

How to Plan an Over-the-Top Destination Wedding and Honeymoon



Various reports put the revenue generated by the wedding industry as high as \$76 billion annually, with average wedding costs reaching new highs year after year (more than \$35,000, excluding honeymoon, according to **The Knot's** most recent **Real Weddings Study**). To help you get your slice of the cake, **Travel Agent** spoke to a number of top experts in the destination weddings and honeymoons market and uncovered several trends and tips on everything from the proposal, places and products to the pitfalls of planning. Here's what we learned:

Destination Proposals

The practice of traveling to a beautiful location to pop the question began to catch on a few years ago, mostly among **Millennials** looking for a cool, splashy way to promote their engagement on social media. And now, **Carolee Higashino**, president and founder of **White Orchid Wedding (WOW)** in **Hawaii**, says the niche is all the rage these days, from simple proposals to elaborate ones on the beach.

"Many couples are booking our services to arrange for their secret surprise by hiring a paparazzi photography session complete with a ceremony site, flowers, champagne and an intimate dinner for two," says Higashino. "Often family and friends are invited as well and appear once the willing participant says yes."

"Resort staff have always been more than willing to lend an assist in this area — and now hotels are beginning to capitalize with special add-on packages," says **Scott Wiseman**, president of **Travel Impressions**. "One of our popular packages is the **Secrets Resorts 'Pop The Question'** package, which features a photo shoot, bouquet of roses, sparkling wine and additional special touches [ranging] from a romantic rose petal- and candle-lined path to the words 'Will you marry me?' written on the sand."

Wiseman also recommends **The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel** in **California**, which offers two proposal packages that have all the trimmings, including a kneeling cushion.

"If you're aware that a proposal is in the works and are not recommending one of these commissionable packages, you're leaving money on the table," says Wiseman. "Beyond financial motivations, helping to make your clients' special day even more memorable is a great way to cement loyalty."

Unusual Weddings / Venues

Perhaps the biggest trend in selecting a wedding type or venue is quite simply avoiding a boring, traditional, ballroom wedding and instead opting for a once-in-a-lifetime ceremony.

"No one is getting married in a box anymore," says **Jenna Mahoney**, travel editor with **Bridal Guide Magazine**. "The days of getting married in a basic ballroom are over because people realize you can be anywhere when you are in a ballroom. People now want a sense of place and a sense of experience."

To avoid a dull celebration, here are a few popular, out-of-the-box types and venues that will wow every guest invited.

Naked Weddings / Vow Renewals: Jamaica's famous all-inclusive, adults-only, clothing-optional resort, **Hedonism II**, is not your average getaway and thus doesn't tote just your basic offerings. Weddings and vow-renewal ceremonies are always complimentary here and the tux and traditional white gown are definitely optional. Wedding packages include a personal wedding planner, a choice of location — whether it be white-sand beaches, lush tropical gardens or waterfall lagoons — a minister, marriage license, champagne, a wedding cake, flowers and music.

Underwater Weddings: Buddy Dive Resort on the **Caribbean** island of **Bonaire** specializes in offering underwater weddings. Their underwater wedding package starts at \$450 per couple and includes dive equipment for bride and groom, an underwater video with editing and music included; and a wedding ceremony at **Buddy's Reef**. Witnesses, champagne and additional services such as photographer, hairdresser and make-up, bridal bouquet, wedding dinner, party with live music are available upon request.

Weddings at a Volcano: Lena Brown of **Largay Travel** recommends clients get married in the **Napali** coast of Hawaii and take a **Zodiac** to a beach that has a stone-hole arch where the 1976 "**King Kong**" movie was filmed on **Kauai**. There is a cabin in the **Hawaii Volcanoes National Park** that you can rent and you have to hike down to it, says Brown.

Higashino tells us that White Orchid Wedding has also organized incredible experiences atop **Maui's** volcano **Haleakala** at sunrise and even performed ceremonies on the **Big Island** near an active lava flow.

"We love utilizing historic and / or culturally significant spots as well as places that have the true essence of Hawaii," she notes.

Get Married in the African Bush: Marsha Carroll of **Travel Beyond** points to **Africa** as a trendy spot for fresh wedding idea, specifically a simple ceremony in the African bush.

"All the planning will be arranged by the safari camp, and the intimate experience offers an unforgettable ceremony," she says. "If you prefer something more traditional with ethnic clothing, a Masai blessing can be arranged."