

Exotic wedding sites grow in popularity

BY ALISON ASHTON
Copley News Service

According to Modern Bride magazine, 65,000 couples planned their weddings away from home last year. The magazine's travel editor, Geri Bain, even wrote a book about it, "Honeymoons and Weddings Away."

"Complicated family situations, different religions, and conflicts over wedding styles and who should attend are among the reasons why couples opt to marry away," she said. "It's a way of removing a wedding from sticky situations and the world of 'shoulds' and casting it in a new romantic light. Almost all couples who get married away say that one of the biggest, and often unexpected, bonuses is being able to focus on each other."

And it's become big business for the hotels and resorts that offer the service. Sandals Resorts, which operates 10 all-inclusive couples-only properties in the Caribbean, coined the phrase Wedding-Moon and hosted 3,000 couples as they exchanged vows last year.

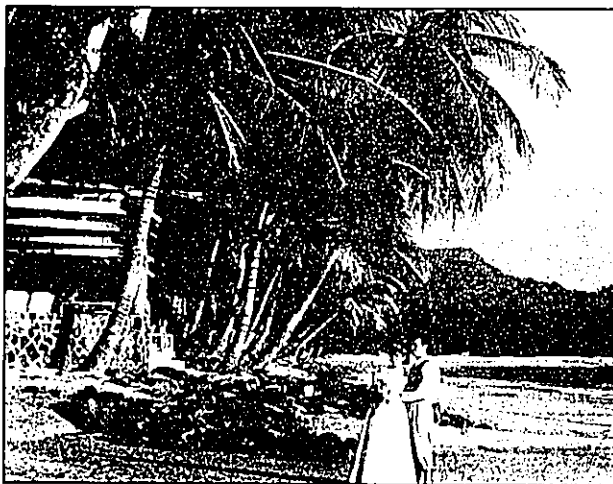
"We have married people in Jacuzzis, underwater, in gazebos," said John Lynch, Sandals' executive vice president of sales worldwide. "We've done weddings for \$500, and we've done ones that cost \$30,000."

Sandals' WeddingMoons start at

\$750, depending on how long the couple stays and the level of accommodations they choose. A basic wedding includes a justice of the peace or clergy, tropical flowers, a Caribbean wedding cake, champagne celebration dinner and wedding-day video. On-site wedding coordinators can assist couples who want something more unusual.

Other resorts are wooing couples with special offers, such as throwing in a complimentary wedding ceremony when they reserve an all-inclusive vacation. Couples who plan a six-night vacation at Rendezvous in St. Lucia get complimentary basic wedding arrangements that include obtaining the marriage license, legal fees, a champagne reception, decorations and a candlelight dinner for the wedding party. The resort caps it off with breakfast in bed the following morning. The couple may choose to pay extra for flowers, photographic services, live music and the wedding cake.

Braco Village Resort's "Marrymoon" in Jamaica costs \$200, including a pre-wedding pedicure, manicure and hairstyling for the bride and massage for the groom, plus all the wedding trimmings. At Bora Bora Lagoon Resort, the wedding package includes Tahitian dress for the couple, a Polynesian-style waterfront ceremony and a sunset cruise in a canoe, serenaded by



Getaway from it all: Busy brides and grooms may consider combining the ceremony and honeymoon in a romantic locale.

Tahitian music.

Many couples head to Hawaii, where just about all the major resorts have some kind of wedding-planning program. The Hyatt Regency Maui, for example, has three different wedding packages, ranging from \$825 to \$1,550, and even built a new wedding gazebo to accommodate all the nuptial couples. In addition to a romantic tropical setting,

Hawaii's marriage license requirements are simple. Proof of age and a photo ID are all that's needed; Hawaii doesn't require blood tests.

There are many bridal packages offered at hotels, lodges and inns in your area. These can be very romantic, and a real boon to couples who are short on time or money.

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