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Top Ten Destination Wedding Locations

Destination weddings often seem like the perfect way to get married, until you get into the logistics of where, when, and how. We straighten it all out for you here, and guide you through our favorite destination wedding locations.

By [Kristin Luna](#)



The Rarotongan Beach Resort and Spa is one of several places that hosts destination weddings on tiny Rarotonga in the Cook Islands. (courtesy, Rarotongan Beach Resort & Spa)

You're tying the knot. You have the ring, the dress, the man (or woman)—now, you just need to pin down a locale, and you're not sure what to do or where to do it. Whether a hometown wedding is simply out of the question (hey, we don't blame you), or you merely want an excuse for one big party on some tropical island with your closest friends and family in attendance, the options of where to host your destination wedding are endless—not to mention, overwhelming—as the majority of resorts and islands all over the globe offer some sort of wedding package to suit your every need.

But think through it first. Several factors should come into play when weighing the pros and cons of where to say "I do." If you're inviting quite the lengthy list, consider if the venue will be accessible to the majority of guests. Is there accommodation that is large enough to host them all, not to mention options on the affordable side, so no one is put in an awkward position? Do you

have a particular theme in mind, like a castle in Cork, Ireland, or Mediterranean romance in Positano, Italy? Is there any red tape in terms of getting your marriage license? Is it going to be so costly that you might as well eschew the thought of a destination wedding entirely and opt for a blowout of a honeymoon instead?

You have questions; we have answers. Read on to find ten perfect destination wedding locales and why we deem them so.

10. [Palau, Oceania](#)
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Palau, Oceania, North Pacific Ocean

By [Kristin Luna](#)

10. Palau

If I had it to do all over again, I'd book my family on the first westbound flight to Palau to watch my husband and me tie the knot, if for nothing else to say I got married in, well, Palau (a spot I guarantee many of my friends think is some mythical land). An island nation archipelago in the North Pacific, this entity in Micronesia couldn't be more dreamlike. You can swim with dolphins, dive with sharks, sample the best spa treatments the country has to offer, visit historical sites on Peleliu, or just relax on silky-sand beaches and work on your tan, an umbrella-clad drink in each hand.

Logistics in planning a Palau shindig aren't as difficult as you may think. Continental Airlines flies to Palau out of Houston and Los Angeles, connecting in Honolulu and Guam. And your guests can book a stay at the five-star [Palau Pacific Resort](#), where a wedding package will cost you a mere \$2,500 and include nearly everything you need to get married in style, such as floral arrangements, champagne, the marriage certificate, and a wedding coordinator.

Making the nuptials official is as simple as presenting a notarized affidavit and having it notarized by the American embassy. Along with the marriage application and license fee, this material will be handed over to the president to sign and make official. (And really, what's cooler than having Palau's leader give your marriage the stamp of approval?) More detailed marriage instructions can be found on [Palau's official tourism website](#).

9. Coastal Maine

Comprising a fleet of a dozen turn-of-the-century sailing ships, Maine's [Windjammer cruises](#)

offers the perfect alternative venue for the couple who wants something different by way of a destination wedding. Get married by a licensed captain atop the Atlantic Ocean while your closest friends and family cluster around you.

From intimate island nuptials to kitschy pirate-themed weddings, the captains can help the couple plan their perfect ceremony. Couples can charter an entire vessel for up to a week or leave the wedding party behind and enjoy a relaxing cruise along the coast of Maine. Costs for a three- to six-day cruise range from \$400 to \$1,050 per person.

This is a wedding for the true naturalist: While there are no heart-shaped hot tubs or canopy beds, the bride and groom and their guests will delight in the natural beauty of the Maine coast, the rich experience of sailing a 19th-century tall ship, and the delicious food and great camaraderie. If you prefer to eschew sea legs altogether and stay on dry ground, look into Kennebunkport, a quintessential Maine locale full of New England romance.

