



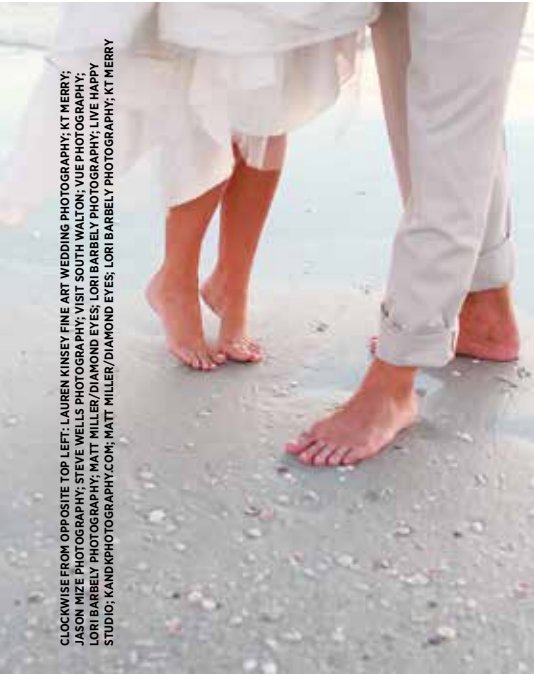
REACHABLE BY CAR AND FLAUNTING WARM TEMPS AND 825 MILES OF WONDER THE SUNSHINE STATE IS NO. 1 FOR DOMESTIC DESTINATION FOR A VENUE? START HERE. WE OFFER 18 OPTIONS, FROM THE EMERALD

BEACH — NOT TO MENTION 200-PLUS SUNNY DAYS A YEAR — IT'S NO WEDDINGS. BUT IN A STATE SO BIG, WHERE DO YOU BEGIN SEARCHING COAST TO THE SOUTHERNMOST POINT IN THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES.

HOW TO MARRY *Florida!*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Rustling palms, shrimp tacos and playful palettes complement any Florida fete. A postwedding stroll on Rosemary Beach. Paper pays homage to Florida's state reptile. A bright boutonniere in St. Augustine. Dressed to impress in Orlando. A Florida must: Ditch the shoes and put your toes in

lanterns liven the mood at WaterColor Inn & Resort in Santa Rosa Beach. A Gulf sunset gives this newlywed kiss a warm glow. An alligator-theme centerpiece the sand. A citrus-theme signature cocktail is a natural in the Sunshine State. Funky flamingos add flair to this ceremony. Starfish fill this flower girl's basket.



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: LAUREN KINSEY FINE ART; WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY; KT MERRY; JASON MIZE PHOTOGRAPHY; STEVE WELLS PHOTOGRAPHY; VIST SOUTH WALTON; VUE PHOTOGRAPHY; LORI BARBELY PHOTOGRAPHY; MATT MILLER/DIAMOND EYES; LORI BARBELY PHOTOGRAPHY; LIVE HAPPY STUDIO; KANDYPHOTOGRAPHY.COM; MATT MILLER/DIAMOND EYES; LORI BARBELY PHOTOGRAPHY; KT MERRY



HOW TO MARRY

North Florida

Spotlight SOUTH WALTON Once you cross the Florida-Georgia state line, the closest beaches lie right off Scenic Highway 30A — 26 miles of tidy roadway that pass through 16 of Florida's most charming towns and new modernist beach communities. Despite Walton County's small size, it ranks in the top 10 for visitor spending and sees an 86 percent repeat factor. From Grayton Beach's arts scene to Sandestin's myriad spas and golf courses, saying I do is as simple as choosing the spot that speaks to you.

SPLURGE

ALYS BEACH

Mazes of shell-stone paths and rows of whitewashed villas hug a private sugar-sand beach on the eastern end of 30A. Hold the rehearsal dinner at Caliza, where guests will feel like they've teleported to an intimate Moroccan Kasbah with an elliptical pool, a Moorish tower and billowing curtains. With sweeping views of both the Gulf and the community's 20-acre nature preserve, the lawn of Kelly Green is a favored site for outdoor events (seats 250). The development's walkability means guests are never far from any venue. *Vacation rentals from \$780 to \$1,300/night; site fees from \$1,500-\$6,500.*

STEAL

TOPS'L BEACH & RACQUET RESORT

Flanked by Gulf beaches and a nature preserve, this 52-acre Destin resort offers plenty of things to do and places to wed. Tennis buffs rejoice at the property's Top 50 ranking; other guests will appreciate nearby

