

The barrel room of a Santa Barbara winery provides a picture perfect setting for an intimate reception with friends and family.

local flavor

You've carefully selected your wedding location and can't wait to share all the fabulous things about it with family and friends. From the food to the favors, here's how to draw inspiration from the beauty, bounty and bridal customs of your destination to give the event an exclusive touch—and your guests a taste of the town. BY ISABELLE GULLÖ

wine country wedding

With their rolling hills, oak-studded grasslands and historic vineyards, wine-producing regions create a most idyllic backdrop for saying "I do." You need little in the way of decoration, culinary offerings abound and, chances are, you can find a venue fairly close to home. "Wine country's scenic beauty speaks for itself," says event planner Robbin Montero of a **Dream Wedding**, specializing in destination nuptials in California's Napa and Sonoma valleys. "And the weather is so beautiful that outdoor events are possible even in the fall."

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Whether you stage your celebration in a garden framed by giant oaks and acres of grapevines, a romantically rustic barn or a castle-like cellar lined with wine barrels, your decor remains simple and inspired by the surroundings. "It can be limited to local seasonal flowers, with infusions of grapes and vines," suggests Montero, the organizer of an annual Napa bridal show. In fact, grapevines can decorate anything from tables to bridal bouquets to wreaths for the women and girls in the ceremony, says planning pro Lisa Light, author of *Destination Bride: A Complete Guide to Planning Your Wedding Anywhere in the World*. "You can wrap wine and whiskey barrels in vine and then fill the casks with saplings, flowers and white lights," she adds. Your cake can be draped with grapes or centered by a beautiful twig harbor with clusters of grapes cascading down the sides.

Candlelight is always a favorite accent and a sweet compliment to those local blooms, Montero says. Or, instead of floral arrangements, create beautiful drip candleholders from wine bottles of different heights and color. "Put five bottles on each table, and be sure to start the dripping pro-

cess before the wedding day to get an authentic look," advises Light, who suggests playing with color schemes of green, burgundy, purple or champagne for the overall decor. For the seating cards, she suggests propping them up with corks, or using corks with slits in them for holders.

BRIDAL RITUALS

Incorporating wine into the ceremony is fun and contemporary, and still gives the event a traditional feel. Similar to the candle, sand or breaking of glass ritual, this custom symbolizes the union of bride and groom. The couple either shares a cup of wine or each person drinks out of a glass with arms interlocked. Make it your own by designing special wine glasses that continue the theme of your event, Light says.

CULINARY OFFERINGS

Each wine region boasts its own "wine country cuisine," incorporating fresh, locally farmed produce, cheeses and vegetables and unique signature dishes by savvy chefs. Wine and food pairings for appetizers and dinners are a popular way to let guests savor regional flavors, suggests Montero, noting that most couples also select a couple of favorite local bottles to share with friends and family. "Some create a signature wine drink or add a port and cigar bar for later in the evening."

Another option is to bottle your own wine and personalize the label (and cork) to carry on the design theme, Light proposes. "You could even name each table after a certain type of wine."

MUSIC + ENTERTAINMENT



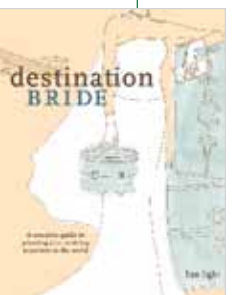
Continue the wine motif at the table with cork seating-card holders and tables named after wine varietals.

No celebration is complete without music. "A winery offers the perfect backdrop for a classical string ensemble to play during the ceremony and cocktail hour," says Montero. At the reception, groove to a fun bluegrass, folk or country band.

GIFTS + FAVORS

Grape jam, a bottle of wine, wine stoppers, seeds and seedlings—the list of locally inspired gifts abound. "Why not create a personalized picnic bag that is big enough to hold a bottle of wine, opener and two glasses," Light says. You can always add cheese and crackers to the mix, along with a map of the wine region and ideal spots to enjoy the picnic.

In *Destination Bride: A Complete Guide to Planning Your Wedding Anywhere in the World*, Lisa Light shares in-depth information about some of the world's most exciting wedding locales, along with helpful planning tips.



Left: Joe Budd Photo. This page: Suzanne Becker Bronk Photography.

caribbean celebration



For ceremonies in the Caribbean, couples don't have to look far for inspiration. The sea, sand and palm trees create a beautiful backdrop for weddings with an island vibe. Right: Steel drums set the mood for a festive reception.