8. Paphos, Cyprus

Known as the "Island of Aphrodite," the goddess of love, it's no wonder couples gravitate toward this Mediterranean isle when searching for a site for their nuptials. Because the majority of accommodations have on-site chapels, Cyprus is the perfect spot for those who desire a religious ceremony in paradise. At the [Anassa Hotel](#), for example, you can wed in a Byzantine chapel in a recreated village square, surrounded by lavender-fringed paths and scarlet bougainvillea. Or at the [Elysium](#), marry on the front patio of a church with the waves of the Mediterranean crashing in the distance.

If you prefer to get out of Cyprus's capital, Paphos, to a smaller town instead, consider the port city of Limassol, which boasts the quaint boutique [Londa Hotel](#). Located on a small beach and commanding spectacular seafront views, the Londa is a five-star deluxe hotel outfitted by an Italian designer. Its restaurant Caprice can cater your rehearsal dinner and reception, so you have no need to leave the property for your entire wedding weekend. At the Londa, you even have the unique option to rent out the entire place, comprising 68 guest rooms, a spa, fitness center, lap pool, and more, for \$15,000. The ease of the marriage process is another appeal of Cyprus: A license costs around \$400, and you need apply only three days in advance.

With more than 10,000 years of human history—seen in spectacular mosaics dating back to 4 B.C., palace ruins, and an incredible amphitheatre located on a cliff-top over the sea—Cyprus can be covered from tip to tip in three hours' time by car. All major towns, save the capital of Paphos, boast sprawling beaches. In winter months, you can ski in the mountains and then come down to Limassol—45 minutes by car—and swim in the sea. The Troodos Mountains tower nearly 6,000 feet above the sea and offer gorgeous views, as well as nine Byzantine churches and a cluster of monasteries to explore. Many of the tourist attractions are connected to mythology, though other famous facets from the island include brandy, lacework, and wine.

7. Little Palm Island, Florida

Florida is the number-one spot for domestic destination weddings, and while Sanibel Island and the Gulf Coast are nice, nothing beats [Little Palm Island](#) in terms of romance and sheer beauty. Located in the Florida Keys, Little Palm is a five-acre islet tucked offshore Little Torch Key and

flanked by emerald-green waters. It's accessible only by boat or seaplane, making it a quiet—and private—slice of utopia. The thatched-roof bungalows are well appointed, but the resort abides by a "barefoot" policy, meaning no electronics like televisions and telephones (not like you'll need them anyway). Plus, the chic SpaTerre has several wedding-themed treatments on tap, such as the "Cold Feet Spa Package" for him or the "It's Your Day Princess" special for her.

You can choose from a variety of ceremony sites—natural white-sand beaches, a lush tropical Zen Garden, harbor view Palapa Point gazebo, and the Sunset Dock—that accommodate a maximum of 40 guests. An added bonus: Children under the age of 16 are not allowed at the resort, making it doubly appealing for your guests (not to mention, you) who want an adult-only getaway.

6. Lizard Island, Australia

Lizard Island is one of the Great Barrier Reef's more remote components—[Hinterland Aviation](#) charter flights depart from Cairns a couple of times a week—but it's totally worth the cost and effort. All protected national park, it's been spared from overdevelopment and boasts a lone resort, [Voyages](#), single airstrip, and acres of pure and verdant beauty.

Spend half an hour on the island and you'll realize where it got its name. Dozens of slothful lizards—ranging in size up to four feet in length—roam the tropical terrain, their relatives having inhabited the territory since before Captain Cook ventured here in the 1700s. Harmless and worthy of hours of amusement, the reptiles waddle along the sand, their tongues flicking in and out in rapid-fire motion (just watch out where you're stepping, especially late at night, or you may be in for a fright).

While filming *Fool's Gold* on and around Lizard, Kate Hudson dubbed it "the most romantic place on Earth." With 40 villas and 24 beaches, your guests will be well tended to. Depending on the size of their event, couples can choose among many ceremony sites, from Sunset Beach to Anchor Bay to a pavilion perched on a ridge overlooking the sparkling Coral Sea. Receptions can be hosted at a number of sites on the property: the beach, dining area, pool deck, or any of the gazebos. Packages start at \$3,450, including accommodation, celebrant fee, license, a cake for two, bouquet, champagne, and beach dinner.

