

Been There, Done That

Four couples who hosted breathtaking soirées across the globe share the ins and outs of organizing a destination wedding. And they've convinced us: Planning this type of wedding doesn't need to be a headache. **BY ALLISON BEAN**



Melissa & Jonathan

December 20, 2008

Paradise Island, Bahamas

When it came to selecting a location for their December wedding, Melissa Abell and Jonathan Cauff let sentiment guide them to the One&Only Ocean Club in the Bahamas. "It's a special place for us," Melissa explains. "We took one of our first vacations there and it's where we got engaged." For the Miami-based couple, choosing the Bahamas was as convenient as it was romantic—the hour-long flight made it easy for them to visit the island several times before their wedding.

To make planning the trip easier on their guests, Melissa and Jonathan blocked rooms at their venue and at The Cove Atlantis, and posted this information on their wedding website. "Both hotels offered us a great group rate," the bride says. Rather than compiling an itinerary of guest activities, the couple kept it simple and hosted only two events:



a welcome barbecue and a farewell brunch. "There is so much to do in the Bahamas," Melissa explains. "We wanted our guests to have the freedom to do what they wanted."

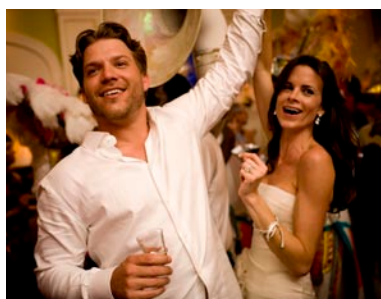
Bernadette Burrows, of Bahamas Bridal Affairs, put Melissa in touch with many local vendors, including her officiant, Matthew Sweeting. "He is such an amazing person and really made our ceremony fun and memorable," says Melissa.

The couple exchanged vows at the Versailles Gardens, which overlooks the spot where Jonathan had proposed. As the couple exited the ceremony, guests threw paper airplanes that Jake, the groom's seven-year-old nephew, had made—a nod to Jonathan's career in the aviation industry. "He spent days folding and testing the planes to be sure

they flew to his standards," Melissa says.

While she was willing to communicate with her florist via e-mail and to choose linens sight unseen, there were some elements over which Melissa wanted more control. "Music is really important to us and we didn't want to risk such a large part of the weekend on an unknown," she says. Melissa flew in not one but two musical guests. Pianist Brendan O'Hara performed during cocktail hour. "He's an amazing entertainer, and we knew he would get the party started right," she says. Later that night, DJ Irie spun a mix of tunes. The couple also arranged for a Junkanoo band, which they booked through the resort, to crash the reception. "We wanted to bring the party's energy to the next level," she says. "Our guests loved it!"

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VENDORS

Photos: benchrisman.com

Resort: oneandonlyresorts.com

Guest hotel: thecoveatlantis.com

Wedding planner: bahamasbridalaffairs.com

Officiant: islandpreacha.com

Music: brendanohara.org

DJ: djiirie.com



Maria & Kalon

June 6, 2008
Scandicci, Italy

After an exhaustive search of venues in their hometown of San Francisco, Maria Meneses and Kalon Gutierrez decided to look beyond U.S. borders. “We started with the world map,” says Maria. “Some destinations were too far, others were too stuffy, and others were a bit too out of our comfort zone.” The couple settled on Italy—a place they had both visited, and loved. “We wanted to create an experience for our guests,” she says. “Florence had everything we were looking for. We were able to have a first-class experience abroad for the price of a mediocre event in the U.S.”

Because of the language barrier, Maria hired Carla Casali of Regency San Marino



to communicate with local vendors. “I would scan pictures from magazines and send detailed descriptions of what I wanted,” she says. “At one point I even bought a bouquet of spray roses, took photos, and sent them over to Carla.”

The couple selected Villa Poggio ai Merli, in Scandicci, as their reception site. The 15th-century villa doubled as accommodations; as a thank-you to their guests, they paid a significant portion of the room rate. “It’s unbelievably charming,” Maria says of the venue. “The landscape is impeccable, the rooms exquisite, and the staff very warm.”

As a pre-wedding treat, the couple arranged a wine tasting at the villa. With the help of her planner, Maria invited Marco Stoppioni, the owner of La Buca del Vino, to set up a tasting of local wines and cheeses. “It was great,” she says. “Our guests were able to learn a little about



the area, taste delectable wines from the region, and enjoy each other’s company.”

Maria and Kalon were married at the Church of San Filippo Neri, a Catholic church in the heart of Florence. “The church had a fantastic Renaissance feel,” says the bride. “We loved the paintings and the simplicity of the altar. We kept the décor minimal so guests could enjoy the church’s original beauty.”

After the ceremony, the couple and their 60 guests returned to the villa to celebrate. Guests dined on a variety of dishes, including roast pork, risotto, and grilled vegetables, catered

by Galateo Ricevimenti Firenze-Milano. After the meal, the couple and their guests watched as pastry chefs prepared millefoglie—a dessert made with layers of puff pastry and cream—which served as their wedding cake.

VENDORS

Photos: coopercarras.com
Wedding planner: weddingsitaly.com Reception site: poggioaimerli.com
Catering: galateoricevimenti.com Wine tasting: labucadelvino.it





Sharon & Jeff

January 18, 2009
Negril, Jamaica

Getting married abroad was a natural choice for Sharon Wong and Jeff Roush. The couple, who are both avid travelers, wanted to share this passion with their wedding guests. While looking for a location, Sharon and Jeff kept two things in mind: proximity and affordability, eventually narrowing it down to Jamaica.

