

# Destination: I DO



BY LUDMILLA ALEXANDER



## Pack your bags for a getaway wedding and then stick around for the honeymoon

WHAT DO DESERTS, VINEYARDS, SPAS, MOUNTAINTOPS, RIVERS AND ISLANDS have in common? Bridal couples. Destination weddings are quickly becoming the trendy venues for tying the knot. They occur on windswept bluffs overlooking the skyscrapers of San Francisco, off chairlifts on top of snow-covered mountains, or just about any location that provides a dramatic setting for the greatest adventure of all: marriage.

Way back when, the bride's parents might have pitched a tent in their backyard for the wedding reception after a ceremony in the local church. But those days are quickly becoming as quaintly old-fashioned as the proverbial blushing bride.

Nothing wrong with a close-to-home wedding, of course, and many couples still prefer to exchange vows within a comfortable circle of friends, family and neighbors. But in the past decade, destination weddings have tripled in popularity, rising up to 30% of the total. That figure is now soaring like a hot air balloon, which, by the way, is another favorite place to tie the knot these days.

In the air or on the sea, or somewhere in between, dressed in traditional wedding attire, couples toast their future life together romantically by themselves or surrounded by friends and relatives who have come along for the ceremony and a mini vacation of their own.

Where to go for a honeymoon? Nowhere. The destination wedding site will do just fine, thanks, at least for openers. After all, the convenience of getting married at your honeymoon spot is all part of the attraction.

Often footing the bill themselves, peripatetic bridal couples sometimes forego the traditional walk down the aisle for strategic, as well as romantic, reasons. Far from home, it's much easier

to avoid arguments over such details as guest lists, religious ceremonies or seating arrangements. While first-time bridal couples look for romantic settings and dress in traditional wedding attire, second-time brides and grooms are more likely to go the hot air balloon route for their marriage ceremonies, or gurgle their vows underwater in full scuba gear. They are also inclined to plan unique touches, such as asking a shaman to marry them or arranging for the bride to arrive by outrigger canoe with conch shells blowing.

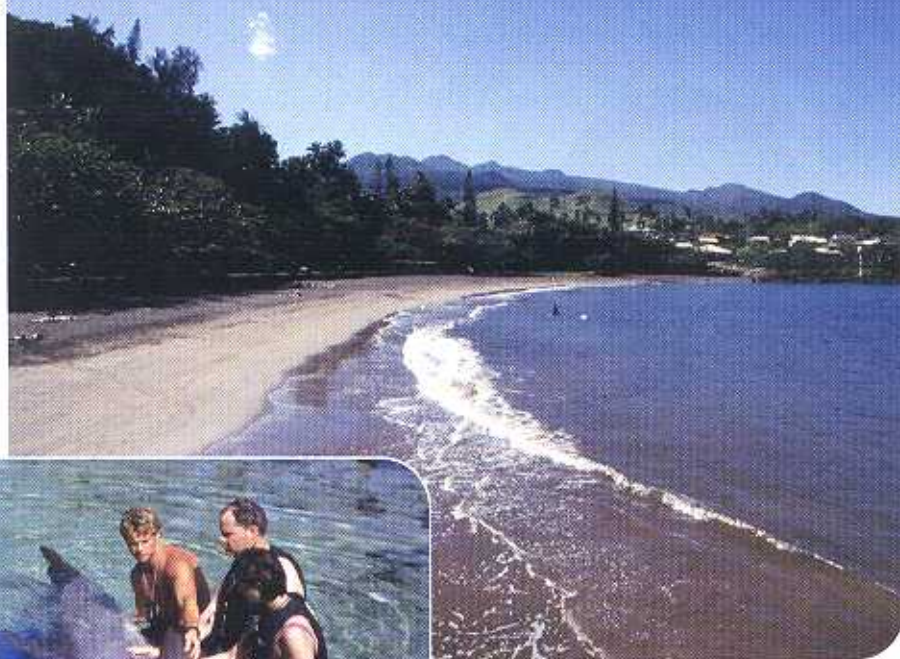
If you decide that a destination wedding is a good match for you, consider the following locations for your event. Also, don't forget that resorts, cruise ships, hotels and attractions employ wedding coordinators whose primary job is to make the experience as hassle-free as possible.

