



The revamped Holiday Inn Sunspree in Montego Bay rolls out the romantic red carpet with a 'Wedding Vows Renewal' package that includes a minister, choice of three seaside ceremony venues including the picturesque gazebo.

Happily Ever After

Take A Vow To Say "I Do" in the Caribbean

By Melanie Reffes

Raising the romance bar with lobster dinners, champagne breakfasts and massages pour deux, the Caribbean oozes passion around every palm tree. From weddings and honeymoons to vow renewal celebrations and anniversary trysts, nothing says romance sweeter than a getaway in the tropics. Whether it is a seaside ceremony or underwater wearing scuba gear, tying the knot in the Caribbean offers the quintessential wedding to remember.

"The romance market has grown solidly for the past 10 years in the Caribbean and I anticipate continued growth," said Richard Doumeng, president, Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) and co-owner of Bolongo Bay Beach Resort in St. Thomas. "As a small hotelier, the romance market has been a lifesaver because we can compete with and even beat the big boys which is why I have two full-time wedding planners in my 75-room hotel."

Green & Serene

On the petite island of Tobago, **Magdalena Grand Beach Resort** is all about romance with an array of packages like the 'Platinum' that includes an on-site wedding planner, decorated arch on the beach or in the gazebo, wedding cake custom-made by local artisan bakers, candlelit dinner for two and a champagne breakfast in bed the morning after. "Our staff love weddings and treat every couple like family," said John Murphy, vice president, EFM Hospitality Solutions, operators of the hotel. "We have confirmed seventy-five weddings so far for this year and anticipate that number to grow." Named for one of Christopher Columbus's ships, the 200-room seaside all-inclusive resort is nestled in the Tobago Plantations Estate surrounding a championship golf course. Formerly the Tobago Hilton, the resort offers en-suite massages, canopy walks through the mangrove forest, fine dining at Salaka Grill and fine cocktails at the Poolside Grill. "Our rum punch with our local Black Label will put any couple in the mood

for romance and for a wedding dinner, I recommend an expertly prepared lobster at a seaside table with white gloved service," he adds. www.magdalenagrand.com

With just 19 rooms, the elegant **Montpelier Plantation** on the small isle of Nevis is the stuff of magical weddings. A Relais & Chateaux hotel where vintage meets vogue, wedding venues include the Mill Privée, the original 18th-century sugar mill; and under the enchanting tree where Horatio Nelson, famous for his service in the Royal Navy, married Fanny Nisbet. "A wedding here is for the bride who is looking to be more than just another bride on the beach," said Tim Hoffman, owner. "We provide our couples with the individual attention of a small hotel while still upholding the top-quality service standards found at larger resorts." Extra touches include homemade spirits that are infused with locally grown passion fruit and three on-site restaurants. "A wedding here is more than just a ceremony, it's a vacation, a honeymoon, an adventure and an unforgettable experience for the bride, groom and their guests," he adds. www.montpeliernevis.com

Fairy Tales Come True

The world's only 100 per cent all-inclusive Holiday Inn, the revamped **Holiday Inn Sunspree** in Montego Bay is rolling out the romantic red carpet with a 'Wedding Vows Renewal' package that includes a

minister, choice of three ceremony venues like the picturesque gazebo at the end of the pier, renewal certificate, bridal bouquet and groom's boutonniere. In addition to the new suites, the resort also tempts with Paella Restaurant, Sol-Mer Spa and a mini-golf course. "We've raised our standards to better meet the needs of today's discerning couples by offering a surprising level of style and amenities for the price," said Nicola Madden-Greig, director, sales and marketing. www.caribbeanhi.com/jamaica

Founded in 1947, The Buccaneer in St. Croix is not only a Historic Hotel of America but also one of the Caribbean's most celebrated. Delighting couples for more than six decades, the 11-room Inn

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unveiled swishy new suites with vaulted wood ceilings and king-size poster beds. "The Buccaneer is a fairy tale setting with many options for wedding sites," said Emily Armstrong, owner. "Our estate is self-contained with panoramic views from every vantage point of the sea, setting sun and our historic Old World architecture." www.TheBuccaneer.com

Something Blue

The only Caribbean destination to earn a spot on *National Geographic's* '20 Best Places to Visit in 2013', Grenada is on a romance roll with one of the most unique ways to tie the knot in the Caribbean. At the **Flamboyant Hotel**, 'Romance on the Reef' includes a blue wedding for diving couples who've always dreamed of saying "I Do" underwater. The package organized by Dive Grenada includes safety divers who act as underwater witnesses. "The romance, wedding and honeymoon niche is a good fit with Grenada's tourism product as the island is blessed with abundant natural attributes that appeal to this target market," said Dr. George Vincent, minister tourism. "All three islands that comprise our nation offer

a wide range of attractions for couples including beautiful beaches, tropical rainforests, sparkling clear waters and authentic cultural experiences." For an extra sweet treat, the Grenada Chocolate Factory at the Belmont Estate crafts delectable dark chocolate from the cocoa beans that grow in the nearby groves. Tours include samples and a stop at the small gift shop. www.divegrenada.com, www.flamboyant.com

Perfect Escape

Northwest of San Juan, 20 one-bedroom casitas are delicious for couples at **Royal Isabela**. Charming and eco-aware, the Inn offers golf carts that run on solar power and farm-to-table dining at Restaurant La Casa under the watchful eye of acclaimed Manhattan Chef David Pasternack. "Couples find that Royal Isabela offers the perfect escape that is far enough away from the city, yet with all the amenities expected of a world-calibre resort," said Stanley Pasarell, co-owner. Reminiscent of a Puerto Rican hacienda in the 1930s, the iconic stone tower that is both the restaurant and library is charming

for an intimate wedding reception with its antique Spanish furniture and artwork from private residences while honeymoons are perfection in the one-bedroom casitas, each with plunge pools and a spa tub. www.royalisabela.com ✦

CARIBBEAN WEDDING TRADITIONS

- In Puerto Rico, the priest performing the wedding also blesses a plate of coins and gives them to the groom. After the wedding vows have been exchanged, the groom gives the coins to his bride, which she keeps as a wedding present from her husband.
- At a Jamaican wedding, a dark fruit-cake liberally laced with rum is served at the reception and then slices are mailed to friends and relatives who were unable to attend.
- Wedding cakes in Bermuda are topped with a tiny sapling. After the reception, the newlyweds plant the young tree at their home where they watch it grow, as their marriage grows.
- Cuban wedding receptions are famous for the traditional money dance, where each man who dances with the new bride must pin money to her dress to help the newlyweds with their honeymoon expenses.

Courtesy www.worldweddingtraditions.com

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