"We thought Negril's spectacular limestone bluffs and mellow reggae vibe would be the perfect backdrop," says Sharon. They selected the intimate Tensing Pen resort for their venue. "It was small enough that we could book the

whole resort," she adds. "Doing so guaranteed our guests a special experience and allowed us to have a private wedding, which was very important."

The bride worked closely with wedding planner Ari Kotoski, of Jamaican Journeys, throughout the year-long planning process. "Vendors in the Caribbean tend to work on 'island time,'" says Sharon. "It's important to have someone who knows reputable vendors and who can be there in person to work out the details."

Though Ari was able to handle things island-side, some details fell squarely on Sharon's shoulders—like figuring out how to transport boxes of Tiffany blue and red lanterns, programs, and favors. "We decided to put everything in suitcases that

traveled with us—a lot of suitcases," she says. It was well worth carrying a few additional pieces of luggage to avoid the worry and hassle of shipping such a large quantity of goods.

The day before the wedding, the couple took everyone on a catamaran cruise (arranged through Wild Thing Water Sports) to Half Moon Bay, a secluded beach. During the five-hour trip, guests had an opportunity to snorkel around a nearby reef. Upon reaching their destination, the group enjoyed a hearty lunch of barbecued chicken, rice, and johnnycakes.

On the wedding day, the bride walked down the aisle to music played by Sharp Steel, a steel-drum band that the couple booked through their planner. "The music was soft and airy and perfectly suited the cliffside location," says Sharon.

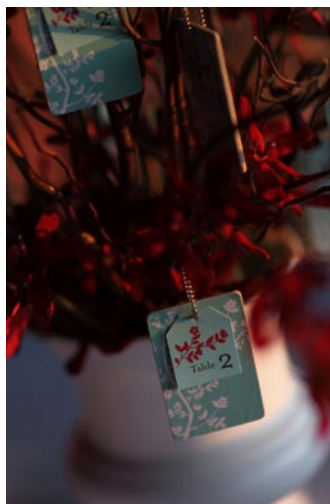
At the reception, guests were guided to their seats by escort cards that hung from branches. The cards, which doubled as favors, were actually luggage tags that the bride found online.

At the reception, which was catered by the resort, the couple and their 40 guests dined on jerk lobster tail and lemongrass sautéed shrimp. After dinner, guests danced to music provided by DJ Gemini from the nearby club, The Jungle.

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VENDORS

Photos: generationphotography.com Resort: tensingpen.com Cruise: wildthingwatersportsnegril.com Escort cards: weiopensecret.etsy.com Wedding coordinator: negriljamaicaweddings.com DJ: junglennegril.com



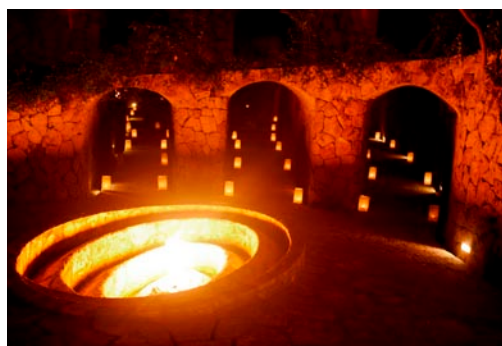


Sunny & Tim

May 10, 2008
Riviera Maya, Mexico

With friends and family scattered across the globe, Sunny Crisantes Ramos and Timothy Fourteau knew a destination wedding was the best option for them. "I wanted to go back to the country where I grew up," says the bride. "I'm Mexican, and my husband is French, so a destination wedding was a good way to unite our families."

Family played an important role in the selection of their reception site as well. "Many years ago my brothers attended a wedding at Xcaret, an eco-park and nature reserve," Sunny says. "They could not stop talking about it. They told me that when I was to be married, Xcaret should be the place." Without even visiting the venue, the couple put down a deposit. "No one knows me better than my brothers," says the bride. "I trusted them completely."



The couple exchanged vows at sunset during a Catholic ceremony at the St. Francis of Assisi Chapel. "We wanted to keep things simple for our guests," she says. "The ceremony, cocktail hour, and reception were all at Xcaret, but held in different areas. This made things interesting but not complicated."

Per regulations in Mexico, the couple had a second, civil ceremony following the Catholic service.

Lime, mango, and strawberry margaritas were offered to guests as they arrived at the second ceremony location—a secluded jungle area set in front

of Mayan ruins. Friends and family surrounded the couple as they signed the marriage license in front of a judge.

The reception was held at La Isla Xcaret, a restaurant in a dramatic cenote cave with underground rivers running along its inner walls. "I wanted to create a surreal contrast between the natural terrain of our venue and the polished décor," Sunny says.

She worked with local wedding planner and event designer Armando Elizondo, who she says flawlessly executed her vision. Tables were covered with white linens and set with white china on bold pewter

chargers. Centerpieces included dramatic silver trees decorated with roses and crystals. The bride, who is a pastry chef in New York City, created the wedding dessert—devil's food cake with layers of chocolate mousse and passion fruit curd.

As guests entered the reception, they were greeted with a lively performance by Mariachi Alma Mexicana, whom the couple booked through their planner. Later in the evening, guests danced as the group Balance la Banda played. "Despite the hot weather, Tim and I spent the entire night on the dance floor," says the bride.



VENDORS

Photos: delsolphotography.com
Reception: xcaretweddings.com
Wedding planner: armandoelizondo.com
Dance band: balancelabanda.com