Bridal couples choose the Caribbean as much for its paradisiacal beaches and balmy temperatures as its colorful culture and warmhearted locals. Each tropical isle has something unique to offer, from time-honored culinary customs and bridal rituals to distinctly dazzling wedding venues. Say "I do" barefoot in the sand, by a towering waterfall, on a historic plantation or try tradition with a twist and throw a Caribbean church wedding—an event friends and family will never forget. "I always suggest an off-property location to give guests a taste of the real Caribbean," says coordinator Natalie John of **Dreamy Weddings & Tours**, based in St. Kitts and St. Lucia.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Outdoor venues in the islands lend their own natural beauty. "Try to find ways to tie the space into your theme," says Andrea Thompson, catering manager at **Four Seasons Resort Great Exuma at Emerald Bay** in the Bahamas. "For example, during a welcome dinner with a lobster bake menu you can dress the space up with crab nets, gas lanterns, lobster shells and themed linens." For a beach or garden ceremony, perhaps use a bamboo canopy with a white cover and place palm fronds and conch shells along the aisle or in a circle around the wedding couple. Another idea: create a bamboo or androsia print aisle runner and

use an old coffee tree or branches to make an alter area, says Light, adding, "Putting bamboo poles in the sand with long ribbons tied to the top is also colorful."

For the reception, pair large shells with exotic flowers like orchids, ginger, protea, frangipani or bougainvillea as well as variegated leaves, says Thompson, who always recommends candles for events. "But consider closed containers so that the candles won't blow out," she advises. Light suggests incorporating culinary items such as coffee beans, cinnamon, nutmeg and tropical fruits into arrangements along with special touches like plantation artifacts and local prints, baskets and other handcrafts.

FUN FACT



In Bermuda, a tiny potted cedar tree is used as a cake topper. The bridal couple later plants the tree to grow along with their love

BRIDAL RITUALS

An island ceremony can involve a variety of local traditions. Often, conch shell blowers announce the arrival of the bride, who is walked down the aisle by a junkanoo group while a steel pan band plays "Here Comes the Bride." Today's Caribbean weddings also integrate outside influences like the sand ceremony, lighting of the unity candle and the African ritual of jumping the broom, all symbolizing the joining of two families, explains John, who points out that if it rains during a Caribbean ceremony, "it means the Lord has showered his blessing upon the marriage."

Special rites unique to the region can also be enjoyed during the reception. In Puerto Rico, for instance, a small doll dressed identical to the bride and with souvenirs attached to its dress is placed on the center table. Throughout the party, the bride and groom thank each guest personally by pinning a souvenir onto the person from the doll's dress.

CULINARY OFFERINGS

Each island is known for its cuisine, too. Curried goat and white rice is common at weddings in the French West Indies, while conch is a must during Bahamian celebrations. Conch can be served more formally alongside a tropical fruit salad or grilled to accompany the main course. Lobster and blackened grouper also make popular entrees, and for dessert, many couples dish up the customary rum cake. In Jamaica, let guests sample a variety of regional staples by creating a fun menu of island appetizers, including jerk beef or chicken and fried plantains, and then provide small sips of different rum drinks with each course. Your entrée may consist of seafood or meat served at different degrees of spiciness. "The food in the islands is very tasty and spicy, so let your guests know this beforehand," notes John.

MUSIC + ENTERTAINMENT

While steel drum music sets the tone for a Caribbean ceremony, a reggae band plays into the night to give the reception a true island beat. You can also entertain guests with limbo dancers, fire eaters, moko jumbies (stilt walkers) and magicians. If you hire a DJ, be sure to share the vibe you envision for the celebration.

GIFTS + FAVORS

Thompson proposes locally inspired gifts that are easily packed or that guests can use during their stay. Straw bags, beach towels, sea shells, local rum cake, coconut cups and small bottles of rum are some of her favorites. Or get extra creative and pack cinnamon sticks, nutmeg and coffee in a calabash bowl, placing the goods in beautifully hand-carved or inlaid boxes, Light suggests.



Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort & Spa

Left: Isabelle Gulló. Right: Getty Images.

gran fiesta south of the border

Mexico takes pride in a heritage steeped in warmth, zest and color. "It's as if each region has its own culture," says Light. Beyond the captivating traditions, tasty food and passionate music, you'll find no shortage of bridal venues to choose from, including beautiful haciendas, tropical gardens, historic ruins and white sands beaches framed by swaying palms and impossibly blue surf. Adds Light, "With everything it has to offer, Mexico is set up perfectly for a fiesta."

