

## bookings built on trust

NANCY FINN IS THE GO-TO AGENT FOR WEDDINGS AT CARIBBEAN AND RIVIERA MAYA ALL-INCLUSIVES

**Nancy Finn** has lost count of the number of destination weddings she has booked since she started specializing in that niche about nine years ago. But it's well over 400.

Finn, who co-owns Island Getaways, a home-based agency in Brookfield, Wis., with her husband, Tom, specifically books weddings and honeymoons at all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean and on Mexico's Riviera Maya, with an emphasis on weddings. Even more specifically, she books only Karisma, Couples, Sandals and Beaches properties, which narrows her destinations to Antigua, St. Lucia, the Bahamas, Jamaica and the Riviera Maya. She is a Couples Platinum Agency and a Sandals Platinum Preferred Agency and is a top producer for Karisma, which is getting ready to launch its own formalized program for agents soon.

Why those companies? Not only do they offer superior product, Finn says, but also "I know all of the wedding coordinators. I know the staff and work with them on a personal basis."

Finn has become the go-to agent for betrothed couples around the U.S. Though she attends bridal shows and operates a website, most of her business comes by word of mouth. Moreover, Island Getaways doesn't have a host agency or belong to a consortium or other marketing group, and the Finns are the sole travel sellers at their agency. "We're 17-hour-a-day workers. We live, eat, breathe travel," she says.

Her success is due in large part to the growing popularity of destination weddings. "Every year, destination weddings get more and more popular," she says. "Younger people are not apprehensive about spending money on a destination wedding. They don't think twice about it, whereas years ago they did."

In addition, these types of nuptials no longer have the spur-of-the-moment elopement reputation that they did years ago. In fact, Finn currently has clients who are planning destination weddings for 2009 and 2010. She has booked destination-wedding groups ranging from two to 96 people.

Moreover, in the past year, four couples for whom she had booked honeymoons contacted her and said that they were tired of stressing out over planning traditional weddings in their hometowns and wanted to book destination weddings. They didn't even care about losing their deposits with their U.S. vendors.

But Finn also attributes her success to her ability to work well with brides and her reputation as a destination-wedding specialist. "I relate really well to the brides. You put me on the phone five minutes with a bride, and I make



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her feel confident," she says. "It amazes me that with all the weddings I do, I've never met most of my clients in person, and they trust me."

Although Finn works with the properties' wedding coordinators, who handle the onsite arrangements, she books the air and arranges such extras as catamaran trips for the group. All the bride and groom have to do is bring their wedding attire and submit their marriage license.

Weddings usually take place on the beach, in the gardens or under a gazebo, but Finn has received—and fulfilled—special requests. For example, a couple getting married in Negril, Jamaica, wanted the ceremony to take place on the resort's private catamaran at the cliffs. The party of 12 had appetizers and cocktails on board the boat and a full reception at the resort.

Finn experienced her own destination wedding last October, when she attended the annual Couples Anniversary party at Couples Swept Away in Negril. Last August she found out that after 23 years of marriage to Tom, the minister who had officiated over the nuptials had not filed the appropriate paperwork, and thus they were not legally married. So she called Couples and booked her own destination wedding, which took place the day before the company's anniversary party. Executives and sales representatives from Couples, as well as clients who were there for the anniversary party, attended. Finn's Air Jamaica Vacations sales rep attended once she heard about the event, and Couples owner Lee Issa gave Finn away. 🌐