



# 10 DESTINATION WEDDINGS

A FINNISH VENUE WITH A VIEW OF NORTHERN LIGHTS, A DREAMY BEACH IN HAWAII, A DELIGHTFUL WINERY IN AUSTRALIA OR A LUXURIOUS RESORT IN THAILAND. IF EXCHANGING VOWS IN ONE OF THE MOST ROMANTIC, LANGUID OR ADVENTUROUS LOCALES IN THE WORLD IS A DREAM THAT YOU WANT TO ACTUALISE, THIS IS THE LIST FOR YOU. BY PS BHAVANA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF THE CROWN PLAZE PHUKET; ETER FRANK EDWARDS, COURTESY OF ALEX ROBINSON/SAN IGNACIO RESORT; COURTESY OF DRUMTOCHTY CASTLE; OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; ONE&ONLY OCEAN CLUB (2)

## 1 RIVIERA MAYA | MEXICO

With over 9,500 kilometres of coastline, this federal republic of North America is a heart-stealer. You can zoom to Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlan, Los Cobos, Cancun, Playa del Carmen, Isla Mujeres or Cozumel. But tucked in its state of Quintana Roo in the Eastern part of Yucatán Peninsula, is the much-sought-after touristy province called Riviera Maya, which houses spa resort hotels with fancy beach and historic settings. For instance, the Palace Resorts (Beach Palace, Cozumel Palace, and Moon Palace Jamaica Grande), Rosewood Mayakoba, Viceroy Riviera Maya or Generations Riviera Maya by Karisma, has destination (even Indian) wedding plans for couples with different interests.

Any hotel you choose, don't forget to throw the following into your planning basket as post-wedding activities—a visit to *cenotes* (freshwater sinkholes), golfing on a procourse, jungle trails, and a beach bonfire parties.

Clockwise from top left: The Crown Plaze Phuket Panwa Beach Resort, Phuket, Thailand; The Napali Coast, on the northwestern side of Kauai; A suite at San Ignacio Resort on Macal River, Mayan Ruins, Belize; an exterior view of Drumtochty Castle in Scotland. Opposite, Clockwise from top: A beach wedding organised at Riviera Maya, Mexico; the lush greenery at One&Only Ocean Club; a customised setting for a nuptial ceremony at One&Only Ocean Club Bahamas.

## 2 KAUAI | HAWAII

This archipelago is a wistful place, where 11 out of world's 13 climatic zones are fiercely guarded in an assorted topography. The Kuna coast is lunar-shaped and azure, while the north and east coasts are verdant with canopies and brooding mountains. Zero in on Kauai—The Garden Island—if you want to create memories on one of the world's best tropical hotspots. Although it is a tad smaller than its plush cousins like Oahu, Maui and the Big Island, it is definitely prettier with Napali Coast, Keonelo Bay, and Waimea Canon drive

(that boasts the traditional Hawaiian system of land division called *ahupuaa*). Biggies such as Sheraton, Marriott, and Hyatt, also offer wedding packages on their pristine beaches, leisurely boats, awe-inspiring waterfalls, and picture-perfect gardens.

## 3 ONE&ONLY OCEAN CLUB | THE BAHAMAS

The terraced steps of a Versailles-inspired garden or a 12th-century Augustinian cloister seems a perfect way to celebrate an austere occasion. One&Only Ocean Club on New Providence island provides



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF SAN IGNACIO RESORT; COURTESY OF THE RED CARNATION HOTEL COLLECTION; OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; WILLOW TREE ESTATE; SHUTTERSTOCK

From top: The pool at San Ignacio Resort on Macal River, Mayal River, Belize; Bushmans Kloof, Western Cape, South Africa. Opposite: Clockwise from left: Havelock Island, Andaman & Nicobar Islands; A beautifully appointed suite at Willow Treestate, Australia; the path leading to Willow Treestate.

such opportunities to couples who want to tie the knot here. Built close to the tip of Southern Florida on the Atlantic Ocean, the property's location gives you the advantage of punching the wedding merriment with thrilling activities (for yourselves and your guests) such as shark watches, dolphin spotting, golfing on Tom Weiskopf's 18-hole course, catamaran cruises, casino visits, kiteboarding, waverunning, deep-sea fishing or kayaking.

#### 4 DRUMTOCHTY CASTLE | SCOTLAND

A wedding in a neo-gothic castle in Scotland, Ireland (try Ballyfin Demesne Resort) or even England always sounds right out of a fairytale. But when it is organised in a quaint 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish property hidden in a woodland glen (southern fringe of Drumtochty Forest), it sounds a wee bit more magical. Here, you could choose the castle's loch or a reception room as your ceremony venue, book a falcon to carry your wedding rings, or plan a carriage ride to St Palladius Church followed by the warm tingling sound of bagpipes to complete your wedding. Your reception can be an elegant formal affair with delicate crystal and china at either the ball room or dining room. Your merriment will seem incomplete without doings like walks through a 300-acre woodland, cycling on narrow pathways, forest trails, trout fishing in lochs, or clay pigeon shooting. They can boost the welcoming experience of your guests.