Baytowne Wharf, a hub for dining, art and shopping, plus after-party hot spots like Fat Tuesday Daiquiri Bar. Wed on the pool deck overlooking the coast with glowing afternoon sunlight, or go barefoot on the beach. Both indoor and outdoor covered and uncovered reception venues are available, so there's an option in any weather. *Rooms from \$81; weddings from \$500.*

SECRET

CELEBRATION HALL

If you want a blank slate on which to paint your perfect wedding picture, Celebration Hall in Santa Rosa Beach, with its vaulted ceilings, wrought-iron chandeliers and room for 300 guests, is a classic canvas. Surrounding gardens have ample space for a reception tent; or hold cocktail hour on the lawn while the staff transforms the hall from ceremony site to party place. If you've got your heart set on a beach wedding, the hall is just a few minutes from the shore and only 50 feet from 30A Suites, a boutique condo hotel, so no one will have to drive after your bash. *Weddings from \$2,100.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: V & V PHOTOGRAPHY; VUE PHOTOGRAPHY; KT MERRY; JOE ADINZO; LAUREN KINSEY FINE ART WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

Activity Planner

BUY A ONE-DAY FISHING LICENSE FOR \$6 AND CAST FROM M.B. MILLER COUNTY PIER IN PANAMA CITY BEACH. ROD RENTALS ARE AVAILABLE ON-SITE. ... BOOK YOUR BRIDESMAIDS ORANGE BLOSSOM FACIALS AT THE PONTE VEDRA INN & CLUB. ... RESERVE CRUISERS FROM THE SEASIDE TRANSIT AUTHORITY AND BIKE-HOP TO THE BOUTIQUES AND BEACHES ALONG HIGHWAY 30A.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A tented lounge outside of Celebration Hall lends a modern vibe to an event in Santa Rosa Beach. Surf's up at Alys Beach. Succulents double as place cards and drink tags. Celebration Hall's chapel-like interior. Shrimp and grits star on a reception brunch menu in Rosemary Beach.

EXPERT PICKS

Heather Canada is a Master Bridal Consultant in Jacksonville, Florida. She founded First Coast Weddings and Events in 2002, providing wedding planning and coordination from Savannah, Georgia, to Palm Coast, Florida.

The River House

ST. AUGUSTINE ➤ This downtown events venue is a standout, says Canada. "Its waterfront location, beautiful outdoor spaces and plentiful parking make it a true gem." Host the ceremony out on the stone terrace alongside the Matanzas River (dolphins sometimes make an appearance); then move to the grand ballroom with French doors and a hardwood dance floor. There's even a bridal suite. *Rentals from \$5,500.*

The Lodge & Club

PONTE VEDRA BEACH ➤ Located 20 miles southeast of Jacksonville, this 66-room, Mediterranean-style boutique offers several event venues with ocean views, from a fountain courtyard and a trellised patio to an oceanfront lawn with a paver aisle. "With floor-to-ceiling windows in its second-floor ballroom, it feels like you're sitting right on top of the Atlantic Ocean," says Canada. *Rooms from \$279; weddings from \$130 per person.*

Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort

AMELIA ISLAND ➤ Choose your view — golf course, freshwater marsh or ocean — at this 404-room stunner, fresh from an \$85 million face-lift. "The Plantation offers a glimpse into the more natural side of Florida," says Canada — think lakes and marshes for fishing, kayaking or paddle boarding, and even a nature center for the kids. Welcome guests with a beach bonfire; then hold your event in the chapel, on the sand or in the rustic Walker's Landing event building outfitted with a fieldstone fireplace. *Rooms from \$219; weddings from \$3,000.*



Activity Planner

GET AN AUTHENTIC DOSE OF FLORIDA WITH AN AIRBOAT RIDE AT LONE CABBAGE FISH CAMP, 50 MILES EAST OF ORLANDO. ... UPSCALE BOWLING! IT'S SUSHI, COCKTAILS AND LIVE MUSIC AT SPLITSVILLE LUXURY LANES AT DOWNTOWN DISNEY. ... ON SATURDAY AFTERNOONS, CIGAR CITY BREWING IN TAMPA ROLLS IN A FOOD TRUCK TO COMPLEMENT THE OFFERINGS IN ITS TASTING ROOM.

A quirky couple has some photo fun with plastic flamingos in Orlando. OPPOSITE: A Cinderella moment courtesy of Disney's Fairy Tale Weddings.



