or key2holidays which offer a wide range of romantic destinations between them. The site gives suggestions for honeymoons in price brackets from 'under £6,000' to 'in your wildest dreams'. Couples get their own webpage where they can post a picture and a message for their guests. Donations are made in honeymiles - worth £10 each with a minimum spend of £20.

For flexibility, Thebottomdrawer.com is worth a look as this gift list service not only offers honeymoons but also enables you to spend your donations in many high street stores. This is handy if you want to give guests a choice between, say, fluffy towels for your bathroom or a spa treatment on your holiday. The Bottom Drawer says the average money raised through one of its gift lists is around £2,000. The service costs £89 but that fee is waived if you spend 90% or more of the contributions you receive through one of the site's affiliated stores. For honeymoons this would mean using bottom- ➔



HONEYMOON GIFT LISTS

Getting the timing right



Most guests buy presents three weeks or fewer before a wedding but remember, you will usually need to pay the balance for your honeymoon before this time. Once your gift list is closed – usually on your wedding day – holiday companies will then typically credit the total amount given onto the bank card you used to pay for your honeymoon. Online registry companies may simply pay your total donations into your bank account a couple of days after ‘I do’. If you’re lucky enough to receive donations that actually exceed the cost of your honeymoon then your bank account will be credited with the excess or, in some cases, the extra cash will be loaded onto a gift card for future use.

drawer's sister travel agency Top Drawer Holidays. Contributions made through SendUsPacking.com can be spent with whomever you wish for a fee of £59.99. If you're looking for inspiration, several tour operators display promotions on the site and you can also ask them to quote you a price for the trip you're planning through a free Honeymoon Butler facility.

All the above sites encourage couples to break their honeymoon into a wish list, inviting guests to pay, for instance, £10 for a round of cocktails, £50 for their first night hotel, £30 for dinner on the beach or £100 for white water-rafting. Because it works with only two tour operators, Honeymiles has the benefit of helping you be quite specific about the price and location of treats for instance 'rooftop cocktails and canapés at the Skybar of the Traders Hotel, Bali'.

TOUR OPERATORS AND RESORTS

Some tour operators have registry lists of their own. With Somak, which specialises in safari and Indian Ocean weddings and honeymoons, guests can contribute online then order a gift certificate confirming their donation. The company finds couples using the scheme typically have about a third of their honeymoon paid for by friends and family. Luxury operator Carrier offers a similar service.

You can ask guests to chip in for a honeymoon booked with Cox & Kings either direct with the company or through

the John Lewis gift list service – handy if you want to offer the option of contributing to your honeymoon or your home. Visitors to the registry services of Caribbean all-inclusive chains Couples Resorts and Sandals are given present suggestions under categories like room upgrades, transportation and tours and can even contribute finishing touches towards the ceremony itself.

Because they know you'll be spending your donations with them, operators and resorts don't usually charge you for using their gift service.

TRAVEL AGENTS

If you have a favourite travel agent you want to book with, check if they have a registry service of their own. These gift list services are often free and you're less likely to be tied to booking your holiday through specific tour operators, particularly if they are an independent travel agent rather than one of the more famous high street chains.

Trailfinders is among national travel agencies with a registry service. It will give you personalised gift list cards for your guests who can then make their contribution (from £10 upwards) online, by phone, post or in a Trailfinders shop. If you're heading Down Under it may be worth noting there's a 10% discount for the agency's gift list users at the Bloomfield Lodge in North Queensland.

Travel Counsellors agents will send you an attractive ➔

So remember, if you are relying on your loved-ones to contribute towards the overall cost of your honeymoon rather than last minute treats and upgrades you'll either have to make it clear when you send out your invites that you need any gifts early, or be prepared to stump up the full amount for your holiday

in advance and get some of your money back later.

Of course, if you open your registry at the time you get engaged you'll have money to play with sooner (and hopefully raise a bigger total) by inviting friends and family to make honeymoon contributions for your birthday and Christmas presents in

the lead up to the big day. Another option is to, like Allison and James (see next page), delay your honeymoon for a few weeks or months after the wedding rather than jetting off straight after. This has the bonus of giving you something else to look forward to when your big day excitement has died down.

Go online to find out exactly what the benefits of each gift list are

