

Getting Hitched at a Camp for Girls

Unlikely Domestic Spots Turn Into Wedding Meccas; An Option Over Tropics

By JANET ADAMY

WENDY MEYER CONSIDERED having her wedding on a tropical island. But she didn't want to burden her guests with overseas plane tickets and pricey accommodations.

So the Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., resident instead picked Point O'Pines Camp for Girls in upstate New York. The woodsy camp offers weekend wedding packages with lake views, private cabins and a barbecue rehearsal dinner. Point O'Pines also will arrange for Ms. Meyer to lead a morning yoga session for her guests.

"It's always nice to go to a tropical island, but this place is more fun and more spirited," says Ms. Meyer, 27 years old, who is scheduled to wed in October.

In the 1990s, weddings morphed into vacations, as Jamaica and other Caribbean islands lured couples with prepaid wedding packages and free honeymoon suites. In the past five years, the percentage of weddings that take place away from a couple's hometowns has doubled to 15%, according to WeddingChannel.com, a nuptials planning site.

Now, some unlikely spots are transforming themselves into new wedding meccas to capture tourist dollars from couples and their guests. Black Hills Receptions & Rentals in Rapid City, S.D., this year started buying advertisements on bridal Web sites to draw more out-of-state clients. In Lajitas, Texas, a resort called Lajitas, the Ultimate Hideout, will dispatch a private plane to pick up out-of-town guests.

Domestic destinations are catching on because they are less expensive than are overseas ones. Caribbean resorts offer low prices for reception food and entertainment, but those rates often apply only when blocks of guests book several nights in the resorts. Many island resorts are "all-inclusive," meaning guests must commit to food, lodging and entertainment packages if they want to be part of the wedding.

Five years ago, officials in Eureka Springs, Ark., thought the nearby Ozark Mountains and glass-enclosed Thorn-



Black Hills Receptions & Rentals seeks to lure wedding travelers to South Dakota.

crown Chapel could make the 2,278-person town an attractive wedding locale and began pitching it at bridal shows. Eureka Springs now issues more than two wedding licenses annually per town resident and draws brides from Japan, Australia and Hawaii.

At Eureka Springs' 1886 Crescent Hotel & Spa, the typical 100-person wedding costs about \$8,000, including food, alcohol, flowers, music, pictures and a spot for the ceremony. A double room starts at \$129.

Point O'Pines Camp for Girls in Brant Lake, N.Y., offers a two-night package that includes a barbecue rehearsal

dinner, prewedding softball game and a lakeside cocktail reception. The boat-house doubles as a chapel. The camp has been getting calls from brides in New York City, Boston and San Francisco, and now fills up for weddings almost two years in advance. The weddings themselves can cost as much as \$100,000. But for guests, lodging starts at \$70 a night for a two-person cabin.

One drawback of lesser-known destinations is that they aren't well-oiled wedding machines like Caribbean resorts, so it can be more difficult to obtain a wedding license, find a skilled photographer and make other arrangements. "For more urban couples, there may also be an issue of expectation," says Liz Zack, travel editor at The Knot, a wedding media company. She advises brides to get lots of pictures of the location before they book it.

Kerry Ermon says she wasn't disappointed when she held her wedding on Mackinac Island, Mich., last summer. She had only seen the venue, the historic Grand Hotel, in the 1980 film "Somewhere in Time."

"I don't know anyone in Michigan," says the 50-year-old New Orleans social worker. As she left the hotel in a horse-drawn carriage, people on the street called her Cinderella. "We couldn't have gotten that in New Orleans," she says.

Marketing to the Bride and Groom

Here are a few locales promoting themselves as wedding-travel destinations:

LOCATIONS	PLUSES	MINUSES	UNIQUE FEATURE
Grand Hotel Mackinac Island, Mich. www.grandhotel.com	Full-service salon and private orchestra.	Cars are forbidden on the island.	Photographers will trail your horse-drawn carriage.
Lajitas, the Ultimate Hideout Lajitas, Texas www.lajitas.com	On-site golf course and spa. Western-themed weddings.	Heat can make summer weddings uncomfortable.	Will dispatch private jet to pick up guests.
Point O'Pines Camp for Girls Brant Lake, N.Y. www.pointopines.com	Packages include a barbecue rehearsal dinner and wedding day softball game.	Spring and fall weddings since campers occupy the grounds in the summer.	Wine, beer served from antique wooden rowboat.
Black Hills Receptions & Rentals Rapid City, S.D. www.blackhillsreceptions.com	Surrounded by the Black Hills National Forest. Bride gets private outdoor dressing gazebo.	Doesn't have on-site lodging, and couples must coordinate catering.	Brides straddle 12-foot bronze Pegasus statue for photos.