

10 TOP WEDDING DESTINATIONS WITHIN 3 HOURS OF YOUR HOMETOWN

by Erika Hueneke



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PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATIONS: SHUTTERSTOCK



BAHAMAS 3 hrs, 20 mins on United

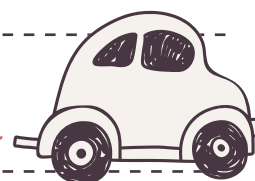


Believe it or not, there's more to Nassau than the pink resort megalopolis of Atlantis. The country's capital city is rich in history, from pastel British-colonial buildings to the circa-1793 Queen's Staircase, a limestone landmark that makes for Indiana Jones-worthy photo ops. For nightlife, a 10-minute taxi ride brings you to Cable Beach's 2.5 miles of white sand and high-rise resorts. Bonus: Travelers clear U.S. Customs at the airport

before leaving the Bahamas, so no snaking lines on the return home. **STAY** You might recognize the 107-room **One&Only Ocean Club** from Daniel Craig's first turn as James Bond in *Casino Royale*. Its 1,100-square-foot beachfront suites are bigger than your first apartment, and a new oceanside infinity pool debuted in 2015. But the real draw is the Euro-tropical wedding setting on the grounds: the terraced, statuary-filled Versailles Gardens and

13th-century stone Cloister imported from France. "Sunset weddings are extremely popular at the Cloister, usually followed by a reception around the garden's lily pond," says butler manager Dustin Morton. Other event spaces include the Beach Deck and a private dining area at the hotel's Bahamian-influenced French-Asian restaurant, Dune, by Jean-Georges Vongerichten. *Rooms from \$715; weddings from \$5,000, plus food and beverage.* — Jennifer Ceaser

KOHLER, WISCONSIN 2 hrs, 30 mins on I-94

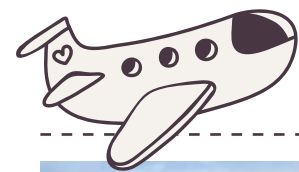


Home of the bath-fixture empire, Kohler is a surprising little tourist village dotted with boutiques and cafes. Throw a welcome bash at the Kohler Design Center, where staff has been known to fill hot tubs with bottles of bubbly or New Glarus craft beer. Fuel up with raspberry truffle lattes at Craverie Chocolatier Café, host a 'maids meditation sesh at Yoga on the Lake, or clink champagne while getting polished at the Kohler Waters

Spa. Groomsmen can play a round of golf at Whistling Straits, where Tiger has teed off (the course is also a classic event venue set along the windswept shores of Lake Michigan). Rally the whole wedding party for a hike at Kohler-Andrae State Park. **STAY** Rustic and Victorian — think Lord Crawley's country home — **The American Club** is a Tudor-style mansion boasting stone fireplaces and portraits of former presidents. Welcome guests with a gourmet

Wisconsin-cheese and wine pairing in the cozy Library Bar. Hold a ceremony among the blooms in the Gazebo Courtyard, followed by a lavish reception in the Great Lakes Ballroom. Kohler Original Recipe Chocolate (one of Oprah's favorite things) can be custom-packaged in your wedding colors. And couples who book an event with more than 100 guests receive a comped one-night stay. *Rooms from \$180; weddings from \$800.* — Sarah Wolf

QUICK FLIGHT
from
New York
City
OR EASY DRIVE



BERMUDA

2 hrs, 20 mins on JetBlue, AA & Delta



Though not part of the Caribbean, this British overseas territory — marooned in the Atlantic Ocean 600 miles from the coast of North Carolina — retains a tropical-island vibe, albeit genteel. Men's formalwear consists of shorts, sport jackets and long socks, and you wouldn't stop a stranger for directions without first asking, "How do you do?" Pubs and pink beaches coexist in perfect harmony (Stonehole Bay is popular for

