

All-Inclusive Resort Vacations- What's to Know ?

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A Romantic Voyage by Sand, Sun & Savings

The buzz word these days is All-Inclusive vacations. This is a wonderful option for honeymoons and destination weddings for a myriad of reasons. An All-Inclusive resort package has several advantages over a typical vacation package. But exactly what does All-Inclusive mean? Simply put, All-Inclusive is a term used to describe vacation packages where for one price upfront, virtually everything on your trip is paid. This includes airfare, accommodations, food, beverages-including alcohol, entertainment and activities. One of the best features of an All-Inclusive vacation is the ability to know exactly how much your honeymoon will cost before you arrive!

But what are the pitfalls to booking an All- Inclusive vacation? Misinformation tops the list! Whether it's from well meaning friends and relatives or from websites that don't tell the whole story, a couple can arrive at their all inclusive resort to find that many of the items that they assumed would be included- aren't! The "All" part of the All-Inclusive can vary widely from one resort and supplier to another. Each resort and supplier determines the features included in its packages. Many websites will advertise that a package is All- Inclusive when in actuality the vacation package only includes flights, transfers and accommodations.

So what can you expect from a typical All-Inclusive package?

Accommodations -The location of the room- garden, ocean view or beachfront, size and any special features such as a hot tub, plunge pool or butler service may affect the price. Things to be careful of with booking your room include whether the resort utilizes a towel card system (lost towels can incur hefty charges), a fee for use of the in room safe, resort fee's and if there is a complimentary mini bar, how often it is stocked and with what beverages for the All- Inclusive price. Some resorts may charge extra for special requests.

Dining & Entertainment- Most All- Inclusive resorts include meals. Some will have a buffet for all meals and others have several different a la carte restaurants and/or snack bars. The venues usually include Asian, Mexican, Gourmet and Italian. Generally the larger the resort the more options are available for dinning. One other feature to look for is whether your chosen resort allows a la carte dinning at any of their restaurants or if they limit visits according to how many days you are staying or what room category you are booked into. Some All-Inclusive resorts will include room service. Check if it is 24 hours or only during set hours!

The food quality is usually what will make or break a vacation ? if a couple prefers American comfort food and all that is

available is fine dining, they may come away from the honeymoon extremely disappointed. Food offerings can vary greatly depending on what nationality the majority of the guests are. If a couple is expecting gourmet or local flavors and the food choices are buffet only or cater to European tastes, disappointment can ensue. Other resorts may only offer gourmet food at a surcharge.

Bar Service- All beverages, from soft drinks to adult beverages are usually available free of charge. Some resorts will serve a limited selection of domestic beverages; others may offer premium brands with the package or for an additional cost. Check to see if they offer your favorite beverage or if the resort offers premium or house/local liquors.

Sports Activities- Most All-Inclusive beach resorts offer non motorized water sports such as windsurfing, kayaking, snorkeling, water trykes and sailing for their guests. Quite often the non motorized watersports offered depends upon the resorts beachfront. If a resort is located in an area that typically has rough water there may be no water sports or often it is red flagged, which means that they will not allow guests to use the equipment. Some resorts require an orientation before they allow you to use the equipment, others have a time limit. Some even require a cash refundable deposit. Tennis, volleyball and fitness centers are almost always offered and included. Often motorized sports are available for a fee.

Entertainment ? Many All-Inclusive resorts include entertainment. This can range from high energy staff members that organize games during the day and then perform in shows during the evening. Or a more laid back approach such as a solo saxophonist, harpist or guitar player during dinner. Many of the all-inclusive resorts have an onsite disco- admission is usually free and most include drinks. Depending on the destination there are All-Inclusives that have a casino onsite- drinks may or may not be included.

Weddings? As part of an All-Inclusive package a wedding may be free and include a coordinator, a few photos, flowers, champagne, music and a wedding cake. These packages usually require that you pay the government /administrative fees. Of course you can always upgrade the package to make it more personalized!

What else should you look for ? The resorts ambience can also make or break a honeymoon or destination wedding. Does the resort cater to families, spring breakers or people within your age group? Is the resort for adults only? Other items that may or may not be included : transportation to or from the resort, local sightseeing or excursions outside of the resorts, internet service or wireless internet, gratuities, use of spa facilities for free or with a surcharge. Spa treatments are usually available for an additional fee. Some will include transportation to their sister properties and use of all facilities including food and beverage. A few resorts may offer excursions outside the resort or greens fees at local golf courses in their package!

So with all of these choices what is a honeymooner to do? Sit down with your fiancée and discuss what each of you envision for your honeymoon, the features that are important to each of you and what isn't important. Be very thorough with your research of each property you are considering and remember the old adage "You Get What You Pay For".

Consider a travel agent that specializes in honeymoons or destination weddings. Generally, using a travel agent will not cost you any more than booking on the internet (and quite often can offer a better value), however you will gain the expertise and knowledge of someone whose profession is to be able to sort the information, avoid common pitfalls and know who the best supplier is for a particular destination. A good travel agent will know the strengths and weaknesses of each All-Inclusive resort either from personal experience or from the training they receive. They will know the amenities available, food quality, what the resorts ambience is and who your fellow guests will be. The travel agent should engage you in a dialogue of your expectations, what amenities and features you & your fiancée want, your budget and then assist in booking your dream honeymoon! Another bonus to using a travel agent is, if something should go wrong, you have a consumer advocate on your side who has a great deal of negotiating power.

When booking your All-Inclusive honeymoon/destination wedding remember to double check the details of exactly what is included. Do your homework before placing your deposit so you have the vacation of your dreams.

About the author: Jennifer Prymula, owner of A Romantic Voyage by Sand, Sun & Savings has been specializing in Honeymoon and Destination Wedding travel for three years and is certified as a Honeymoon & Destination Wedding Specialist by The Travel Institute. A few of Jennifer's other certifications include Certified Sandals Specialist by Sandals Resorts, Hawaii Destination Specialist by the HVBC and an Accredited Cruise Counselor with Cruise Line International Association. A member of the West Michigan Wedding Association and also the Kalamazoo Bridal Association. You can contact Jennifer at 269.686.0595 or visit her website at www.sandsunandsavings.com