

All ASHORE

HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST CRUISE PORT FOR YOUR DESTINATION WEDDING

Ocean breezes. Spectacular oceanfront photos.

Unforgettable wedding memories.

Getting married on a tropical island during a cruise adds a unique twist to your destination wedding, and is an ideal way to celebrate your union with family and friends.

We've gathered some insider tips from a planner who specializes in weddings at sea so you can choose the best option for your dream wedding at a port of call.



SET SAIL WHEN
THE WEATHER'S
ON YOUR SIDE.

You may have your heart set on a summer wedding, but that's prime hurricane season: Between June and November, you could hit rough seas and stormy weather, says Michelle Pyke, program manager for the Princess Cruise Line program for Royal Ocean Events in Vancouver. The wedding planners work exclusively with four major cruise lines – Royal Caribbean, Norwegian, Princess, Holland America – and can also arrange weddings on Carnival ships.

"We do have couples who take the risk, but it's not something we recommend," says Pyke. "There are other options for that time of year, such as Alaska, where we can do glacier weddings, or Santorini in Greece, which is a really great location."

Sometimes, strong winds surrounding ports like Grand Cayman can cause cruise ships to alter the itinerary to avoid a storm. However, the cruise line's wedding planners always have a plan B, says Pyke.

"For example, if you had a wedding booked in Nassau and now you're going into a different port of call where we have a team set up, we'll work with them to plan a wedding for you, even if it's three days away."

SELECT THE
RIGHT ISLAND FOR
YOUR CEREMONY.



If you've never taken a cruise, you may want to take a closer look at how the ship docks at certain ports – especially if you're sailing on a mega-ship. At some islands, such as Aruba, Nassau, Barbados or Cozumel, a large vessel can pull up to the port and passengers walk right off. But other islands, including Grand Cayman and Belize, have tender ports that require ships to drop their anchor in the ocean and transport passengers to shore via a small boat.

"It's definitely a lot easier if couples don't have to worry about getting their guests into the tender boats, but we make it work," says Pyke.

TAKE ADVANTAGE
OF ITINERARIES
FEATURING AN
OVERNIGHT STOP.



Cruise lines now offer overnight stays at especially popular islands, such as Bermuda. That means couples don't have to rush to disembark, get to the wedding venue, say their vows and head right back to their ship, says Pyke.

"Bermuda is a really popular destination for ashore weddings; the beaches are stunning, and with an overnight stop, you aren't limited by the time constraints," she notes. "We have more options, so we can host ashore receptions. We also have great teams set up there, so the flowers and décor are amazing."

Couples can choose from island brunches, cocktail receptions set up on a beach lit with Tiki torches, or a more formal sit-down dinner.

HAVE A LEGAL
WEDDING
ASHORE.



PLAN A PRIVATE
ISLAND EVENT.



Dreaming of a fairy-tale wedding at Disney's Castaway Cay, Norwegian's Great Stirrup Cay or Holland America's Half Moon Cay? A destination cruise wedding offers this additional perk for couples, says Pyke.

"Royal Caribbean does many weddings at CocoCay, an exclusive area that's one of their biggest destination wedding locations. Not only are you taking this amazing luxury cruise, but you're going to your own private space on that island and having a wedding," she says.

Be aware that if you want to get married on a cruise line's private island, the ceremony will be symbolic. You can, however, have a legal ceremony at your port of departure before the ship sets sail with the captain officiating, suggests Pyke, and then do a symbolic ceremony ashore.

"In Bermuda, it's fairly easy to get a licence, while in other ports like Santorini, it can be a more complicated application process that takes longer to arrange."

Many couples assume they can only have a symbolic wedding if they choose a port of call, but that's not always the case, says Pyke. In fact, Canadians can legally be married in Bermuda, Nassau, St. Thomas and the Cayman Islands, for example.

Because licensing rules, waiting periods and fees vary wildly depending on the port, Pyke's team guides couples through the process.

"In Bermuda, it's fairly easy to get a license, while in other ports like Santorini, it can be a more complicated

application process that takes longer to arrange," says Pyke, adding that because some ports can also charge hefty fees, many couples opt for a symbolic ceremony.

Most cruise lines require booking a minimum of 45-60 days in advance to get married during the trip, and you must book the cruise before you can start arranging the ashore wedding. Keep in mind that if you want to be married by the captain, you'll have to do so onboard the ship, as local officials conduct ashore ceremonies.