### On an Island

Hawaii is one of the most popular destinations for California brides because of its tropical beauty, warm weather and colorful culture. Plus, there's plenty to do during the honeymoon, including swimming in the surf, cruising on a catamaran and snorkeling in crystal-clear waters.

Maui is the most popular island for destination weddings, with dozens of beautiful beaches full of soft sand in shades of white, gold and

One of Maui's beautiful beaches (below); making new friends (inset).



black. One example is Maluaka Beach, located on the west side of Maui, away from the crowds. Some 400 couples say "I do" annually, standing either by the lapping waves or on a tree-shaded lawn overlooking Turtle Cove, a favorite swimming and sunbathing spot for turtles.

The 1,800-acre Maui Prince Hotel with its beautifully landscaped Japanese gardens and koi ponds is located in Makena next to Maluaka Beach. The hotel's Romance Specialists can arrange every detail of the wedding, from obtaining a marriage license to booking a photographer.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** Check out the various catamarans that sail daily for crescent-shaped Molokini Crater. With visibility ranging from 80 to 150 feet, snorkelers can see turtles, tropical fish and other sea life swimming in underwater coral gardens.

THE ISLAND OF KAUAI is even more visually spectacular because of its lush rain forests, deep Waimea Canyon and steep-sided Na Pali Coast, offering one of the world's best hiking trails. Because of such scenery, couples have been creative with their ceremonies. Some have married in a helicopter hovering over the canyon or waterfalls, exchanging vows through a two-

way intercom system. Others have wed on horseback after riding to a waterfall. Still others promised "forever" in the beautiful green 1912 Waioli Huiia Church in Hanalei with stained-glass windows.

The Princeville Resort on the North Shore of Kauai offers an awesome setting for a wedding on the beach overlooking Hanalei Bay and the green cliffs of "Bali Hai." The hotel's wedding coordinator can set up a white tent on the beach for a lavish wedding reception, or the new husband and wife can dine in a private ocean-side cabana.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** Because Kauai is so beautiful, Hollywood has filmed many movies here, including *Jurassic Park*, *Six Days and Seven Nights* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. See some of these magnificent vistas for yourselves by kayaking with Aloha Tours up the Huleia River to picnic in a tropical forest, swim in a mountain pool and swing on the rope made famous by *Indiana Jones*. There is even an underwater lava tube to explore, which was once used by a Kauai chieftain to hide from his enemies.

ON THE BIG ISLAND OF HAWAII, volcanoes are the major attraction, with the Kilauea Crater actually spewing red-hot lava near the ocean. As a result, many of the hotels are built on ancient lava flows rather than on sand. One of the best resorts for weddings and honeymoons is the Hilton Waikoloa Village on the Kohala Coast. Guests stay in towers spread all over

the grounds and travel from their rooms to the pools and restaurants via mahogany boats, on air-conditioned trams, or meandering along flagstone walkways.

The "Hale Aloha" wedding pavilion overlooking Waiulua Bay is the site for all weddings. The basic package costs \$1,500, which includes use of the pavilion, services of a non-denominational minister, two leis and two roses, a bottle of champagne, a small wedding cake and a "Just Married" boat ride after the ceremony. (Note: Catholic priests are not allowed to marry couples in the pavilion or anywhere else on the islands because the Hawaii Diocese does not recognize wedding ceremonies performed outside the church.)

Of course, many more amenities can be added to the basic package at an additional cost. These include salon services for the bride, videography, the services of a Hawaiian duo for an hour and chocolate strawberries at evening turndown.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** If the Big Island is your chosen site, book in advance a hands-on encounter with dolphins. Dolphin Quest operates a model habitat for bottlenose dolphins in the Waikoloa Village lagoon and offers several programs of up-close and personal experiences.

ANOTHER OPTION to say "I do" is a wedding cruise in Hawaii. All three NCL cruise ships in Hawaii have wedding chapels onboard where an officiant legally pronounces a couple to be husband and wife. Included in the package are a personalized wedding ceremony arranged by the ship's wedding coordinator, recorded ceremony music, a marriage certificate, wedding cake, a bottle of champagne and photography service.