I do's), and visitors whiz past crumbly stone walls and the boulder-strewn coastline on scooters (there are no rental cars). Wedding traditions are rich — walk through a moon-gate arch for good luck, serve cakes wrapped in gold and silver leaf, and plant a sapling in honor of your union. **STAY** The Reefs' appeal is equal parts service (the staff knows you by name) and setting (the clifftop perch served as backdrop for a Vineyard Vines catalog

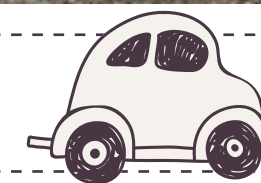
photo shoot). Caso's Point, a wooden deck hovering over a secluded slice of sand, is tops for ceremonies, while reception feasts of Bermuda rockfish are held at Coconuts restaurant. The soundtrack: a local Gombey performance or a steel-pan artist. If your gang gets a little carried away with rum swizzles, there are worse places to end up than the infinity pool, carved into the cliff seven stories above the shore. *Rooms from \$360; weddings from \$3,895.*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ROWELL PHOTOGRAPHY; THE REEFS; ROWELL PHOTOGRAPHY



THE POCONOS

2 hrs, 40 mins on I-80



Waterfalls and water parks. Antique shopping and all-you-can-eat brunch. Hiking and heart-shaped tubs. Like Jim and Pam reveling in the kitschy wonder of Niagara Falls for their hijinks-filled wedding weekend on *The Office*, Northeasterners continue to embrace the quirky romance of this mountain region. Diversions range from museums and farm markets to paddleboarding and zip-lining. Plus, its blend

of natural beauty, full-service hotels and rustic venues like the Chapel in the Pines at Tall Timber Barn make it a no-brainer for wedding groups. **STAY** Cove Haven Entertainment Resorts introduced 7-foot champagne-glass hot tubs in 1984, and the three couples-only resorts — Pocono Palace, Paradise Stream and Cove Haven — still take their reputation as the Land of Love quite seriously. "Love-themed" suites are meticulously

maintained (picture silk sheets, real fireplaces and ceiling mirrors), and weddings take full advantage of the area's lake views. A team of pros handles all the details, and couples who reserve a reception receive a free night's stay. Book early for Valentine's Day or New Year's Eve I do's; holidays get snapped up fast. *Rooms from \$195, including breakfast, dinner, nightly entertainment and most activities; basic wedding package free (minimum requirements apply).*

REDFIELD PHOTOGRAPHY (3)



PUERTO RICO *3 hrs, 30 mins on Delta*



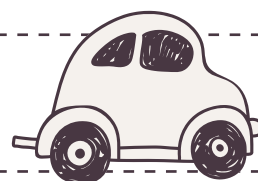
➔ No need for passports or currency-converter apps in this U.S. territory, where salsa music drifts from clubs, and piña coladas (invented here) flow freely. A day-after photo shoot is de rigueur; the only challenge is narrowing down the backdrops, from the stone sentry boxes of Castillo San Felipe del Morro and Castillo San Cristóbal to the pastel storefronts lining the cobblestone streets of Old San Juan. Thirty miles east of the capital,

El Yunque National Forest is the United States' only tropical rainforest; explore on foot or all-terrain vehicle. The even-more intrepid can paddle by moonlight into Fajardo's Bioluminescent Bay. **STAY** Keep the sand out of your shoes with a ceremony on **Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa's** new Beach Front Deck, debuted August 2015. Carnival-themed receptions take place in the indoor-outdoor Caribbean Ballroom,

swathed in orchids — Puerto Rico has more than 50 native species. The centerpiece: *lechón a la barra* (roasted pig on a spit). Marrying couples receive upgrades and gratis nights based on the number of rooms booked, and the resort is even pet-friendly. The most interesting request director of romance Brian Lewis Postle has pulled off recently? "Incorporating a bride's beloved dog as her maid of honor." *Rooms from \$159; weddings from \$1,499.*