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Fresh local flowers, ribbons and tropical foliage create a wonderful wedding backdrop, whether used as the frame for a ceremony or as table centerpieces, says Jorge Wolf, event manager at **Aqua Cancun**. "Starfish and sea shells in various shapes are great for adorning beach ceremonies." Although, he notes, "If the wedding reception is on the beach, you won't need much decoration. You already have the sun, sand and surf—what more could you ask for?"

For a formal party, bridal consultant Camelu Millán with **Diseño Nupitals** in Mexico City suggests white linen or yute tablecloths accented by handmade talavera pottery. "You can also use white *papel picado* to decorate as well as to make piñatas," Millán says. What's more, small piñatas

can be turned into lanterns, proposes Light, who also likes accents such as colorful lace and paper banners and drinking glasses with blue rims. "One idea is to design the tables with Mexican blue glass and local artifacts," she says. Other regional influences that can inspire design: multihued mosaic, silver, red roses, parrots and sombreros. "Just have fun with it," Light encourages.

BRIDAL RITUALS

The tradition of the lasso (*lazo*) plays a significant part in many Mexican ceremonies. Symbolizing unity, the lasso, or a large loop of rosary beads, is placed in a figure-eight shape around the bride's and groom's necks after they've taken their vows. Also popular is the rite of the thirteen gold coins (*trece monedas de oro*), which the groom presents to his bride as a pledge of marriage.

A Mayan ceremony is an interactive ritual deeply connected to nature and the universe. At Aqua Cancun, for example, a shaman leads this service and blesses the union by creating an altar for the Mayan gods with fruit, flowers, seeds and fire to represent gifts of prosperity and fertility. Before taking their vows, the bride and groom experience a purification ritual using native copal, burned as incense by the Mayans, explains Wolf. "Together, everyone asks the four elements (fire, earth, water and air) and Mayan gods to guide the couple through a union of light and unconditional love." The bride and groom share the fruit and their vows before guests speak their blessings and shower the two with flower petals.

During this ancient ritual, the couple and guests usually dress in white clothing. But for a conventional wedding, the bride may opt for a dress made of manta to add

a bit of Mexican flair, Millán says. Or she wears a mantilla veil, a dress with flamenco-inspired ruffles or a bolero. For good luck, tradition indicates she should sew three ribbons (in yellow, blue and red) into her lingerie to ensure food, passion and pros-

Mexican wedding cookies add sweetness and tradition to your gran fiesta.

PASTELITOS DE BODA

- 1 cup toasted walnut, pecan or almond pieces
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- 1½ cup unbleached white flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¾ cup non-fat margarine
- ¼ cup light cream cheese
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon almond extract
- 1¼ cup powdered sugar

Magic Mix: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a food processor, mix the nuts, flours, salt, and cinnamon for about 30 seconds. Set aside. In mixer bowl, cream the margarine, light cream cheese and powdered sugar until fluffy. Add and beat vanilla and almond extracts, then the flour mix and blend on low. Roll dough into 1-inch balls and place on nonstick baking sheets. Bake until lightly browned (18 to 20 minutes). Roll the warm cookies in powdered sugar; let cool for 15 minutes and roll in sugar again.



Mexico provides many magical spots to tie the knot. The breathtaking views from this romantic rooftop locale in San Miguel are unforgettable. Left: Margaritas get the party rolling.

perity in times to come. The groom and groomsmen can wear guayabera shirts or suits with silver embroideries, while the ring bearer and flower girls may don traditional Mexican outfits, Light suggests.

CULINARY OFFERINGS

Kick off the welcome party with a tequila tasting at your resort or a local cantina, pairing drinks with local appetizers like ceviche and tacos. "There are hundreds of different types of tequila to make fabulous signature margaritas," says Light. For the reception, Millán recommends nouvelle cuisine mexiquense with entrees such as chile poblano soup and chicken in Jamaica sauce. "It uses a range of sophisticated ingredients mixed with Mexican flavors." Or opt for more typical party food: rice, beans, tortillas, ques-

dillas, mole, seafood fajitas and *pambazos* (savory sandwiches). Mexican wedding cakes are often rum-soaked fruitcakes filled with bits of pineapple, pecans and coconut. You can decorate the cake with a miniature mariachi cake topper or place a white lasso or string of rosary beads around a bride-and-groom cake topper.

MUSIC + ENTERTAINMENT

Sometimes a mariachi band will replace organ music at the ceremony, but the processional traditionally features the organ. Mariachis often play the post-ceremony recessional and sometimes perform at the end of the reception, too. During the party, many couples choose to play Spanish-style music, such as salsa and meringue, flamenco guitar, a guitar trio or marimba.