#### 5 MAYAN RUINS | BELIZE

Belize is one of the few places in the world that offers a heritage site like its Mayan ruins to hold a wedding—imagine a backdrop of pyramid temples, stone structures, and hieroglyphs. Although you could have a wedding at a beach, on a catamaran, in a church, on an island, sailboat or sandbar, the limelight falls on the ruins of Cahal Pech (meaning 'place of ticks'), and Altun-Ha (or 'rockstone pond'). Best bets to help you organise this are San Ignacio Resort on Macal River (Cayo district), Victoria House, El Secreto, Captain Morgan's, and Grand Caribe, where other than the usual beach-esque affair, banquet, and stay facilities, you could cover rainforest or medicinal jungle trails, check the Iguana Project, go zip-lining through trees, and explore old-world-bitten surroundings.

#### 6 CROWN PLAZE PHUKET PANWA BEACH RESORT | PHUKET, THAILAND

Phuket steps beyond an island for a quick beachy getaway abroad to being a resplendent theatrical backdrop for a destination weddings. The scenic beauty of its beachside rock formations and jewel-coloured coves are furthered by luxury resorts which are easy on the pocket as far as an international destination wedding goes. The Crown Plaze Phuket Panwa Beach Resort that overlooks the Makham Bay is a humble-yet-voguish property

when it comes to celebrations—cottages with private terraces, silk furnishings, and traditional Thai Buddhist chants playing through the corridors. Here, you can pop yourself on a decorated pachyderm (instead of a traditional horse) and enter your venue in a grand way or simply book an entourage of drummers. After the wedding, you can whoosh to Phi Phi, Koh Samui, Krabi, Hua Hin or Chiang Mai for a bunch of myriad experiences.

#### 7 TORASSEIPPI | FINLAND

A wedding on this Scandinavian winter wonderland—think snow-capped mountains, crystalline white glaciers, the must-watch Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights), and amidst such poignance, an ice chapel or a cosy barn to utter your vows in. Not only is such a wedding far removed from the traditional Indian setting, it gives you the feeling of being on a celestial plain. Cherish a true Nordic pulse at the picturesque property that makes such a wedding possible. The Torasseippi Harriniva Hotel located in the Finnish-West Lapland of Muonio is your dream come true. The hotel helps organise intimate weddings, and promises visits to reindeer and husky farms (you could get driven to your venue on a sleigh or snowmobile), cabin and winter villages, and a museum. Use one of their in-house photographers for best underlights wedding shots as they know it like the back of their hand. Post wedding, say hello

to Muonio's little hamlets like Ylimuonio, Kangosjärvi, Kätkäsuvento, Kihlanki, and Särkijärvi.

#### 8 WILLOW TREE ESTATE | AUSTRALIA

Kangaroos could be your unexpected guests, grape-stomping (pigeage) could be your know-the-other-family activity, and wine casks could be part of your venue décor. Set in the lovely Hunter Valley Wine region of the country, the Willow Tree Estate (Pokolbin)—bed-and-breakfast is a seven-acre venue

overlooking vineyards. The chic white and wood deco, wine and cheese tasting sessions, winery tours, horse and bicycle rides, hot air ballooning, carriage rides, antiques' shopping opportunities, and fine dining tales can cast strong bewitching spells on you. For something similar, you could also opt for Barossa Valley or All Saints Estate (with a castle and authentic mud-and-brick winery) in the Rutherglen Wine Region in Northeast Victoria. Both are scenic and replete with rustic vibes.

#### 9 BUSHMANS KLOOF | SOUTH AFRICA

If you have ever been a fan of the funny, 'click' sound-making character of Xixo from *The Gods Must Be Crazy* series, this secret place in Western Cape (270 kilometres from Cape Town) as a wedding destination would be perfect for you. The Bushmans Kloof wilderness reserve and wellness retreat is built on 7,500 acres of land. Next to the impressive 500 million-year-old Cederberg mountains this is an option for couples looking for an off-beat place to celebrate their nuptials. Arranged either on a natural sandstone amphitheatre called Embers that overlooks the gigantic Khabo Dam ('dream' in the San language), in a stone building named Kadoro with spectacular valley views, on the house deck of a restored 170-year-old manor with wild fig trees and a river view for a backdrop, or at the Peninsula Dam with a stunning sunset view, you will not be in want of anything more.

You can round off your merriment by admiring some mystical paintings by Bushmen on the rocky overhangs, getting pampered at Kloof's in-house spa full of indigenous organic herbs and fynbos, enjoying an extended stay at Koro Lodge that shows off a South African bric-a-brac (a rugged game-viewing vehicle), and gorging into traditional 'potjiekos' stews cooked on open fires.

#### 10 HAVELOCK ISLAND | ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS, INDIA

If you are looking for a secluded destination at an arm's length, Andamans are now a popular wedding destination for couples. Choose a locale (from an archipelago of more than 500 islands like Jolly Buoy Island, Mud Volcano, Red Skin Island, and Barren Island, amongst others) that is comfortably close to India and inexpensive compared to exotic locations across massive oceans. *Munjoh*, which is nestled in mango trees and betel palm groves, is a perfect place for both. This sustainable eco-resort arranges scuba diving classes, Quixotic dinners on a beach, assorted wedding parties on isolated stretches, nature walks, and snorkeling, too. Your guests can also experience the lifestyle of one of the world's oldest tribal clans—the Onges, or saunter through the well-kept Naval Marine Museum. ♦