FROM LEFT: VICTOR ELIAS PHOTOGRAPHY; HEIDI GELDHAUSER FOR OUR LABOR OF LOVE; COURTESY WYNDHAM GRAND RIO MAR BEACH RESORT & SPA; VICTOR ELIAS PHOTOGRAPHY

SAVANNAH *3 hrs, 35 mins on J-16/J-75*



➔ Georgia's first city is small but mighty — compare its population of 142,000 with the 13.5 million visitors who descend each year. The draw: Southern hospitality, antebellum mansions, 22 beloved park squares and the cobblestoned Historic District, one of the largest in the country. Forsyth Park, with its white fountain and Spanish moss hanging from century-old live oaks, is the top spot for weddings (it can be booked exactly one year

out; hire a local planner to elbow her way to the front of the line outside the booking office). Entertain guests with a trolley tour or haunted pub crawl — the Historic District has no open-container laws. **STAY** Festooned with original artwork, **Mansion on Forsyth Park** is a quick stroll from the fountain and hosts cocktail hours in its tented Marble Garden Courtyard, followed by receptions in the Viennese Ballroom. "Gatsby themes are popular

based on our antiqued mirrors, Swarovski-crystal chandeliers and 24-karat gold-leaf columns," says catering sales manager Hannah Blashock. Serve area delicacies like fried green tomatoes and mini shrimp and grits; the hotel coordinates with couples to bring in other regional favorites like horse-drawn carriages and the seersucker-clad Rev. Joseph Schulte, who married Mandy Moore and Ryan Adams in 2009. *Rooms from \$179; weddings from \$12,500.*

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY ANNA AND SPENCER PHOTOGRAPHY (4)



Travel Intel By Air

ORD "There's a yoga studio located at terminal 3 on the mezzanine-level rotunda, as well as two Terminal Gateway Spas in terminals 1 and 3. Schedule a mani-pedi, a facial or a wax to get beach-ready. You can make reservations online before you go."

— ALI PHILLIPS, ENGAGING EVENTS BY ALI

JFK "JetBlue has the best deal on upgraded seats — in addition to legroom worthy of business class, you also get through security like a boss. If you book an Even More Space seat (\$45), you can jump to the expedited security line — which is well worth it when you have Deep Blue Sushi on the other side."

— KAREN BUSSEN, SIMPLE STUNNING

ATL "Flights out of the international terminal earlier in the day have shorter lines for check-in and security. Register online and receive updated info on flights and security lines at atlanta-airport.com."

— CANDICE GURR, SIGNATURE WEDDINGS BY CANDICE

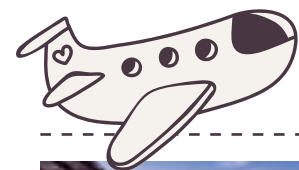
LAX "When departing from terminal 3, purchase a day pass to the Virgin America Loft and enjoy the luxury lounge complete with Internet, food and all-you-can-drink cocktails for a nominal \$30 fee."

— WAYNE GURNICK, MOMENTS BY WAYNE

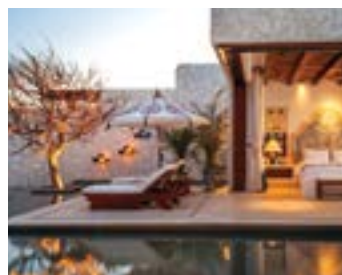
MIA "Pre-security passengers can use the Skyride Connector, a system of moving walkways on level 3 that links all three terminals, the MIA Mover Station and the two parking garages."

— CHRIS WEINBERG, CHRIS WEINBERG EVENTS

Anj and Ben took advantage of Old San Juan, Puerto Rico's colonial architecture and balmy Caribbean weather for photo ops galore.



