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destinationweddings

on the second, and a morning-after breakfast or farewell brunch on the third. But resorts often honor special group rates three days before and after the event as an incentive for guests to stay and enjoy the locale longer.

Q. What's the average size?

A. These days, 50–100 guests is average, but a destination wedding can range from fewer than 10 to 200-plus.

Q. What activities should I plan?

A. For island weddings, many couples book a snorkel trip or sunset sail; in Europe, tours to local sights or wine tastings and cooking classes are popular; for spots such as Napa Valley, hot air ballooning and picnics are fun.

Q. Any suggestions for guests' in-room welcome baskets?

A. They should reflect the place: In Napa or Italy, you might fill baskets with area wines, biscotti and a regional cookbook; island weddings can have a beach tote filled with suntan lotion, a visor and a bottle of local rum or coffee. Then there's what I call a pampering basket: candles, wine, soaps and chocolate-covered strawberries.

Q. Any ideas for making my ceremony special?

A. I love to see a couple's personalities reflected in the ceremony: If you are playful, give guests wands of ribbons to wave or bubbles to blow. For a more formal tone, release doves or plan a shower of rose petals; both are beautiful and easy to arrange. Also, I suggest you write your own vows—it makes the ceremony so much more special.

Q. What's the difference between a resort wedding and a villa wedding?

A. A resort will offer your attendees more amenities, such as room service and a spa, and activities, such as water sports or golf. But it will also have other guests who may gather to watch the ceremony. A villa is more secluded, creating a wonderful sense of intimacy. Some villas share rights with nearby resorts, which is the best of both worlds.

Q. Any tips for choosing and transporting my dress?

A. Always buy a gown that complements the weather—beach brides

should opt for a lighter fabric, such as linen, organza or chiffon, not a heavy silk. And never, ever pack the gown! Always carry it on the plane and give it to the first-class attendant for proper storage. Most airlines are happy to help, but you should be sure to make such arrangements when you book your reservation.

Q. What can be done locally, and what should be brought in?

A. Flowers, cakes and musicians are usually done locally. The photographer is the one vendor I highly recommend you bring with you, since local photographers often have a different style than you may be used to. Plus, if you have an issue with the photos, you'll have recourse in the U.S. but not necessarily in a foreign country.

Q. Any helpful hints from past weddings you've arranged?

A. Make sure you have a rain plan in place for every event. Confirm that the wedding cake you select can hold up in the tropical heat of an island locale. Allow an extra travel day for your vendors in case flights are delayed, or worse, canceled. And know the weight restrictions on all your flights—you don't want to have to pay an extra fee or find that items don't fit onboard the smaller planes used to get to some less populated islands. —Gerit Quealy

Costa Rica

(continued from page 347) discovered firsthand the almost-incomprehensible lengths the resort goes to defend its status as the first recipient of the Five Leaves Sustainability Certification—the highest ranking. As a fitting finale, we planted a tree—a permanent tribute to the environment and our commitment to each other.

Susan and Jeff were married at Hotel Punta Islita (doubles from \$250; 866/446-4043 or hotelpuntaislita.com). Other eco-sensitive resorts we recommend are Hacienda Tres Rios, a new all-inclusive focused on environmental sustainability on Mexico's Riviera Maya (doubles from \$600, all-inclusive; 800/224-4231 or haciendatresrios.com) and RockResorts in the U.S. and Carib-

bean, which offer Environmentally Engaged Weddings (doubles from \$129; 888/FOR-ROCK or rockresorts.com).

GREEN WEDDING TIPS

- Support native vendors. Purchase regionally made wares as favors.
- Use local, in-season flowers. This cuts down costs, supports area growers and eliminates the carbon emissions caused by shipping.
- Protect indigenous fauna. Rice is a no-no, and some birdseed may be harmful to local species. Consider alternatives such as native seeds or petals (or forgo the tradition).

Mexico

(continued from page 347) preferred wines and champagnes.

The takeover also allowed us to play with dress codes. For the formal rehearsal dinner, I wore a modified (I cut off the train) beaded Reva Mivasa-gar wedding dress. The white was a romantic contrast to the kaleidoscopic fiesta at which dinner was served in hot molcajete (Aztec lava stone bowls), and the hacienda's stables echoed with a 12-piece mariachi band.