Because Lizard Island is more intimate and harder to reach than most places in Australia, couples with bigger wedding parties and guest lists might consider a destination on the mainland, such as [Sydney's botanical gardens](#) instead. Then you can always hop a charter to the reef for the honeymoon.

5. Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

Emerging as the most popular international locale for Americans getting hitched, Cabo San Lucas has quite the repertoire of factors that make it so. For one, the wedding is legal in the United States as long as it's performed by a judge (civil unions are legally recognized, religious ones are not). The paperwork for the license is extremely easy: You just fill it out ahead of time, arrive a few days early to do a blood test, and you're all set. Most places in Cabo accept American dollars, and nearly everyone speaks English. There are a variety of hotels in the area,

so you can accommodate all your guests' budgets. Plus, you're almost guaranteed perfect weather, no matter the time of year.

Consider the swanky [Capella Pedregal](#) as the venue for your big weekend. Each of the 66 guestrooms is equipped with its own private plunge pool for soaks anytime of the day. The Auriga spa offers treatments that are both indigenous in nature (calling on authentic Mexican healing traditions of the Baja region) and based on the phases of the moon (a nod to the Capella brand's "star-studded" origins). Couples can book a number of couple's treatments in the 12,000-square-foot spa, which holds ten treatment suites, including eight treatment pods and two deluxe suites, fashioned into round, pod-like dwellings. Each floating pod and suite opens to the outdoor spa pool area, offering views of the endless sky and shimmering sea. Furthermore, famed hair designer, Julien Farel of Madison Avenue, has just signed on to open his first remote location in the world at the new Capella Pedregal. Julien Farel Cabo San Lucas will provide the perfect outlet for bridal parties in need of hair styling and other beauty treatments.

Additionally, past couples to wed in Cabo have even had the delight of surprise guests showing up unannounced: humpback whales bobbing playfully just off the shore of Playa Grande. Cabo San Lucas and San Jose Del Cabo both offer countless dining choices and activities for sightseers and explorers, too—from golf, jet skiing, surfing, hiking, snorkeling, whale-watching, and more. If you prefer somewhere in Mexico more intimate and less touristy, check into the quaint fishing village of Zihuatanejo further south instead.

4. Tabernash, Colorado

Deemed one of the top eco-friendly hotels and resorts in the world by Conservation International, the rustic yet luxe [Devil's Thumb Ranch](#) is the perfect venue for the bride and groom looking for an alternative to a beach locale. Sitting on 5,000 acres of privately owned wilderness just an hour west of Denver, the ranch is home to 16 luxury ridge-top cabins, each uniquely appointed in Scandinavian and European antiques and nestled among the pines and aspens. A new 12,000-square-foot wellness center, Ranch Creek Spa, offers nature-based treatments, perfect for bridal parties, as well as a couples' massage room with copper tubs for the bride and groom who need to unwind.

Food has a sustainable focus with all catering coming from the on-site Ranch House Restaurant or Heck's Tavern, serving more casual, contemporary ranch fare. John L's Wine Cellar and Private Dining Room accommodates up to 16 people for something uniquely special with custom multi-course dinners and wine pairings.

With 80 weddings each summer alone, the ranch is well equipped and experienced for a wedding of seismic proportions. Indoor and outdoor facilities include a meadow looking out to the Continental Divide, the Timber House with floor-to-ceiling windows and 270-degree views of the ranch, or the Broad Axe Barn, named for the reclaimed 1850s barn that serves as the framework for this large room, which opens onto a second-story patio and can accommodate 150 people.

3. St. Kitts

Picture this: Glorious sunshine, tropical setting, a train pulls up and deposits you and your

spouse-to-be at the site of your nuptials. You can have all this and more on the island oasis of St. Kitts. The only Caribbean country to lay claim to a scenic passenger railway, St. Kitts is adorned with plantations and rolling sugarcane fields shimmering against a glittering sea. Following the ceremony, guests can reboard the train for the reception and continue on their merry way back to their hotel (or, more likely, the bars of Basseterre).

The final car of the train consists of a bedroom where the newlyweds can stay once the fete is over. The conductor simply has to "un-couple" the bedroom car so the newlyweds can enjoy their secluded romantic setting overnight while the guests continue to party on their way back to town. The newlyweds are then picked up by the train the following day.