Additional special touches that wedding couples can order include artistic tropical flower arrangements, musicians and entertainers, videography, salon services and invitations.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** During the seven-day cruise to four islands, dozens of shore excursions are offered, from helicopter rides to zipline rides through treetops. You can also see red lava flowing into the ocean as you cruise at night along the coast of the Big Island. In short, your honeymoon onboard ship can be as active or as quiet as you desire.

## Some have married in a helicopter hovering over the canyon or waterfalls, exchanging vows through a two-way intercom system.

### In the Desert

Perhaps it's the timelessness of nature, or the area's mysticism, or the looming, red rock monoliths. Whatever the reason, Sedona, Arizona, has become a popular wedding site for couples who love the spirituality of the outdoors. It's not unusual to see an American Indian shaman performing a ritual on a hiking trail, shaking a rattle and rain stick over a bridal couple dressed in serapes.

Native Americans have, in fact, performed sacred ceremonies of all kinds in red rock country for centuries. More recently, healers, intuitives and spiritual guides have been drawn to the area because of vortex sites where, supposedly, the earth's energy heals and leads to self-awareness. Visitors to Sedona are as awed by these New Age spiritualists as they are by the Mogollon Rim and other strange-looking stone formations. Few towns have so many stores selling healing stones, crystals and incense as does Sedona.

For bridal couples, views of the rock formations on their wedding day are of major importance. L'Auberge de Sedona, one of the best hotels in town, has vistas of

the gigantic red rocks both in the garden and on the hillside lawn area. An intimate wedding package for 15 guests or fewer includes the services of a wedding specialist, use of an indoor or outdoor ceremony site, a bridal bouquet and groom's boutonniere, a one-hour wedding photography session, wedding cake, champagne toast and a one-night stay.

El Portal, a 12-room bed-and-breakfast inn constructed from adobe, resembles a hacienda, with 18-inch walls, a courtyard and a fountain. You'll have trouble not falling in love with the building itself. The hand-sculpted walls, high ceilings and archways all lend a romantic atmosphere.

Casa Sedona is an award-winning bed-and-breakfast conceived by a protégé of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The views of Thunder Mountain are spectacular, and bridal couples have a choice of several locations for their ceremony.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** *Make time to go on a "Broken Arrow Tour" offered by Pink Jeep Tours. Although your backside will take a pounding on the two-hour ride, you won't believe how easily the jeep climbs impossibly steep rocks and inclines.*

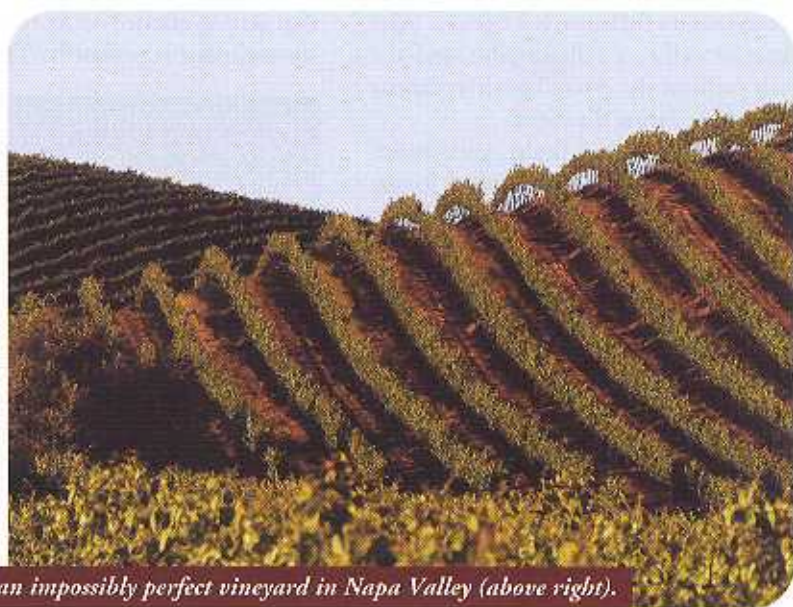
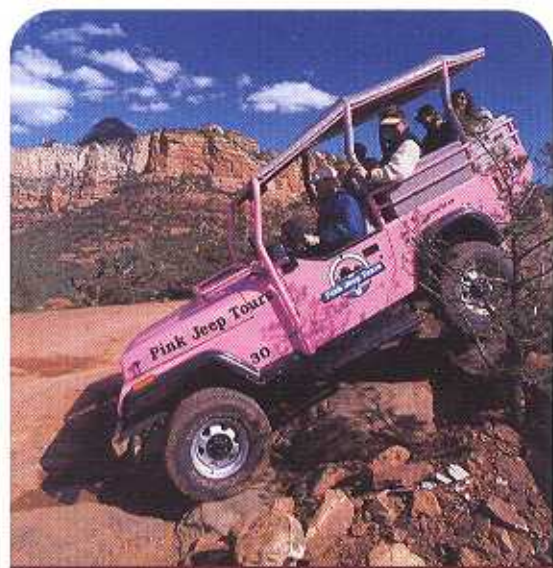
### Among the Vines

