

TRAVEL

Livonia couple stake out their paradise in Hawaii

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

George and Sharon McConnell have staked out their place in paradise.

The McConnells of Livonia had their honeymoon in Hawaii, their fifth anniversary in Hawaii and, a year ago November, their 10th anniversary in Hawaii. And they plan to go again. And before she was married, Sharon, who works for United Parcel, had already been to the 50th state twice.

"It's a tropical paradise, but in this country," said George, who works at General Motors Ham-trunk plant. "You feel safe. In Cancun or the Caribbean, you're still traveling outside your country. There you don't need a passport."

The McConnells had done Oahu and Kauai on past trips. This time they went to Maui and the Big Island of Hawaii, where

an active volcano has been spewing a steady flow of lava.

Hawaii is a place where you can relax on a white or black sand beach as you watch 8-foot waves carry surfers into shore or it's a place you can participate in a variety of activities.

The McConnells did a bit of both.

"Neither of us had been snorkeling before," said Sharon.

So she bought a throwaway, underwater camera for a snorkeling adventure off Hawaii Island. The snorkelers gathered in the bay at Captain Cook's monument.

"The water was crystal clear and the colors there were the colors of the rainbow," said George.

The snorkeling was an all-day adventure with a barbecue lunch in between snorkeling.

"It was all ages, they didn't push anyone, but they encouraged everyone," George said.

And Sharon's underwater pictures came out surprisingly good.

The McConnells took helicopter rides over both islands. On the day they explored Hawaii there was a heavy fog and the active volcanoes were erupting and spewing steam making it impossible to fly to the peaks.

"Lava covered the roads in places. And we were close to where it flows into the ocean," Sharon said, showing pictures of billows of steam along a winding beach.

As seasoned Hawaiian travelers, the McConnells have some tips for those who want to go.

On Maui, they had stayed in the Kaonopali area but after being checked into a hotel they didn't like, they were moved to the Wailea area, which they proclaimed superior in every way.

"Stay away from Waikiki (on Oahu), it's just another big city. Go to the Big Island of Hawaii if you want to get away from people," George said.

"Take half of what you think you'll need. We packed too much," said Sharon.

"Go to Pearl Harbor at least once, make it a side trip. Go to Maui and Kauai," George said.

Other prime Hawaiian activities include parasailing, scuba diving and submarine rides to view tropical fish, beautiful golf courses and bicycling.

Seafood is the top cuisine of the island, but every hotel plays host to a luau where a pig roast takes center stage in a show that includes hula dancers and native Hawaiian music. The McConnells said they went their first time but have steered clear since. The island restaurants range from McDonalds to Planet



In paradise: George and Sharon McConnell took their Observer along on their trip to Hawaii.

Hollywood to expensive seafood and Oriental restaurants.

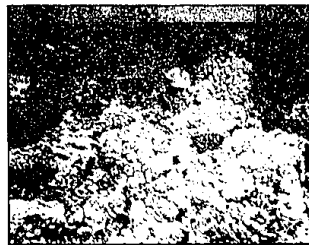
The McConnells admit that Hawaii can be expensive.

"It's expensive, but not as out of reach as some people think. We usually ate just one major meal a day and grabbed snacks the rest of the time, because we were always on the move," said Sharon.

"You can go there pretty cheap because there is a wide range of hotels," said George.

The McConnells said their vacation was somewhere in the middle at around \$3,500.

And they definitely plan to go again.



Undersea theater: Sharon McConnell captured this underwater parade off Hawaii Island with a throwaway waterproof camera.



Jungle vista: This lush vegetation is a hallmark of Hawaii's beautiful islands.

GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 691-7279.

WINTER DRIVING TIPS

As winter brings on rain, fog, snow and ice, AAA urges motorists to use caution when driving in wet and hazardous conditions.

"Winter can be a dangerous driving season for motorists," said Ron Kennedy, a AAA Northern California spokesman. In California last year, 224 people were killed and 14,050 were injured in weather-related crashes, according to the CHP.

To help motorists avoid wet weather collisions, AAA recommends the following:

WET WEATHER SAFETY TIPS:

Slow down. Your car needs

three times the distance to stop on slick roads. Maintain six to eight seconds between you and the vehicle in front of you.

Cloudy weather reduces visibility, so use extra caution when passing vehicles.

Be deliberate in maneuvering your vehicle - most skidding is caused by sudden stops and turns.

If your vehicle skids, don't panic. Ease off the accelerator and steer into the direction of the skid.

Do not speed up when navigating through standing water. Doing so may cause the tires to lose contact with the road, causing the vehicle to hydroplane. If this happens, avoid braking hard or turning sharply. Hold the steering wheel steady, and lightly apply the brakes. After the wheels gain contact with the road, slow down until you have full control of the car. After making it through standing water,

lightly pump the brakes to restore normal braking capacity.

Be prepared. Have tire treads, brakes and wipers checked.

If you are having car trouble, turn on your hazard lights and pull off the road as far to the right as possible. Ignite flares or signal for help. Stay in your car unless it is in danger of being hit by other vehicles.

The AAA affiliate for Northern California, Nevada and Utah serves nearly 4 million members with an array of automotive, travel, and insurance services.

WEATHER CONDITIONS ON WEB

New this winter on Travel Michigan's web site at www.michigan.org, are road conditions reports, provided by the

Michigan State Police, updated twice daily.

"During the winter months, when Michigan's weather conditions can change from clear and dry to clouds and significant

snowfall in a matter of hours, drivers are encouraged to check out weather and road conditions before traveling," said Richard Czuba, director of Travel Michigan. "It is our goal that every-

one traveling Michigan highways and secondary roads this holiday season, arrive at their destinations safely. We encourage using this service," he added.

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