

Flight to the Altar **By Deanna McFadden**

Have the plans for your wedding left a bigger knot in your stomach than the one you're about to tie? A "weddingmoon" might be the perfect solution. Here's how to say "I do" to a destination wedding.

Have the plans for your wedding left a bigger knot in your stomach than the one you're about to tie? Are you bogged down in plans to organize the church, the reception, the guest list and the wardrobe? If the phone ringing is enough to set you off into a panic attack, it might be time to start re-evaluating having that big wedding with five hundred of your parents' closest friends.

An increasing number of soon-to-be marrieds have opted to move their nuptials to resorts in the Caribbean or Mexico, simply to avoid the headache and hassle on what is supposed to be the happiest day of your life.

With the cost of an average wedding approaching \$20,000-\$25,000, many couples are re-evaluating the need for a big ceremony accompanied by an even bigger reception. It makes more practical sense, financially anyway, to spend that money on a down payment for a house, especially considering the cost of having a wedding in, for example Nassau, Bahamas, approaches a much more reasonable \$4,000. Even the traditional flight to Vegas cashes in at only about \$3,600 USD for a wedding at the beautiful Bellagio hotel. And with web sites like itravel2000.com offering complete packages for a combination dream wedding and honeymoon, planning an overseas wedding has never been easier.

The setting of many of these resorts couldn't be more idyllic. The weather couldn't be better, the setting couldn't be more beautiful and there's a wealth of extra-curricular activities at your fingertips. One drawback of the non-traditional wedding would have to be the cost for your guests to accompany you. It's not just the cost of a wedding present, but it's also the idea of scheduling a vacation to attend your wedding alongside paying his/her own way in terms of the resort. That's a lot to ask friends and family. The selling point becomes the fact that they'll have a wonderful vacation, with an added bonus of watching you get married.

There are few things to consider before jumping ship, literally, and planning your wedding on a cruise or a resort. While the wedding ceremony itself is legal and recognized in Canada, each of the host countries have specific requirements for couples planning to get married on their soil, or beaches. You'll need to do your research ahead of time, and give yourself plenty of advance notice to ensure you've got the proper documentation. For example, couples wanting to get married in the British Virgin Islands will need to purchase \$110.00 in BVI Postage Stamps if residents for one day; \$50.00 if residents for 15 days or more; in addition, they require a three-day waiting period, valid passports, proof of marital status and two witnesses.

These specifications vary from country-to-country, so if you're planning your wedding yourself, make sure you investigate all the legal/societal customs before you buy your tickets and book your wedding. A good place to start would be the Caribbean Tourism Organization (212-635-9530; www.doitcaribbean.com) or visit itravel2000.com, where they've listed requirement specific to each country within their weddings section (<http://www.weddings.itravel2000.com/index.htm>).

Planning a wedding overseas isn't without its own headaches. You'll also have research the weather patterns of your dream landscape. While getting married in September or October in Canada might led to the perfect setting in terms of the weather here, it's not the same for many Caribbean countries, where the same months are the peak hurricane season. The last thing you want is to fly half way around the world and not be able to enjoy your environment. While planning your wedding during the high point of vacation season might raise the cost, it'll certainly be worth the extra money to actually be able to enjoy yourselves outside of the resort and will also lend to taking advantage of the natural wonders of the islands.

Also, many hotels/resorts offer different package deals, offering shorter trips like three-day weekends for those of your guests not wanting to incur the cost of an entire week away. If you as a couple want to get away by yourselves, there's always the option to stage the wedding and reception at one resort, and then move to a more private (read: couples) resort for a honeymoon period.

If you're looking to eliminate many of the headaches involved in a more traditional wedding, getting married in Mexico or the Caribbean, or even on a cruise, might just be the answer you're looking for—but as with any

major event in your life, remember to plan carefully, so that when you hop on that plane the last thing on your mind is whether or not your fiancé's best man has forgotten to pack the rings.