From St. Kitts, feel free to hop next door to its sister island, Nevis, for your actual honeymoon (neglecting to tell your guests, of course, where you'll be, lest they be inclined to follow). Located in the Leeward Islands of the West Indies archipelago, Nevis is just eight miles long and six miles wide, yet it has a natural beauty that is unparalleled. The Spanish explorers called it "Nuestra Senora de las Nieves" (Our Lady of the Snows) as a tribute to the white clouds surrounding the island's central volcanic peak. Its green foothills support tropical rainforests, secluded valleys, historic plantations, and the remains of sugarcane fields, while the turquoise waters lap palm-fringed beaches.

2. Muir Beach, California

Located just over the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco, this sandy oceanside paradise feels worlds away from the cosmopolitan city that draws so many people to the area. With a protected cove and playful otter residents, and flanked by the famous redwood trees of Muir Woods, Muir Beach is an ideal setting for sunset nuptials. Holding a ceremony at the national park will cost you \$400 for a small wedding (just be sure and make your reservation well in advance); you can also choose to tie the knot at the Muir Beach Overlook

Book the neighboring [Pelican Inn](#) for the reception, or go all out and marry on its plush lawn, before retreating inside to the cozy, Tudor-style English pub for a cocktail hour and intimate dinner. The inn's planning team will tackle the majority of details—basic flower arrangements, set-up, service, and top-notch catering—so you can simply show up and enjoy yourself. The glass-roofed conservatory is beautifully lit for a sit-down dinner once the sun sinks below the headlands, and the area can be converted to the dance floor when the toasts conclude.

As the inn is quite small and has just seven rooms, you'd be smart to spend your wedding night in the privacy of nearby Sausalito at the iconic [Casa Madrona](#), with views of the bay and San Francisco skyline from your window. A host of top-tier accommodation—from the Mill Valley Inn to the Lodge at Tiburon—is located in the surrounding communities, so you won't have any trouble finding the perfect place to house your guests.

1. Rarotonga, Cook Islands

What French Polynesia is lacking in authentic color, the Cook Islands more than make up for. A bride and groom—and their guests—will have plenty to do to pass the time: For local flavor, they can hit up the Highland Paradise Cultural Centre, where natives don the traditional Maori dress, and experience sites of former sacrificial ceremonies. They can attend Sunday morning

church services—a must-do, says travel icon Peter Greenberg—or take in one of the many Island Nights, with traditional Polynesian dancing and singing galore. They can splash in the shallow lagoons with the fish (and octopi and turtles), or soak up the wildlife and history of the land through one of Pa's Nature Walks. Or they can partake in the islanders' favorite pastime: doing absolutely nothing at all. (The aquamarine water and silk-sand beaches provide the perfect backdrop for such an activity.)

Oddly enough, getting married in this far-flung South Pacific locale is far more affordable than in the United States. Prices for a beachfront wedding at one of Rarotonga's poshest resorts, the [Pacific](#), start at just \$1,300, and that includes the marriage license and a team of on-site professional planners. An additional \$500 gets a bride and groom a traditional vaka lagoon ride with a warrior, a ukulele serenade, a shell horn announcement by an island warrior, and a hand-woven coconut palm and flower archway. Flights for your guests are relatively affordable and easy, too: On a ten-hour direct flight from Los Angeles, you can reach Rarotonga for as little as \$800 round trip.

Following your big day, the couple of note can leave their guests behind and hop an inter-island flight to the oasis that is Aitutaki for the ultimate honeymoon getaway. The hospitality is second to none (particularly at the five-star [Pacific Resort](#)), the scenery goes unsurpassed, and fewer than 1,000 people inhabit the sparsely populated isle. Be sure to indulge in a day cruise through the surrounding lagoon, stopping over at One Foot Island, home to *Survivor: Cook Islands* and a small shack that doubles as both a snack bar and a post office; take a dip and snorkel in the shallow crystal clear waters, where you'll see a giant clam or two; and hit up an island show at the resort at night to see a native Polynesian song-and-dance act.