

Off the Beach: Caribbean Weddings in Unique Venues

By Ed Wetschler - June 1, 2017

The classic island wedding on a beach will never lose its appeal, nor should it. The Caribbean represents romance, nature, beauty and warmth, so what's not to like? Still, many couples want to tie the knot in a setting that's different from the one where their friends got married, so here are four recommendations for wedding venues that are not resort beaches. Some aren't even within sight of the sea, but all are wondrously romantic.

Sugar Cane Vows

The Buccaneer; St Croix, USVI

From the 1600s into the twentieth century, sugar cultivation and processing drove much of the Caribbean economy. When The Buccaneer opened in 1947, it helped end St. Croix's dependence on agriculture, but the Armstrong family, which owns the resort, has preserved their land's links to the past, which include a classic brick sugar mill. Couples with small wedding parties can get married and even enjoy a celebratory dinner in the sugar mill, which the staff decorates with native flowers. For larger groups, the mill serves as the backdrop for the ceremony, and then the reception is held in the main building, also a historic landmark.

In part because U.S. citizens don't need a passport to visit the USVI, The Buccaneer often attracts large wedding groups—the average being 30 to 40 people, and up to 65 people can attend weddings with the mill serving as a backdrop. The *Hibiscus Package* offers a rough idea of costs: about \$9,500, excluding a live band, for a party of 20. Room rates start at approximately \$300, or \$400 for a *Luxury Ocean View*. Agents earn commission on the accommodations but not the wedding.

Thai the Knot

Zemi Beach House Hotel & Spa, Anguilla

Plenty of Caribbean spas offer touches of the Far East, from stone Buddhas to sitar music, but Zemi Beach House Hotel & Spa, a recent addition to Anguilla's luxury hotel scene, tops that by having a 300-year-old wooden Thai house as the centerpiece of its spa. The Zemi Thai House Spa's garden, an Eden of serenity, can accommodate wedding ceremonies and celebratory dinners for up to 50 people. The *Thai House Spa* deck, which offers views of the water, is ideal for a cocktail reception.

Weddings are so customized at this resort that it's hard to pinpoint a typical cost, but according to weddings coordinator Jennifer Liebsack, most run between \$12,000 and \$25,000. Retail travel agents do not earn commissions on the weddings, but they do earn 15 percent on the rooms. Even the smallest of Zemi Beach House's 54 rooms (it also offers nine 2- and 3-bedroom suites) is 535- to 600 sq. ft. Room rates start at about \$430, including tax. A 700-sq.-ft. *Luxury Ocean View King* starts at \$740.

Derring Do Meets "I Do"

Sugar Beach, A Viceroy Resort, Saint Lucia

"When someone thinks of the Caribbean—Saint Lucia, to be precise—they think of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Pitons: the forest, the shades of green, the sound of birds," says Anisha Maximin, groups and events manager at Sugar Beach, A Viceroy Resort. "To me, getting married in the Pitons is a unique experience that screams romance in its purest form."

Maximin can arrange weddings for fit couples at the summit of Gros Piton (yes, it's a trek), after which, she says, "we encourage guests to indulge in a couple's massage and then enjoy a relaxed, private dinner at their villa patio, on the beach, or in a poolside cabana." However, Sugar Beach weddings on a suspension bridge near a waterfall, on the Pitons' lower slopes, are far more accessible. The bridge ceremony accommodates up to 10, and the typical cost for the ceremony and a banquet for 10, including flowers, a band, etc., is about \$6,000. Sugar Beach pays agents commission on its pre-set weddings, as well as accommodations. Rooms start at about \$525, including taxes, and meal plans are available.

Sacred Setting

One&Only Ocean Club Nassau-Paradise Island, The Bahamas

There's one and only one (get it?) place in the Caribbean region where couples can say their vows in an authentic medieval cloister: the One&Only Ocean Club on Paradise Island. It's there because newspaperman William Randolph Hearst once bought this 12th-century Augustinian cloister from a French monastery and had it dismantled and shipped to the States; then he sold it to A&P heir Huntington Hartford, who shipped it to Paradise Island. Hartford reassembled the ruins on his estate and set it off with formal gardens inspired by Versailles.

So many nonstop flights connect to NAS that North Americans often choose this place for large weddings with as many as 100 guests. (The cloister can fit as many as 200.) A 2-hour location rental costs \$5,000 and includes cold towels for the guests, waiter service, water and pink lemonade, chairs, and a sparkling wine toast. The celebratory dinner can be held in the gardens, and the total tab usually comes to about \$1,100 pp. Travel agents earn commissions on accommodations but not on the wedding ceremony.

Rooms start at about \$890, including tax. That's pricey, but as Nancy Brenner, director of weddings, celebrations, and events, says, "The magic of the cloisters is a touch of Europe within the Caribbean—there's really nothing like it."

Contact Information

The Buccaneer: thebuccaneer.com

One&Only Ocean Club: oneandonlyresorts.com/one-and-only-ocean-club-bahamas

Sugar Beach, A Viceroy Resort: viceroyhotelsandresorts.com/en/sugarbeach/wedding

Zemi Beach House Hotel & Spa: zemibeach.com