

Seeking the best kind of pregnant pause

● Parents-to-be are hitting the road for a last taste of freedom before their new responsibilities keep them closer to home.

By ABIGAIL GREEN • Special to the Star Tribune

The honeymoon is so passé. The newest travel trend is the babymoon, one last getaway for parents-to-be before endless diaper changes and 3 a.m. feedings.

Hotels and spas now cater to expecting couples with packages that include perks

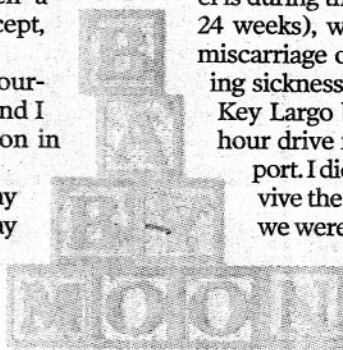
such as non-alcoholic cocktails and prenatal massage. There's even a website devoted to the concept, www.babymoonfinder.com.

Or you can go the do-it-yourself route, as my husband and I did on our recent babymoon in Key Largo, Fla.

We planned our getaway for mid-January, about halfway through my pregnancy. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists,

the safest time for a pregnant woman to travel is during the second trimester (18 through 24 weeks), when there's the lowest risk of miscarriage or premature labor, and morning sickness has usually passed. We chose Key Largo because it's only about a two-hour drive from Miami International Airport. I didn't think my bladder could survive the longer drive to Key West. Plus, we were after some peace and quiet.

Babymoon continues: A last chance for a few elegant meals for two — or three. **G8**▶



◀ BABYMOON FROM G1

Peace, quiet and pastries

We found what we were looking for at Azul del Mar, a five-room boutique hotel that overlooks Florida Bay. Our room featured leather couches, a spacious bathroom and a kitchenette with a refrigerator and a microwave — a plus for always-hungry pregnant guests.

The Azul del Mar provides another perk — fresh pastries and yogurt delivered to guests' doorsteps on weekdays. By the second day of our stay, my stomach had developed its own internal pastry clock, waking me in anticipation of flaky papaya- and guava-filled croissants by 8:30 a.m.

A few miles from the hotel, which has its own small beach, is the John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, home to two sandy beaches (with the requisite nearby restrooms and refreshments). Bobbing in gentle waves, I felt

ing. Our hotel proprietor, Dominic, steered us toward several excellent restaurants.

The first night, too tired to venture further, we walked a few yards down the road to Hobo's. This unlikely spot doesn't look like much from the outside, but one look at the expensive cars in the parking lot and the packed dining room and we knew we'd been let in on a well-kept local secret.

The next night we headed down the highway to Pierre's in Islamorada, the kind of elegant restaurant we know we'll rarely set foot in once the baby arrives. My potato-crusting grouper with roasted tomatoes

buoyant for the first time since my waist disappeared. A word of warning: bring big swimsuits. My newly voluptuous figure proved too much of a strain on my pre-pregnancy bikini.

My doctor had given me the green light to pursue one of my all-time favorite water sports, kayaking. I explained to the staff at Florida Bay Outfitters that I was looking for an easy paddle. They suggested they drop us off a few minutes up the road at Garden Cove, where we'd have protection from the wind.

Things started out fine, but an hour or so into it we got turned around in the narrow inlets and lost our way. Three hours and some choppy water later, we somehow ended up back at our starting point, exhausted. Lesson learned: take a guided trip and bring along plenty of sunscreen and water.

Eating for two

A babymoon is an ideal time to indulge in many pregnant women's favorite activity — eat-

ing. Our hotel proprietor, Dominic, steered us toward several excellent restaurants.

After dinner, we usually ended up waddling back to our hotel in a happy food coma. There's not much nightlife in Key Largo, but really, what pregnant women needs it? I'm lucky if I stay awake till 9 p.m.

We returned home from our babymoon a little tanner, a lot more relaxed and ready to tackle the baby's room. Now the only question is what to paint the walls: flamingo pink or Florida Bay blue?

IF YOU GO

Azul del Mar Resort is a modern, five-room boutique hotel located on the bay side of Key Largo, Fla. Rates, which start at \$169, include coffee, tea and pastries on weekday mornings, beach towels and use of the hotel's kayaks (1-888-253-2985).

Florida Bay Outfitters offers kayak, canoe

John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park has snorkel, scuba and glass-bottom boat tours, plus power boat, canoe and kayak rentals. There are restrooms, a snack bar and a gift shop. Admission is \$6 per double-occupant vehicle (1-305-451-1202).

For dining, good picks are **Hobo's** restaurant (1-305-451-5888) and **Pierre's** (1-305-664-3225).