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Scenes from a bachelor party

Strippers and Las Vegas drunk fests aren't every groom's idea of a great bachelor party — really.

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Darren Hitz is 29, an age that makes him a veteran of bachelor parties.

As soon as he graduated from Notre Dame in 1999 and moved to Tampa, he started getting the wedding invitations, and in their wake the calls to attend the bridegrooms' traditional last hurrah.



Courtesy Adventure Bachelor Party

The problem was that they were no fun at all — the parties, dude, not the weddings.

"We showed up at the airport and we would drink all weekend, and Sunday go home, and we were still feeling bad on Wednesday because of too much intoxication," he recalls. "My parents would ask me how was so-and-so, and I wouldn't know because we'd been drinking too much."

But his friend Mike Fuji's

wedding in New York changed everything including his view of bachelor parties, and even his profession — not that taking soil samples from landfills as an environmental scientist was not a really good time for a fun guy such as himself.

So Mike broke the news, and Hitz had an idea. "I said let's go to West Virginia and go white-water rafting. So we picked a location we could all fly into, went rafting, and it went really well."

So well that Hitz put up a Web site for bachelor trips. It turned out other guys were tired of drinking parties, too, and wanted guy-adventure trips in the great outdoors instead of the traditional indoor debauchery. Last year, Hitz planned four trips, and this year his company, Adventure Bachelor Party, has organized 40 trips, he says.

The company is based in Detroit, where he moved to take an Internet marketing job after his Florida tour of landfills.

Now, he works for bachelors.

Next year, he has 40 trips planned to 30 locations around the country. All are outdoor adventures, or as he calls them "male-bonding excursions in the wilderness" — horseback riding, rafting, mountaineering . . . No strippers.

The best part of the trip, he says, is making memories. "Usually when we would get together we would tell the same 10 stories from college. On the trips, you make new stories. The idea of the trip is the opportunity to communicate in an environment that produces memories. I remember when we hit this big wave in West Virginia, I immediately thought that this was going to be a good story."

So why don't guys organize their own bachelor trips?

"Guys can be lazy with bachelor parties," Hitz says, laughing. "They're not good at planning. They don't contact me until late in the game. It's usually the best man who calls, but sometimes the groom if the best man is a real goof."

And money can be awkward. "The hardest part for guys about organizing a group is collecting money. And the best man usually can't afford to put down a deposit for 15 people, and some of those people are the bride's relatives who he doesn't know. I take care of that problem. And they don't want to go to Vegas, they've already done that. But they don't know where to go."

His average client is "usually about 25 to 35, and he's over the bar scene, and he can appreciate a trip with friends." The trips have a minimum of six guys, with an average of 12.

The first step to a weekend adventure is finding a major city that guys from different parts of the country can fly into, except for New York, L.A., Vegas, cities that are a hassle, he says. He plans adventures within an hour's drive from the airport, which has a downtown for a little urban excitement on a Friday night.

"I find places that take them a little bit out of their element. Then I find an outfitter willing to pick the guys up on Saturday morning for an adventure where they are immersed in nature," he says.

On a West Virginia rafting trip, they fly into Charleston, W.Va., and are given a list of bars and restaurants. Then they stay in a lodge in the woods near Fayetteville, a quaint town near white-water rafting.

Hitz doesn't go on the trips. "Guys don't need a chaperon. They just need to be told where to go and what to do," he says.

Business has grown so much, he's branching out to include the University of Michigan alumni groups, small corporate groups, church groups and even bachelorette trips.

Travel agents book flights and hotels, but Hitz plans every detail for a weekend trip for a bunch of guys. "I plan the experience. I'm gonna go to the 15 places in town — the bars, the hotels — and try the outdoors adventure, and plan the weekend trip, and make it affordable. They're usually only \$300-\$600 per person not including air fare."

Hitz is amused by a new development in his business — brides are calling him to book the grooms' bachelor trips. "They see it as a safer alternative to a traditional bachelor party."

And, no, Hitz has never had his own bachelor trip. He remains happily single.

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