Row upon row of vines full of luscious grapes growing on the gently rolling hills of Napa Valley suggest a life of good food, good wine and good friends. No wonder bridal couples are inspired to be married there. Pop diva Christina Aguilera was the latest celebrity to do so last November at a small family vineyard in Rutherford.

Unfortunately, the number of wineries where nuptials can be held in Napa are few. Last October, the County Board of Supervisors voted to keep the number down because of issues concerning property use and use permits.

Nevertheless, couples with their hearts set on a wedding among the vines still have some options. V. Sattui Winery in St. Helena, founded in 1885, can hold nuptials at several sites on its two-acre property, including the front of a massive stone building with a stone fountain. Receptions are held in the winery's cellar, where bottled wines age in caves behind wrought-iron gates. Another possibility is the Hans Falden Winery, a licensed indoor-outdoor facility in Calistoga, located at the far end of Napa Valley. Here, in addition to several outdoor locations, bridal couples can also choose to be married in a volcanic ash cave.

The Harvest Inn, located in St. Helena, isn't a winery but it has a beautiful Vineyard Terrace next to the Whitehall Lane Winery that makes a romantic setting.



Rock on with Pink Jeep Tours in Sedona (above left); an impossibly perfect vineyard in Napa Valley (above right).

*Pronounce your vows aloft—perched high above Napa Valley.*



## Second-time brides and grooms are more likely to go the hot air balloon route for their marriage ceremonies, or gurgle their vows underwater in full scuba gear.

With flowers perfuming the air in the beautifully landscaped garden, the bride and groom are only yards away from the grapevines.

Of course, non-vineyard settings are plentiful in Napa Valley and just as spectacular. They include hotels, country clubs, restaurants, a state park, a culinary institute, the Napa Opera House and COPIA, which is a food and wine museum.

You can also marry in a hot air balloon, hugging your new spouse as you fly over the valley. Joyce Bowen, owner of Bonaventura Balloons, is a licensed minister as well as a balloon pilot, and she can perform the ceremony either before takeoff or during the flight.

After the magical flight, your entire party can go to the Meadowood Resort for a celebratory champagne breakfast.

Two major resorts, Silverado and Meadowood, are popular for nuptials and receptions held on their well-manicured lawns and gardens or inside banquet rooms. Guests of the resort are able to enjoy tennis, golf, fine dining and spa services.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** *Whether you tie the knot in the air or not, take a hot air balloon ride. The sensation is one of surprising quiet as you drift over the lush valley that has become world-famous for its fine wines.*

### Down a River

Ever since 1803, when Meriwether Lewis and William Clark trekked across the U.S. and then paddled down one waterway after another to learn about western geography and indigenous people, rivers are loved by Oregonians. Today, riverboat cruises along the Columbia and Willamette Rivers are popular with locals and visitors as they enjoy 360-degree vistas of the gorge, the river and the legendary fishing platforms used by Native Americans.

