

When a bride reflects back on her wedding day, she wants to remember every cherished moment and bask in the warm afterglow of such a meaningful day. All too often, however, there are tales of tension, exorbitant expenses and time crunches that rob couples of the joy they've worked so hard to capture for their nuptials. It's no wonder destination weddings have become so popular — with Mexico as the top wedding destination for American couples looking to minimize stress and expense while maximizing pleasure.

BY LAURA JENKINS

# BRIDAL BLISS



## BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

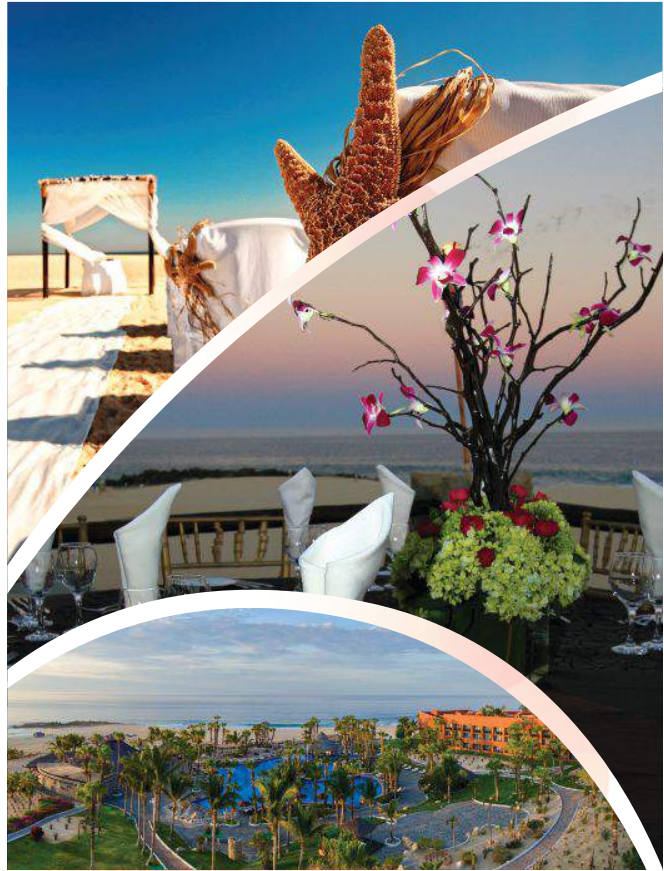
Texas couple Kristal and Raun Bryant can attest to the ease of taking their wedding south of the border. "I would do it all over again every day if I could," Kristal says. "It was so easy. Everything was done for us — every detail was provided, and it was exactly as they said it would be." The "they" she's referring to is the staff at the Hotel Riu Palace Cabo San Lucas, where the couple recently married in a spectacular beach ceremony. Both Kristal and Raun agree that they couldn't have had nearly as nice of a wedding in the United States for the all-inclusive price they paid in Los Cabos. And it was stress-free. "Everyone from our young son to Raun's 86-year-old grandmother just raved about it," she says. "It was a wedding, a vacation and a honeymoon; and we got to hang out with all of our favorite people. It just doesn't get any better than that."

## RESORT LUXURY

Los Cabos resort weddings are indeed wildly popular, and offer a wide variety of approaches. The Cabo Surf Hotel is a boutique beach resort located on one of the most privileged beaches in Los Cabos. The location makes it a very popular venue, and the facility's wedding coordinators are known for taking care of every last detail, from the flowers to the photographer. Let Executive Chef Alejandro Ponce create a custom, innovative Mediterranean menu, or select cuisine from the highly rated 7 Seas Seafood Grille. Peruse the special spa packages that the Sea Spa & Salon has created for wedding groups, and enjoy the beach, garden, terrace and infinity pools that are available for ceremonies and receptions.

