

Island Destinations Takes Clients Away From It All and You To The Bank

RICK SHIVELY

Getting away from it all on an island honeymoon or destination wedding is one thing. Getting away from it all in high-end, five-star luxury and choosing from exclusive resorts in The Bahamas, Bermuda, the Caribbean, Costa Rica, Dubai, Fiji, French Polynesia, Hawaii, the Maldives and the Seychelles, is a very special **Island Destinations** thing.

"Honeymoon business is probably 80 percent of our business. Destination weddings are less, but it's growing every year," explains Clair Arrindell, sales and operations manager at Island Destinations. "The thing is, here at Island Destinations, we definitely focus on the high-end, five-star luxury market and having the properties that we do, people tend to want to do a lot of things at one time. It's not only the wedding, but also sort of like a vacation, or more like a family reunion. So it's more than just one event happening at one time."

Arrindell says the most popular region for destination weddings is still the Caribbean. "It's very easy to get to, the hotels have been doing it a long time and know exactly how to tweak their programs to make adjustments for the clients. But more and more, people are wanting to go further. But for now, the Caribbean is definitely the number one spot for our destination weddings." So what are the most popular wedding destinations in the Caribbean? "For us, it's got to be Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos. And that has got to be because of the scenery—the beaches are the best beaches in the Caribbean. And because the hotels there have been doing it for such a long time, it's just so easy," Arrindell says. In addition, she points out, because you're seeing so many celebrities getting married down there or taking a honeymoon there, "...people want to mimic what their favorite stars are doing."

But the kind of destination weddings Island Destinations conjures up are not for the faint of heart or those who are light in the wallet. Depending on the number of days and the number of people in the wedding party and guests, it can run anywhere from about \$60,000 to over \$200,000. "We've done weddings in the past, for example, where the couple bought out the entire property for the wedding party and there again, in a situation like that, anything goes. We had one on a private island at a resort where the wedding party had the entire island to themselves. There were beach parties into the wee hours of the morning, picnics on another nearby secluded island complete with a band, and spa treatments anytime the guests wanted."

The Caribbean comes out on top in the honeymoon category as well, Arrindell says, probably because the Caribbean offers what everyone looks for—beautiful beaches, great weather, great food—something they may not have at home. "It's just such a win-win situation, especially at our properties," Arrindell says. "The scent of the jasmine, the atmosphere, it's so sensual and so totally different."

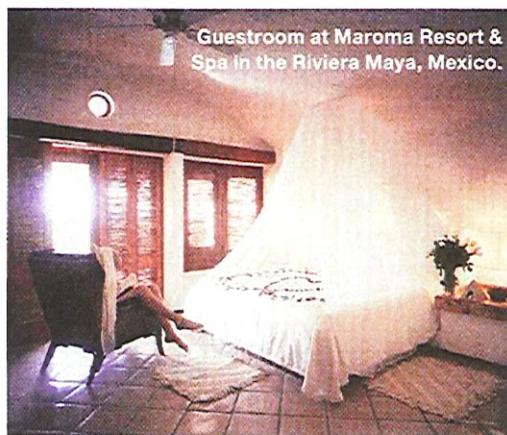
Honeymoon pricing, too, is a little kinder, even in the Island Destinations luxury niche. A good 7-night honeymoon low season, for example, would run anywhere from \$3,500 and upwards. "We have some hotels that have some incredible, really cost-effective honeymoon packages for five and seven nights that would include everything from meals to a private catamaran cruise with hors d'oeuvres and a bottle of Champagne, and a massage for two," Arrindell points out. "You know, great little perks. We always want to make each honeymoon as special and as different as possible—anything that we can do to make it as personalized as possible. I remember one honeymoon that we, along with the travel agent, had the mother of the bride send us a picture of the couple—a wedding picture—and we had that in the room for them when they checked in, with a beautiful frame with their name and the date of the wedding. Just little things like that which makes it such a personalized and special honeymoon—their favorite food and dinner waiting for them the first night, their favorite song playing in the background on a beautiful secluded beach with lit torches—it's just the whole vibe."

She also points out that honeymoon product demand is getting more and more elaborate and more and more exotic, which is why the company has added destinations like Dubai, the Maldives and the Seychelles over the last two years and are looking for more like those for their 2009 inventory.

Arrindell's personal favorite is in the South Pacific. "I recently visited French Polynesia and I really thought that was extremely special. I go to the Caribbean quite often and to Mexico quite often, but as soon as I stepped foot on Bora Bora or even Moorea, it was just so special and at that point I thought, this is what the honeymoon should be all about—the tranquility of the whole thing, the sensuality and the sexiness of the rooms, the colors of the water. The whole thing, it was just incredibly sexy and incredibly special. Of course, I went with a group of travel agents," she adds with a laugh, "but I still pictured myself there on that special occasion and that was it."

Finally, Arrindell wants agents to know that there's a great benefit to booking with Island Destinations because it's like one-stop shopping. "They can do the air with us, they can do the land with us. We have a concierge that can arrange everything and anything for the couple or the group in advance—from spa treatments and picnic lunches, to yacht rentals and transport. And we also try to have as many items commissionable as possible, so that's a great plus for the agent and they're not doing all that work for nothing."

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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