HOW TO MARRY

Central Florida

Spotlight ORLANDO Beloved for its theme parks, Orlando was the most visited destination in the United States in 2012. Wedding numbers are equally noteworthy: Disney World alone hosted 1,500 weddings in 2013. Guests of destination I do's aren't short of diversions, from park hopping to mall shopping. And events can be as traditional or as fantastical — think Cinderella carriages and mouse ears — as you wish.

SPLURGE

WALDORF ASTORIA

Only the second Waldorf Astoria in the world after the flagship in New York City, this **Orlando** hotel shares several of its doppelganger's most admired restaurants and bars, including Peacock Alley, Bull & Bear and Oscar's. But the Big Apple original can't boast the Florida outpost's other draws — namely free transportation to Disney and wedding venues like formal gardens and an inland island the size of Will Smith's Cali mansion. Choose from the resort's array of table settings, cakes and menu options, such as a wall of mini desserts and a Manhattan station — the cocktail was invented at the NYC hotel. *Rooms from \$239 (low season), \$459 (high); weddings from \$185 per person.*

STEAL

DISNEY WORLD SWAN & DOLPHIN

Don't be fooled by the name: This hotel isn't owned or operated by Disney, and it doesn't fall under the umbrella of Disney's

Fairy Tale Weddings either. All of the above is a good thing for budget-minded brides: The resort offers more wedding flexibility and similar all-inclusive event packages for less (think \$2,810 versus \$12,000) — and it's still a stop for Disney transportation. "It even offers a white-sand-beach ceremony location without having to trek to the coast," says Erin Calabritto, a wedding planner with Orlando-based Just Marry. *Rooms from \$159; site fees from \$2,030.*

SECRET

EPCOT'S LIVING SEAS SALON

Walt Disney World's theme parks and resorts encompass a surprising number of unique venues (37, to be exact), including the popular Disney's Wedding Pavilion. But our favorite offbeat site is the Living Seas Salon, where 6,000 sea creatures in a 5.7 million-gallon aquarium swim past floor-to-ceiling windows right in the dining room. Serve mahimahi to up to 100 guests; just keep in mind that some Disney venues allow events only before or after park hours. *Lunch receptions from \$14,000.*

EXPERT PICKS

Zoë Prosser Gallina is creative director of Botanica International Design & Decor Studio, based in Tampa. She was raised in the event industry by floral-designer parents and won an American Floral Society design competition at age 8.

Postcard Inn

ST. PETE BEACH ➤ A former Travelodge turned trendy, wallet-friendly Gulf hotel, the Postcard Inn earns media praise for its mid-century-modern surfer vibe. "It's comfortable and laid-back, making guests feel as if you're hosting your reception at your home," says Gallina. Beach weddings are popular, but there's also a pretty courtyard with hanging lanterns and benches for events. *Rooms from \$89 (low season), \$229 (high); weddings from \$3,500.*

Sandpearl Resort

CLEARWATER ➤ "Whether you want a barefoot beach bash or an over-the-top black-tie affair, the Sandpearl can accommodate," says Gallina. Two lawns — one gulf-front and one between the pool and a two-story waterfall feature — are also options for I do's. Standard guest rooms are available, but families will go for one- and two-bedroom suites that come with washers, dryers and full gourmet kitchens. Other draws: a zero-entry pool and beachfront fire pits. *Rooms from \$209; weddings from \$6,000.*

The Ringling

SARASOTA ➤ Conjure Gatsby at the 1920s-era estate of circus barons John and Mable Ringling. "Rich in architecture and history, the facility's U-shaped Museum of Art is stunning," says Gallina. Large groups have ample space to celebrate in its courtyard, graced with replicas of ancient Greek, Roman and Baroque statues. Other venues include a rose garden, a banyan grove and the mansion's bay-front Ca' d'Zan Terrace, where Ringling himself threw countless parties. *Weddings from \$2,500.*

DISNEY'S FAIRY TALE WEDDINGS; OPPOSITE: LORI BARBELLY PHOTOGRAPHY




HOW TO MARRY

South Florida

Spotlight MIAMI/FORT LAUDERDALE *The billion-dollar sandbar that is Miami Beach, the megayacht expressway of Fort Lauderdale's Intracoastal Waterway: A SoFlo wedding serves eye candy all weekend long. Some 25 million visitors came to Miami-Dade and Broward counties in 2012, a number that enjoys an uptick with every passing January. (Or is it June? With this weather, who can tell?)*