The ceremony, in a thatch-roofed Catholic church, was followed by an alfresco black-tie reception. Beneath a blood orange harvest moon that had everyone gasping about our "attention to detail," our party was every bit the Renaissance extravaganza we'd fantasized about. The six-course wedding feast peaked with leg of lamb, roasted asparagus and salted crème mushrooms. And when we cut our stacked tres leches wedding cake, the whole party cheered. As the rising sun eclipsed the moon, waiters served crispy and gooey breakfast quesadillas. The DJ team we'd flown in from New York smiled while spinning our favorite tunes and told us our party "was just like playing in Ibiza." It was exactly what we'd dreamed of: taking those we love on a fantastic journey. Nicole and Tyler were married at Cuixmala (casitas from \$350 and villas from \$1,500; 866/516-2611 or cuixmala.com). Other takeovers we recommend

are Aquamare, a new trio of five-bedroom villas on Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands (from \$12,500 per week; 787/461-2638 or villaaquamare.com) and Gaige House, a 23-room inn in California's Sonoma Valley (takeovers from \$6,000 per night; 800/935-0237 or thompsonhotels.com).

TAKEOVER WEDDING TIPS

- **A buyout doesn't have to mean a blowout.** Choose a resort with accommodations in several price ranges. Cuixmala offered casitas with a communal pool, quiet bungalows, and wait-staffed villas sleeping up to 10 guests.
- **Play up your personal style.** Outside the church, we celebrated in Bohemian-chic style with vintage Moët Rose Champagne, my favorite Aussie Vegemite and cheese sandwiches, and Tim Tam biscuits as the wind rustled white Mexican paper flags.
- **Invest in your Web site.** We hired a designer to make it informative. The more knowledge people have, the more comfortable they'll be.

Italy

(continued from page 348) shouted "Bella sposa!" in my direction.

Following the ceremony, we walked back to Piazza San Marco. After champagne and photos, we headed to La Caravella restaurant for a traditional Italian dinner in a courtyard beneath the stars. Five hours flew by as our guests shared touching and humorous stories about us and we took turns interacting with each of them in a meaningful way. The entire day was filled with unexpected moments that we could never have predicted, nor replicated, if we tried. And the magic didn't end there: Everyone who attended spent time traveling in Europe before or after our wedding, which is precisely what we'd hoped to inspire. I can't imagine getting married any other way.

Katherine and Chris were married in a Venetian gondola (rates from \$110 per hour). Other intimate locales we recommend are the St. Charles Streetcar as you pass the mansions of New Orleans'

Garden District (charters from \$250; 504/864-6649 or norta.com/services/charters.php) and aboard the London Eye as you enjoy a panorama of the city (weddings from \$3,800; 011-44-870-220-2223 or londoneye.com).

INTIMATE WEDDING TIPS

- **Wed ahead.** Instead of arriving early to get a marriage license in Italy, we made it legal beforehand in New York City, where we live. Thus, we could have our symbolic ceremony in Venice without the constraints of Italian rules.
- **Don't dress up a sunset.** We spent practically nothing on flowers and decor because the destination was already so magical. Can you really make Venice any more beautiful?
- **Plan an after-party.** Since not everyone made it to Italy, we also held a reception in each of our parents' towns, plus a miniceremony and dinner with our grandparents.

Hawaii

(continued from page 348) blue cheese-crusted filet mignon and shrimp cocktail hors d'oeuvres while a Hawaiian trio played slack-key melodies. The island theme continued with a dinner of macadamia nut-encrusted fish, followed by a three-tiered cake filled with passion fruit and pineapple. I even based my wedding colors on the locale: cornflower blue to match the ocean, chocolate brown to complement the sand and mango orange to represent Maui's stunning sunsets. Just because we were in Hawaii, we didn't want to abandon certain traditions, so we still tossed the bouquet and garter and danced to a DJ late into the evening. The great thing about mixing a vacation with a wedding is that your guests have time to really get to know one another, which made for a fun and relaxed reception. Most brides say that their wedding went by too quickly. I was lucky because mine lasted an entire week!

Jennifer and Nick were married at The Westin Maui (doubles from \$350; 800/937-8461 or westinmaui.com). Other beach resorts we recommend are

the modern Mexican-influenced Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort, in Los Cabos, Mexico (doubles from \$199; 800/HILTONS or hilton.com) and the newly renovated Hyatt Regency Aruba (doubles from \$370; 800/55-HYATT or aruba.hyatt.com).

RESORT WEDDING TIPS

- **Do your research.** If you can, visit beforehand and tour several hotels, as photos can be misleading. We also met with each wedding coordinator, since we'd be relying on them to handle the details in our absence.
- **Don't overschedule.** We knew that our guests were also there to enjoy a relaxing vacation, so we didn't plan too many activities. Instead, we told them where we'd be and let them opt to join us or not.
- **Branch out.** Just because you're holding the reception at a resort doesn't mean the ceremony has to be there. We held ours in a beautiful Catholic church built in the 1800s.

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