

NUPTIALS

# Destination weddings

Planning your ceremony in a faraway place can be as easy as a walk on the beach

MARSHA STEEVES  
SUBMITTED TO THE SUN

Weddings are a stressful time — just ask any couple married in their hometown. There's a lot of decision making, checking and double-checking lists; and that's not to mention the one big worry every Vancouver bride has — will it rain on my wedding day?

That's why one in five Canadian couples is now opting for a sun-destination wedding in places like Mexico and the Caribbean, according to industry sources.

A destination wedding, if done right, is as easy as a walk on the beach — and the happy couple and their guests get to celebrate for seven days instead of one.

A debt-free wedding is becoming a priority for many couples, and the allure of a resort wedding package costing from \$750 to \$5,000 — a fraction of what traditional wedding arrangements can cost — is a big incentive for the budget conscious.

Or maybe it's the luxury of diving into the ocean just minutes after saying "I do," or the fact the honeymoon can start immediately.

It all makes for a picture-perfect day, and chances are the weather will be sunny without a cloud in the sky — the only shadows you'll see is the shade offered from swaying palms.

With a recommended one-year advance notice, group rates and incentives for accommodations, a minimal deposit and time to save for final payment, destination weddings are a viable option to the traditional ceremony. Here are some tips for those contemplating a get-away ceremony:

Due diligence

Dealing with foreign countries and co-ordinating travel and a wedding is not something you want to do on your own. Weddings are a one-shot deal, so save your DIY skills for another occasion. Cori Waugh's initial reaction could be typical: "The thought of making wedding plans in another country and running my business kept me up at night tossing and turning," Waugh recalls. "Lingering thoughts of all that could go wrong in another country kept flashing through my mind."

By the time she and husband Bob tied the knot in Cabo San Lucas on Nov. 11, 2011, however, all the worries had disappeared. The Waughs learned a destination-wedding specialist will endure the headaches, deal with late responses, communication barriers and legal paperwork.

It is important for those considering a destination event to find the right wedding consultant with the right expertise.

Meet and greet

Make an appointment to meet with your destination-wedding specialist. Allow up to an hour and a half for the meeting. Discuss your budget range with your partner, along with the destinations you may be interested in. Food, service, location and proximity to beaches must be considered.

Your destination-wedding specialist should be knowledgeable on the destinations, resorts and the legal requirements.

All in

For most weddings, the most popular choice is the "all-inclusive package" that covers airfare, transfers from the airport to the resort and a seven-night stay. All inclusive means all meals, alcoholic beverages, daily activities, non-motorized water sports are also included. The average budget is \$1,500 to \$2,000 per person.

What to expect

Your wedding away can be as simple as saying your vows with your toes in the sand or an elaborate affair, and packages can be created to encompass specific cultures and traditions.

very economical wedding day. Many resorts offer a complementary wedding package with a minimum number of room/nights booked.

Popular destinations

Mexico is by far the most popular destination-wedding venue for folks from the West Coast. The flights are typically non-stop and under six hours. Direct and shorter flights are preferred to ensure the comfort of seniors, children and infants in the family. Mexico also offers excellent value, with a minimum of 4½- or five-star properties recommended to ensure quality of food, service and accommodations.

Other popular destinations include the Dominican Republic which is known for its many beautiful beaches and value equal to

Mexico. However, if you want a civil ceremony instead of symbolic, you should be aware that both partners would need to return to the destination to file for a divorce.

Cuba is another popular venue, with excellent value similar to Mexico. It is not known for its cuisine, but is revered for its pristine beaches and turquoise waters. An excursion to Havana is a must, and a five-star property is recommended.

Jamaica is a very popular location as well. This island with real flavour allows the wedding party to experience one of the many Sandals Resorts, home to adult-only luxury. The family version, Beaches, is another great option.

Other budget destinations like Costa Rica are gaining in popularity, and the South Pacific; Tahiti and Fiji remain favoured elopement locations.

Marsha Steeves has been a traveller and destination wedding planner for the past 30 years.  
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Amy and Andy were married June 9, 2013 at Riviera Maya, Mexico. Many couples are opting to have their ceremonies in sun-drenched locations like Mexico and the Caribbean.

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## What brides-to-be really think

POSTMEDIA NEWS

As January, a.k.a. "Wedding Inspiration Month," arrives, so, too, does David's Bridal annual What's on Brides' Minds survey of newly engaged and married women.

Here's a sneak peek:

- 75 per cent of women would choose having their wedding completely paid for instead of losing 15 pounds.
- Comediennes Tina Fey and Amy Poehler are the pair most brides would love to have in their wedding party to help calm their marital jitters.
- 56 per cent of women didn't know their intended was "the one" when they first met.
- 64 per cent of brides said Skyping or live streaming their vows isn't an option.

David's Bridal has also launched a new online magazine. The inaugural Winter 2014 edition offers tips on choosing the wedding dress silhouette that best flatters your figure.

MARSHA STEEVES DESTINATION WEDDINGS

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