SPLURGE

THE BILTMORE

 This **Coral Gables** grand dame delivers outsize fantasy in spades, from the 225-foot-long pool (the equivalent of 25 bouquet tosses) to the lobby's massive cages that house chirping finches. (In fact, the tiered, 275-room property slightly resembles a wedding cake. Coincidence?) Choose from multiple ballrooms and outdoor spaces; the surrounding Donald Ross golf course provides both solitude and stunning vistas. Guests may be tempted to visit nearby Miracle Mile, but the pool, golf course, spa and culinary academy keep most close by. *Rooms from \$249; weddings custom.*

STEAL


NEWPORT BEACHSIDE RESORT

 Budgeters sigh in relief when they hear about this beachfront resort, nestled in the high-rise canyon that is Collins Avenue in **Sunny Isles Beach**. The hotel is approximately halfway between Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and Miami

International Airport, so airfare options abound. Low-season rates fall handily under \$200 per night, and the \$60-per-person wedding package offers good value: It includes a cocktail reception, a three-course dinner, a custom cake, discounted rates for guests, and a complimentary oceanfront suite for the happy couple. *Rooms from \$159; weddings from \$60 per person.*

SECRET

ANCIENT SPANISH MONASTERY

 The directions say Miami Gardens Drive in **North Miami Beach**, but the old street signs call it NE 183rd Street. And NE 185th Street. And NE 186th Street. Maybe they don't want you to discover this former abbey, hidden amid Spanish oaks dangling moss as long as a cathedral veil. The 870-year-old building, moved stone by stone from northern Spain, is remarkably versatile. Opt for the intimate French Altar if the guest list is under 10, or stretch your legs in the Gothic, 80-seat Monastery Chapel. Twenty acres of gardens make a showstopping backdrop for any wedding album. *Chapel weddings \$750 to \$2,600; garden weddings \$900 to \$2,500.*



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: JERRY YOON PHOTOGRAPHERS; KT MERRY; SEBIE IMAGES; LIFE WRITING PHOTOGRAPHY; LAUREN KINSEY FINE ART WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

Activity Planner

CRUISE THE INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY WITH PRIMETIME BOATS, BASED AT MIAMI BEACH MARINA. ... ON THE SECOND SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH, MIAMI'S WYNWOOD ARTS DISTRICT HOSTS ART + DESIGN NIGHTS, WHERE COCKTAILS, ART AND SHOPPING CONVERGE. ... THE LEOPARD LOUNGE, IN THE CHESTERFIELD HOTEL IN PALM BEACH, BOASTS LIVE MUSIC IN THE EVENINGS.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A winged flower girl at the Ancient Spanish Monastery in North Miami Beach. Stealing a kiss in Islamorada. Bold citrus-hued roses make a statement at South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island. The Hemingway Home all dressed up for a Key West reception. A pink-and-white wedding cake evokes seashells.

EXPERT PICKS

Kelly McWilliams is a destination-wedding stylist and planner, as well as founder and owner of Weddings by Socialites in Naples. Kate Bentley oversees client relations and provides wedding-planning and design services for Kate Bentley Events, a Key West-based boutique event studio.

South Seas Island Resort

CAPTIVA ISLAND ➔ Occupying 330 acres on the northern reaches of Captiva Island, this resort village feels more remote than it actually is. "And because it's private to its guests, you don't have to worry about ceremony spectators," says McWilliams. (For the ultimate in privacy, opt for the Sunset Cove beach area on the Gulf.) Accommodations span from hotel rooms and condos to private homes, and families love kidcentric amenities like a water park and an old-timey ice cream shop. *Rooms from \$149; weddings from \$160 per person.*

The Ritz-Carlton

NAPLES ➔ At this five-star gulf resort, big-city style meets relaxed tropical hideaway. Couples have their pick of party sites — beach, ballroom, courtyard, garden and even a two-story Beach House with a peaked roof, wooden floors and loads of windows. Plus, says McWilliams, "the Ritz has incredible menus and dinner presentations." *Rooms from \$399 to \$1,299; weddings from \$240 per person.*

Hemingway Home and Museum

KEY WEST ➔ A circa-1849 Old Town estate where Ernest Hemingway lived and wrote for almost a decade now welcomes tour groups and weddings — and shelters about 50 six-toed cats, all named after famous people (continuing a tradition that Hemingway himself started). "Surrounded by a tall brick wall and a canopy of trees, its garden is a natural for destination weddings," says Bentley. *Weddings from \$500.*