LOS CABOS 2 hrs, 25 mins on Alaska & AA



➔ Mexico's playground to the stars (celebs from Keith Richards to Adam Levine have gotten hitched here) is a tale of two cities. To the west, Cabo San Lucas flaunts shopping, nightlife and big resort brands, while eastern San Jose del Cabo oozes colonial charm. Devour prickly-pear tacos chased with mezcal on the cobbled streets of San Jose's centuries-old main square, fringed with courtyard restaurants and folk-art

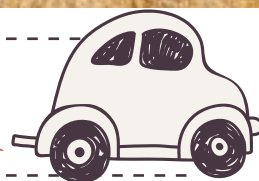
galleries. For a true adventure, make your way to Wild Canyon, where up to 100 guests can zip-line over cactus-spiked ravines and whip ATVs around twisting desert paths. **STAY** Beautiful resorts line the 20-mile coast between the two Cabos, but none can beat **Las Ventanas al Paraíso, A Rosewood Resort** for both Mexican authenticity and pure luxury. Whitewashed pueblos with hand-laid stone floors and carefully combed cactus gardens spill down the hillside into

seven infinity pools and a pristine beach. Instead of the usual check-in, all guests are whisked to the spa solarium for a massage and a margarita. Say I do under the Tree of Hearts, then stroll to the beachfront lawn for yellowtail ceviche and a tequila tasting, featuring selections from one of the largest collections in Baja. December through April, watch humpback whales breach in the Sea of Cortez. *Rooms from \$925; weddings custom. — Vicky Hodges*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: TOMAS BARON DESTINATION WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER; JILLIAN MITCHELL; ROSEWOOD HOTELS & RESORTS; © DINO GOMEZ PHOTOGRAPHY 2016 (DINO GOMEZ.COM); ROSEWOOD HOTELS & RESORTS



SANTA YNEZ VALLEY 2 hrs, 40 mins on US 101



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JACKIE WONDERS PHOTOGRAPHY (JACKIEWONDERS.COM); (3); CORTESIA ALBAL GUEST RANCH; JACKIE WONDERS PHOTOGRAPHY (JACKIEWONDERS.COM)

➔ Thirty minutes north of Santa Barbara, the Santa Ynez Valley encompasses 120-plus wineries so sybaritic, they've caught Hollywood's attention: Parts of the 2004 movie *Sideways* were filmed at Sanford Winery, while Sunstone Vineyards set the scene for the wedding of Mark-Paul Gosselaar and Catriona McGinn, as well as Lauren Conrad and William Tell. Wine tasting in this laid-back valley gets personal — owners

and winemakers are known to make cameos. Sample European flavor in the village of Solvang, founded by Danish-Americans in 1911; it's home to Scandinavian bakeries, windmills and a Little Mermaid fountain. **STAY** Tucked in the golden foothills of the Santa Ynez Mountains, **The Alisal Guest Ranch & Resort** prizes its own piece of A-list history: Clark Gable and Lady Sylvia were married here in the library in 1949. Today, weddings take place by the lake,

creekside under chandelier-slung sycamores, or on the Alisal River Terrace. Crafted by executive chef Pascal Godé, menus steal the show with gourmet barbecue, fresh veggies, wine pairings and custom seasonings blended by Godé himself. Send guests off with a hayride to the Old Adobe for a cowboy brunch (up to 200). *Rooms from \$525; ranch-wedding buyouts from \$52,000 per night; River Terrace weddings from \$3,500, plus \$55 per person.*



Travel Intel By Road

CHICAGO “Stop at Mars Cheese Castle in Kenosha, Wisconsin, to find so many perfect snacks for welcome bags, from its famous cheese curds and sausages to great local microbrews.” — PHILLIPS

NEW YORK CITY “Don’t leave home without an E-ZPass. On these toll roads, having to wait in cash lines can absolutely ruin your trip. On some roads out to the Poconos, there’s even an E-ZPass express lane, which allows you to pass through the toll reader at full speed.” — BUSSEN

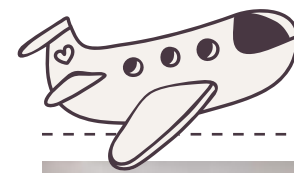
ATLANTA “Once you pass Macon, food options are scarce. Eat before you start your trip, or wait for some delicious seafood at Savannah’s Fresh Catch Seafood, Barracuda Bob’s or The Pink House.” — GURR

