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Life / Travel

Wedding destinations, Parrot Cay: Even brides go barefoot here

Exclusive island in the Turks & Caicos welcomes small parties for intimate ceremonies


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Sunsets are magical on Parrot Cay, a private island resort operated by Como in the Turks & Caicos. The resort has 74 rooms and villas, and a number of cottages and homes. With activities from diving to fishing, the resort offers plenty for wedding parties with a penchant for action--and its spa, Como Shambhala Retreat, draws guests, too.

By: **Becca Hensley** Freelance Travel writer, Published on Fri Apr 03 2015

It might be just a dream. Or, at least a gauzy memory inspired by a chick flick. I have one foot out of the diaphanous mosquito netting that wraps my Balinese style bed, before I recognize that this is reality.

I awaken at a villa that overlooks the azure Caribbean Sea on a beach with bridal-bouquet white sand. That swirl of white crescent and bit of blue out my window couldn't be more fitting. That's because I've come here to attend a wedding--and the scene set by the landscape is nature's altar.

At Como's Parrot Cay, a private island retreat in the Turks & Caicos my childhood friend will tie the knot. It was her brilliant idea to buy out all 1,000 intimate acres of this tony resort, to make the entire isle her own for this fete of a lifetime. Although this will be her day, my stay at this gorgeous resort to celebrate her big moment, seems more like her wedding gift to me.

A half hour's boat ride from Providenciales, Turks & Caicos' biggest island and home to its airport, Parrot Cay occupies its own remote island; it's just one of this nation's 40-odd cays and islets. Set amid the worlds' third largest coral reef, far flung enough from other resorts and islands to feel like Robison Crusoe's home, the serene resort beckons as a haven. It's the place for celebrities to hide out (although, if you visit, you're like to glimpse one) for honeymooners hankering to focus on one another, and for families who understand the concept that sometimes doing nothing at all is really doing everything.

With 75-rooms and suites -- some that dot the very edge of the beach -- a colonial style main house, and a handful of two-and-three-bedroom villas and larger estate houses,

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which scatter down the shoreline like tide-deposited seashells, Parrot Cay makes the perfect place for a destination wedding of any size.

As an island buy-out can service about 200 people, weddings held here tend to be small, even at their largest. Couples do bring smaller groups, and hold ceremonies on the beach, on the verandahs of sea-facing villas, and in the spa. Some brides and grooms come alone, choosing to borrow staff to serve as their witnesses — and letting the hotel wedding-planners organize every romantic detail.

For this wedding extravaganza, I've brought my family. And, why not? There's plenty to amuse kids here. Besides sandcastle-building, the resort offers a bevy of complimentary beach toys and activities, from stand-up paddleboards, to sailboats, to bikes, and staff can organize scavenger hunts around the island, and outings to kid-pleasing places such as Iguana Island, where giant lizards roam en masse as did the dinosaurs of yore.

Wedding guests, groomsmen and maids can likewise entertain themselves. Besides an infinity pool, ringed by linen-capped day beds, Parrot Cay offers daily Pilates and yoga, and customizes itineraries to include sunset cruises, snorkeling expeditions, diving outings, and deep sea fishing adventures.

The Shambhala Spa, renowned for its principles of Ayurvedic wellness, offers a number of treatments suited to wedding parties and guests with a penchant for unraveling the knots. The bride and I both choose the Javanese Royal Lular Bath, which is apparently a Balinese wedding tradition. It involves being scrubbed with ginger, turmeric and sandalwood, before being slathered with yogurt.

For the few days before the wedding, I set up housekeeping at one of the three-bedroom villas, said to be owned by Keith Richards. Of course, he's not in residence, and I'm not doing much housekeeping, as the villas come with their own handy butlers.

Ours is called Robert, and he's been trained at one of London's most prestigious academies of butler-dom. One thing he apparently learned in London is mind-reading. Just at the moment I feel a pang of hunger and hear the sounds of my children astir, Robert arrives cheerfully balancing a large tray holding strong coffee, eggs benedict and house-made granola with apples and nuts.

As I sit beside our villa's personal pool, nibbling my breakfast, and looking out at the sea, I thank my old friend, the bride-to-be for planning a wedding in a destination that's also fun for me.

After some pre-wedding day activities, and plenty of lounging in the sun, I receive a message from the bride, which she sends to everyone. "Don't you dare wear shoes today!" she says.

Although I've packed some heels I bought just for this event, I understand. After time spent at this barefoot chic retreat, I comprehend that its elegance is stripped down to nature's essence, that to hobble through the sand in four-inch heels, would be to disrupt the tone of a wedding in paradise.

So, with my gossamer formal wear, I don flip-flops, and so do my kids. We arrive to the main beach to see it simply transformed. There's a sheer white carpet leading to an arch bedecked with artful assemblages of white blossoms. The air smells of frangipani. A violin plays softly. The waves whisper as they meet the sand.

A row of white lounge chairs beckon. Some columns, wrapped in filmy material, reveal the ocean beyond. And, the bride and groom, highlighted by the sapphire expanse, appear as flowers themselves. A short but beautiful ritual unfolds. It ends when the local celebrant says, "By the laws of these islands and the laws of your hearts, I declare you husband and wife."

Then the party begins.

*Seeking out the most romantic locales to tie the knot in the world, wedding expert and travel writer **Becca Hensley** has attended weddings in more than one hundred far-flung destinations. She always packs more than one pair of shoes.*

Just the Facts

For information on a legal marriage in the Turks & Caicos, see the marriage certification page at: turksandcaicostourism.com/license-requirements.html. Keep in mind that one option is a symbolic wedding ceremony, which works well for vow renewals.

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Parrot Cay: Consider the Kurnia Package, which organizes the wedding ceremony for up to 10 guests, \$3,500 U.S. For more information on wedding packages offered by Parrot Cay, go to its website: comohotels.com/parrotcay/events-and-facilities/weddings-and-celebrations/ceremonies-and-packages

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