

Globe Travel

VACATION PRIZES

The truth about free trips

So you've won a trip to a dream destination. Now, how much is it going to cost you?

BY TERESA PITMAN

If you like to travel, then winning a trip might just be your ultimate fantasy. Not for you practical prizes such as cars, houses, big-screen TVs. A trip to the Caribbean or another exotic location equals pure indulgence.

Really, what could be better? At a time when free vacations have become a lure of choice for marketers, the answer just might be not winning.

Ask Amanda Philip, of Hillsburgh, Ont., whose promised "free trip" turned out to be not quite so free. "I had filled out a ballot at a bridal show," she recalls. "And when we got the call that we won, I was so excited - I called all my friends."

Her excitement faded when she learned that in order to pick up the certificate for her prize (covering accommodations, but not airfare, meals or taxes), she and her partner would need to attend a cookware demo. "I was angry and disappointed to learn that there were all these strings attached," Philip says. All the same, she joined several other engaged couples at the lengthy presentation.

She admits that she actually purchased some of the "incredibly overpriced cookware" to get the trip certificate. Only then did she do the math and realize that the "free" trip would be significantly beyond their newlywed budget. As well, she says, "I had visions of arriving only to find it was some shabby, horrid hotel and being stuck there for a week. No thanks."

Are these free-trip phone calls really as much on the rise as they seem to be? Ric Borski, president of the Better Business Bureau of Mid-Western and Central Ontario, says that over the past 12 months his office has received 104 complaints about questionable