Bridal couples, in turn, have discovered that getting married on an old-fashioned sternwheeler is romantic. The captain

himself performs the ceremony on land, onboard, on river's edge or even in the wheelhouse while family and friends beam with happiness.

The *Sternwheeler Rose*, a 120-passenger red, white and black sternwheeler, is a bridal riverboat that cruises the Willamette River underneath nine bridges. Bald eagles fly overhead while osprey catch fish and river otters paddle alongside. *Sternwheeler Rose's* wedding package includes the ceremony, plus a 2-hour cruise, hors d'oeuvres, champagne, printed wedding invitations and napkins, wedding cake, floral package, a wedding coordinator and bartender's fee. Cost for 50 guests is \$3,795.

Another riverboat is the 300-passenger, triple-decker paddlewheeler named the *Sternwheeler Columbia Gorge*. Cruising through the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, the red and white sternwheeler offers bridal parties a variety of options, including several locations for the ceremony, a choice of renting the entire vessel or only one deck, plus the option of treating guests to Oregon's famous salmon bake prepared in the park.

A third is the *Portland Spirit*, a sleek, white dinner ship that can hold 350 seated passengers or 540 guests at a reception. Weddings on the *Portland Spirit*, as well as her sister ships, are elegant affairs with Northwest cuisine prepared in the galley onboard. Choices range from a delicious brunch to a complete sit-down dinner.

Of course, the new marrieds will want to stay on the river for their honeymoon. RiverPlace Hotel in Portland is located on

*The Portland Spirit dinner ship can hold 540 guests at a reception.*



PHOTOS COURTESY WWW.SILVERADERESORT.COM (TOP); WWW.PORTLANDSPIRIT.COM (BOTTOM)

the Willamette River, with oversized guest rooms and a grand lobby with a library and fireplace. Located within walking distance of the downtown area, the River-Place Hotel is the flagship of the Larkspur Collection of hotels.

Another choice is the Avalon Hotel & Spa, a boutique hotel in the South Water-front District along the Willamette River. Its marble baths, plush bathrobes and evening turndown are wonderful amenities, as is the complimentary town car service to downtown locations.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** Ride a high-speed excursion boat called the *Outrageous to the Bonneville Dam*, to Astoria on the ocean, or underneath Portland's famous bridges. Offered by the *Portland Spirit River Cruise* company, the ride gives you chills and thrills, as well as interesting historical insights into the area.

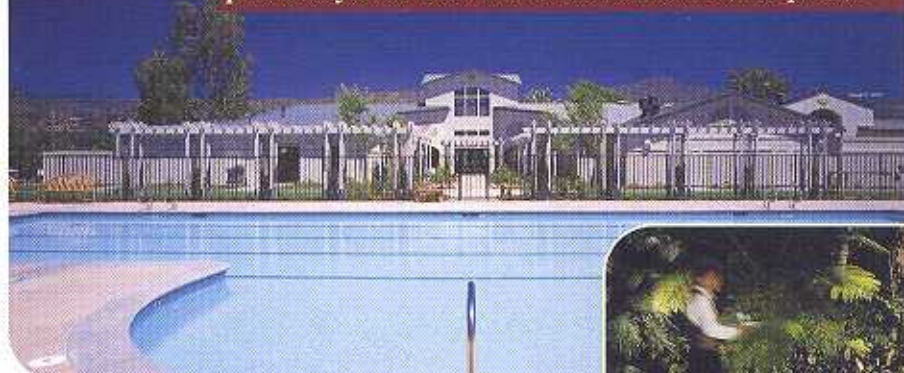
## At a Spa

Who says weddings have to be stressful? Plan your wedding and honeymoon at a luxurious hotel with a fabulous spa where you can start the festivities with friends and family members already in a mellow mood. One of the best is the Spanish Colonial-style Four Seasons Resort Santa Barbara, with its red tile roofs, adobe walls and graceful archways. Its newly renovated spa building is light and airy, with breathtaking views of the ocean across the street. Highly trained therapists offer a variety of massages, facials, body wraps and salon services.