The Sandos Finisterra Los Cabos is a luxurious wedding spot that offers a variety of stunning nuptial settings. "This property was built on a cliff," says Ramon Ascensio, director of sales, "so we have very dramatic views of the marina and the ocean. We have three lavish pools and seven acres of private beach — which means we have areas where there are no beach vendors." Couples can get married on the beach, on the side of the mountain, or under a *palapa* (a thatched roof structure), as Rolling Stone Keith Richards did. Sandos Finisterra is one of the few resorts that has an open vendor policy, meaning couples can bring in their own vendors without incurring any additional fees.

ME Cabo is located on Médano Beach, which means that it's about five minutes' walking distance from many of the best restaurants and nightspots in Cabo San Lucas. For that reason, it's a popular choice for those who



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enjoy nightlife, parties and loads of fun. The resort's philosophy is, "Everything is possible," according to Pamela Llonin, special events manager at the hotel. "If a bride wants purple flowers and fire dancers and fireworks, we can do that. We can even commission custom fireworks that form into the shape of a heart containing the couple's initials!" In addition to coordinating the details of weddings, Llonin also arranges fun wedding-themed excursions, including golf and fishing tournaments for the guys, and spa days and horseback or camel riding for the girls.

**ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES**

For those who prefer something a little more daring and unique, Sunrider Tours offers a 250-person catamaran for "floating" weddings. (It also has a smaller boat for more intimate gatherings.) Couples can opt for a scrumptious Mexican buffet or select other cuisine to enjoy while sailing the Pacific Ocean; the fee includes an open bar for all guests. Everything is customizable, from the flowers to the decorations to the music (the latter of which can be anything from a live band to karaoke.)

Another sensational new wedding venue is located 20 feet below the surface of the breathtakingly beautiful Pacific Ocean. Bahia Hotel & Beach Club has partnered with Nautilus Dive Tech to create underwater wedding packages that are certain to thrill. Couples can tie the knot with a well-known local minister officiating while exotic fish and brilliant aquatic hues surround them. Guests are welcome to participate by diving, snorkeling or enjoying the scene from the comfort of a glass-bottomed boat.

For those who want to broaden their celebratory options, Terramar — a tourism service company that has been in operation in Los Cabos for more than 19 years — is a phenomenal resource. Over the years, Terramar has developed an intricate

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understanding of Los Cabos wedding venues and vendors, giving them the ability to help a bride hone in on exactly what she's looking for. "We work with most of the resorts," says Gaby Ruiz, chief wedding and event planner, "but we also coordinate weddings at a wide variety of private villas, hacienda-style homes, restaurants and even unusual venues such as an organic farm." Ruiz says that their wedding services focus on constructing the most unique and

meaningful celebration possible. "Sometimes we recommend things that people didn't know were possible," she says. "Lanterns can be released into the night sky, creating a beautiful illuminated glow above the ceremony. Releasing butterflies is also an option." Whether it's arranging exquisite pre-wedding activities, finding the perfect venue or helping a couple decide what type of ceremony to have, Terramar is there every single step of the way.

## HOW TO GET MARRIED IN MEXICO

In the end, getting married is a legal affair. For that reason, it's necessary to think through the three wedding options available in Mexico:

- A civil ceremony is performed by a judge, who conducts the vows in Spanish. It is recognized as a legal union around the world but requires blood tests, a fair amount of paperwork and four adult witnesses over the age of 18.
- To get married in a religious ceremony in the Catholic Church, either the bride or groom must be Catholic, and the proceedings must begin with their home church in the States. Once all marital requirements have been satisfied at the couple's home parish,

all paperwork must be sent to Mexico at least 90 days prior to the ceremony. A religious ceremony is performed by a Catholic priest and can take place only in a Catholic church.



- The most prevalent way to get married in Mexico is called a symbolic, blessing or commitment ceremony. This type of service will not change your legal marital status; most people who take this route get married in a civil ceremony (by a Justice of the Peace, for example) either before or after the actual Mexican ceremony. Because there are no legal or religious requirements, the symbolic ceremony is more customizable to the couple's preferences and needs.



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