GIFTS + FAVORS

Look for unique gifts in the straw market—pottery, hemp beach bags, handmade scarves or typical snacks and drinks, Light recommends. "Maybe give bottles of pure vanilla as it's so expensive in States." Other flavorful favors include Mexican wedding cookies, hot sauce, tequila, coffee beans or cocoa.



Send your invitations on traditional *yute* or *amate* paper and use a string to hold the invite. "This is how the recipient knows it's a Mexican party," says Mexico City bridal consultant Camelu Millán.

Pacific Rim “I dos”



There's something innately exotic about Hawaii. Stunning topography, eclectic regional fare and fascinating traditions passed down through generations make the islands a sought-after location to tie the knot. "If you envision lush tropical rainforests, pristine white sand beaches and immaculately sculptured gar-

dens, then Hawaii's for you," attests Maui coordinator Tammy Ash Perkins, founder of *First Class Weddings* and author of *The Best of Hawaii Wedding Book*. "The islands offer some of the world's most breathtaking scenery, and the culture is enchanting. You feel the spirit of aloha from the moment you arrive."

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DESIGN ELEMENTS

Possibilities for decoration are endless. "Tropical flowers and greenery, colorful fruits, tiki torches, kahili bearers, bamboo arches and lava rock are just a few of the accents Hawaii is known for," says Perkins. Also consider island-style bench seating with pillow tops in lieu of traditional chairs along with bamboo canopies, floral archways and elaborate pathways with custom lighting.

Beautiful gardens and lush foliage serve as a natural backdrop for most ceremonies, adds Jill Hamasaki, *Four Seasons Resort Lanai's* wedding specialist. "Couples can enhance the setting with a mix of soft and tropical florals for an elegant feel." Across the islands, find a variety of fabulous homegrown blooms, from stunning hibiscus (the state flower) and fragrant frangipani to cream-colored tuberose blossoms, white pikake and exotic orchids.

BRIDAL RITUALS

A Hawaiian ceremony begins with the blowing of the pu, or conch shell, by an island minister. Leis are exchanged between the bride and groom and often with guests as well. "It's a symbol of embracing one another in love," explains Tim Clark, president of *Hawaiian Island Weddings*. "The head and shoulders are considered sacred, and the placing of the lei is an expression of great honor." Other cultural customs that entertain are torch maidens, hula dancing and canoe processions, Perkins says.

Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) / Tor Johnson



Left: Isabelle Gulló. Right: Stewart Pinsky.



Left: Fragrant frangipani blossoms add a touch of elegance to tabletops, wreaths and leis. Above: Coconut ice cream is a delicious, locally inspired dessert.

CULINARY OFFERINGS

For cocktail hour and the reception, mai tais rank among the favorite libations along with blue Hawaii, lava flow and pineapple iced tea. Or, says Hamasaki, create a signature drink that matches the color scheme of the event, and name the cocktail after the bride and groom or the location.

For the grand dinner, many opt for a traditional Hawaiian luau feast, complete with a pig roast and poi—a traditional island dish made by cooking taro root in an underground oven. Or serve a locally caught fish like mahi-mahi or Pacific blue marlin, which pairs perfectly with a fruit rum cocktail. You can arrange a formal banquet, a festive buffet, a family-style dinner or simply provide *pupu* platters filled with island-style hors d'oeuvres like fried shrimp, dumplings and skewered beef. "Unless you know exactly what to serve, select the main course and

then let your chef provide options for complementary dishes," Perkins recommends. After dinner, introduce such regional sweets as *haupia* (coconut cakes and candies), *moshi*, coconut frosted ice cream, chocolate-

dipped pineapple chunks, lilikoi sorbet, Big Island chocolates or macadamia nut treats.

MUSIC + ENTERTAINMENT

Hawaiian music offers a range of traditional and popular styles, from romantic acoustic guitars, ukulele and native drums to luau shows with hula and fire knife performers. "Music and dance are as important as the culinary component in capturing the essence of aloha," Hamasaki notes.

GIFTS + FAVORS

"Imagine chocolate-covered macadamia nuts, white chocolate sea shells, fragrant plumeria-scented floating candles or individually designed, island-themed confections," says Perkins. Make gifts extra exceptional with custom-designed, edible thank you tags representing Hawaii's native wonders.

LANAI BREEZE

(*Four Seasons Resorts Lanai's signature cocktail*)

- 1.5 oz Absolute vodka
- 3 oz guava juice
- 3 oz pineapple juice

Magic Mix: Stir gently and serve in a colada (hurricane) glass over cubed ice. Garnish with a pineapple wedge and cherry (orchid blossom optional).