Wedding consultants at the hotel are experts at organizing spare-no-expense weddings and receptions. Only superior linens, cutlery, china and glassware are used. The chef can prepare anything from an intimate family brunch to a sophisticated cocktail buffet to a grand reception banquet. For the day after the nuptials, arrange either a champagne breakfast in your guest room or suite, a candle-lit dinner in your room, or a romantic picnic basket for two.

**HONEYMOON TIP:** Schedule a *Sunset Sanctuary couples' package* where two therapists knead out all the stress in your bodies with a reflexology treatment and a full body stone massage. You are then served a three-course dinner by a butler on the balcony of the *Westwind Suite* as you watch the sun set into the Pacific.

*Spectacular Silverado is a popular wedding destination (below); pure luxury at the Four Seasons-Santa Barbara (inset photo).*



## Destination Details

Click or call for more information on these nuptial/honeymoon possibilities:

### On an Island

Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau. [www.gohawaii.com](http://www.gohawaii.com); 800/464-2924.  
 Maui Visitors Bureau. [www.visitmaui.com](http://www.visitmaui.com); 808/244-3530.  
 Prince Resort, Maui. [www.princeresortshawaii.com](http://www.princeresortshawaii.com); 800/321-6284.  
 Kauai Visitors Bureau. [www.kauaivisitorsbureau.com](http://www.kauaivisitorsbureau.com); 800/262-1400.  
 Princeville Resort. [www.princeville.com](http://www.princeville.com); 800/826-4400.  
 Aloha Tours. [www.hawaiikayaks.com](http://www.hawaiikayaks.com); 808/246-6804.  
 Hilton Waikoloa Village, Big Island. [www.hiltonwaikoloavillage.com](http://www.hiltonwaikoloavillage.com); 808/886-1234.  
 Norwegian Cruise Line. [www.ncl.com](http://www.ncl.com); 866/234-0292.

### In the Desert

Sedona wedding information. [www.sedonaweddings.com](http://www.sedonaweddings.com); 800/551-0448.  
 Sedona Tourism Bureau. [www.visitsedona.com](http://www.visitsedona.com); 800/288-7336.  
 L'Auberge de Sedona Resort. [www.lauberge.com](http://www.lauberge.com); 800/272-6777.  
 El Portal Bed and Breakfast. [www.innsedona.com](http://www.innsedona.com); 800/313-0017.  
 Casa Sedona Inn. [www.casasedona.com](http://www.casasedona.com); 800/525-3756.  
 Pink Jeep Tours. [www.pinkjeep.com](http://www.pinkjeep.com); 800/873-3662.

### Among the Vines

Napa Valley wedding information. [www.napavalleyweddings.com](http://www.napavalleyweddings.com)  
 V. Sattui Winery. [www.vsattui.com](http://www.vsattui.com); 707/286-7273.  
 Hans Fahden Vineyards. [www.hansfahden.com](http://www.hansfahden.com); 800/929-6760.  
 Harvest Inn. [www.harvestinn.com](http://www.harvestinn.com); 800/950-8466.  
 Bonaventura Balloon Company. [www.bonaventuraballoons.com](http://www.bonaventuraballoons.com); 800/FLY-Napa  
 Silverado Resort. [www.silveradoresort.com](http://www.silveradoresort.com); 707/257-0200.  
 Meadowood Resort. [www.meadowood.com](http://www.meadowood.com); 800/458-8080.

### Down a River

Sternwheeler Rose. [www.sternwheelerrose.com](http://www.sternwheelerrose.com); 503/286-7673.  
 Sternwheeler Columbia Gorge. [www.sternwheeler.com](http://www.sternwheeler.com); 800/224-3901.  
 Portland Spirit River Cruises. [www.portlandspirit.com](http://www.portlandspirit.com); 800/224-3901.  
 RiverPlace Hotel. [www.riverplacehotel.com](http://www.riverplacehotel.com); 800/227-1333.  
 Avalon Hotel & Spa. [www.avalonhotelandspa.com](http://www.avalonhotelandspa.com); 503/802-5800.

### At a Spa

Four Seasons Resort Santa Barbara. [www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara/](http://www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara/); 805/969-2261. ■