LOS ANGELES “Padaro Lane is a charming little street next to the ocean with several places to eat on your way. Padaro Beach Grill has a large open lawn, patio and view of the sandy beach and Pacific Ocean. Oh, and kids will love the sandbox!” — GURNICK

MIAMI “MEAT Eatery & Taproom in Islamorada has the best burger in the Keys. Harriette’s Restaurant in Key Largo is a breakfast institution. Key West’s Cuban Coffee Queen is a must-stop for cafecito.” — WEINBERG

After John and Tracy’s elopement at Jade Mountain resort in Saint Lucia, they stopped for photos at Diamond Falls Botanical Gardens, just 10 minutes away.

MATT LIEN PHOTOGRAPHY



SAINT LUCIA 3 hrs, 35 mins on AA

MATT LIEN PHOTOGRAPHY (4)

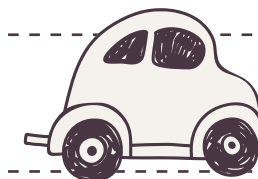


No longer just a honeymoon haunt, Saint Lucia made *DWH* readers’ list of the top three Caribbean wedding locales in 2015. The volcanic island is a kaleidoscope of color — silver sand, emerald mountains, cobalt water — and vendors are conveniently listed at simplybeautifulweddings.org. Its most famous region is the west coast town of Soufriere, nestled in the shadow of the twin Piton mountains; ogle them via chaise

longue, sailboat or zip-line. Or hike right up Gros Piton — a local guide is required, and summiting takes about two hours. **STAY** The darling of travel magazines and TV producers, **Jade Mountain** comprises seven levels of bridges and “sanctuaries” (three-walled guest suites with private plunge pools) that are carved into the mountainside. “*The Bachelor* was filmed with us twice, once on the Celestial Terrace and once in the 17th-century plantation

ruins at Anse Mamin,” says owner Karolin Troubetzkoy. Both are popular venues, along with the beach and the resort’s 60-foot double-decker catamaran (seats 100). “We use a lot of local touches, including a steel-pan duo, Caribbean barbecue and our signature Stairway to Heaven rum punch.” Get the party started with a bachelor/bachelorette outing for up to 12 on the hotel’s yacht, *Searenity*. *Five nights from \$7,812, all-inclusive; weddings from \$1,095.*

KEY WEST 3 hrs, 30 mins on US 1



FROM LEFT: BRANTLEY PHOTOGRAPHY FOR THE MARKER; HEIDI GELDHAUSER FOR OUR LABOR OF LOVE (3)



Colorful and quirky, the continental United States’ southernmost town is a melting pot of artists, fishermen, tourists and locals marching to the beat of their own drum. What the 6-square-mile island lacks in beaches, it makes up for in parties, with reportedly more bars per capita than anywhere else in the States. Plus, this is the only place in the country that never freezes. Wedding sites, from the beach at Fort Zachary Taylor

Historic State Park to the gardens of the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum (where 54 six-toed cats live), are walkable or accessible via an adorable Old Town Trolley. To best enjoy the isle’s famous sunsets, set sail on a Fury Water Adventures catamaran (hint: also ideal for welcome cocktails or the ceremony).

STAY One of the first new hotels to open in Old Town Key West in 20 years, **The Marker Resort** fits right in with the wooden-frame

conch homes in the neighborhood. After drinks around the adults-only Serenity Pool, get the celebration underway in the Harbor House (seats 80), trimmed with pieces by Cuban artist Mabel Poblet. Serve Marker Mojitos and Key-lime cake, and entertain guests with a cigar roller on the veranda. Receptions must wrap by 10 p.m., but a Duval Crawl after-party is only four blocks away. *Rooms from \$399; weddings from \$135 per person.*