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YOUR BIG DAY SIMPLIFIED

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the *plan*



OUR GUIDE TO WEDDINGS FROM SARASOTA TO THE EVERGLADES

how to marry in **SOUTHWEST FLORIDA**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HUNTER RYAN PHOTO (HUNTERRYANPHOTO.COM); REBECCA READ PHOTOGRAPHY; CAT PENNINGA; COURTESY BAY PRESERVE IN OSPREY; HUNTER RYAN PHOTO (HUNTERRYANPHOTO.COM); REBECCA READ PHOTOGRAPHY; HUNTER RYAN PHOTO (HUNTERRYANPHOTO.COM); NAPLES; MARCO ISLAND, EVERGLADES CVB

by **SARAH SEKULA**



Naples & Marco Island

Florida's Paradise Coast is equally posh and primitive, where upscale dining and high-end shopping meet natural Everglades allure.

STAY The Inn on 5th offers a slew of spots to chillax with your guests, including a rooftop courtyard and wraparound balconies. Serve aphrodisiacs, like oysters with jalapeno mignonette, at your rehearsal dinner at Avenue5, where glass doors open to simulate alfresco dining. *Rooms from \$149; weddings from \$2,500.*

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club has a sprawling lawn for bocce ball, croquet and a cookout. Tip: Plan your wedding on July 4 or New Year's Eve for a gratis fireworks display, or schedule your fete in the summer and settle in for free jazz concerts. Consider using orchids as decor; the onsite greenhouse has 3,000 of them. *Rooms from \$199; weddings from \$2,500.*

PLAY Paddle through tall grasses with Everglades Area Tours in search of stingrays and sea sponges. Afterward, write love notes on sea-grape leaves at the nearby

post office to send home. The **Dolphin Explorer** gives groups the chance to play biologist for a few hours as part of a working research project. Equal parts "om" and adrenaline, **Str8 Up Aviation** sets you down on a remote beach for a private yoga class.

PARTY At Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, the most popular reception spot includes the occasional lion roar. Shell out a little more for guests to take snaps with Molly, the three-toed sloth. The butterfly garden at the **Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary** makes for an intimate soiree that comes alive with colorful blooms and rare orchids.



MANGROVE-LINED CANALS, WIDE SWATHS OF SAND, PLAYFUL DOLPHINS — THIS SLICE OF FLORIDA IS ONE YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE CONSIDERED FOR YOUR I DO'S ... UNTIL NOW. WITH 200-PLUS SUNNY DAYS A YEAR, THE QUIANT COASTAL TOWNS FROM SARASOTA TO MARCO ISLAND ARE WORTH PUTTING ON YOUR SHORT LIST FOR YOUR BIG DAY AWAY.

The Details LOCAL COLOR

THESE GIFTS, YES. PINK PLASTIC FLAMINGOS, NO.

WELCOME BAGS

Include personalized sunglasses, sandalwood fans, pre-stamped Florida postcards and Kristi's Key-lime cookies made in Naples. — *Kelly McWilliams of Celebrations, Weddings & Parties*



FOOD

Grouper tacos, Gulf shrimp and pan-seared snapper are big hits. Trade your wedding cake for slices of Key-lime pie (with a topper of course). — *McWilliams*

DECOR

Most flowers are available year-round in Florida. Dress up classic and elegant flowers like hydrangeas and roses with colorful Florida orchids. — *Carrie Darling, Carrie Darling Events, Inc.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HUNTER RYAN PHOTO (HUNTERRYANPHOTO.COM); NAPLES, MARCO ISLAND; EVERGLADES CVR, SHUTTERSTOCK (2); LAURA GREER OF BEAUTIFUL DAY PHOTOGRAPHY

Sarasota & Charlotte Harbor

Filled with friendly locals, art escapes and avid boaters, these seaside hideaways also boast the squeakiest, shiniest white sand around.

STAY At Longboat Key Club your main ladies will appreciate the mani-pedis and en-suite hair and makeup; guys will love cocktail hour near the golf course (where a miniature Australian shepherd roams) and an optional grilled-cheese bar (just do it). Rooms from \$269; weddings from \$150 per person. **Palm Island Resort** sits on a secluded barrier island accessible only by ferry, and no cars means sweet serenity during your sunset vows. Opt for a casual beach ceremony or wed under island palms surrounded by Old Florida architecture. Rooms from \$148; weddings from \$85 per person.

PLAY Reel in king mackerel, amberjack and grouper with King Fisher Fleet, or have your fun on the water with a kayak caravan to a remote island arranged by Phoenix Rising Kayaks. Take

shelter from the sun with Hooked on SUP's evening paddle-board sesh where glow-in-the-dark lights under the boards mean optimum fish viewing.

PARTY The Ringling Museum of Art's exotic Moorish backdrop includes banyan trees and the waterfront Ringling mansion, where fire-breathers and acrobatic reception entertainment would fit in nicely. For an outdoor tropical gala, consider Marie Selby Botanical Gardens or host a picnic at Bay Preserve underneath hundred-year-old oaks.



THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Banyan trees and history drape the grounds at the Ringling Museum. Sanibel Moorings' beachfront venue. The bridal party's on board. Super-cool shades at the Ca' d'Zan mansion. String lights and stars at Marie Selby. A Big Cypress swamp walk. PREVIOUS PAGE: The Sunshine State brings natural and tropical fun.



Fort Myers & Cape Coral

Find bustling bistros, funky shops and ornate historical buildings in these beach towns.

STAY If QT with fam and friends is what you're after, Outrigger Beach Resort delivers. Here, a beachfront wedding combines a tiki hut and gentle Gulf breezes (we suggest veil weights). Afterward, dine at Charley's Boathouse for delectable steak and seafood. Rooms from \$100; weddings from \$1,345. South Seas Island Resort, situated on a 330-acre wildlife preserve on Captiva Island, has 2 miles of indoor and outdoor venues, including a second-story outdoor patio with a sweeping view of the pools, pier and dolphins jumping in the distance. Rooms from \$140; weddings from \$1,500.

PLAY Soar above the waves together with Paradise Parasail and walk away with professional photos to post to FB and Insta, or boost your nautical know-how with an Offshore Sailing School course. Wind down at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates with a tour of the inventor's 14-acre riverfront

estate, Thomas Edison's lab and experimental gardens, and Henry Ford's three-acre home (you can get hitched here too).

PARTY Resident butterflies, birds and bromeliads make The Botanical Gardens at Sanibel Moorings a no-brainer for nature lovers. Plus, there's a lighthouse nearby for first-look photos. The Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center is also a crowd-pleaser, and the Grecian columns in front of the building make for stately portraits.



Quick Hits

BEST WEDDING MONTHS >> October–February

AVG. TEMP >> 74°F

STATE FLOWER >> orange blossom

STATE GEM >> moonstone