



## MARRY IN MEXICO

Say “I do” in one of these romantic south-of-the-border settings.

By Bekah Wright

**U**pon arriving, your heart beats a little faster and your breath catches. Some describe the feeling like the butterflies in the stomach at the first blush of love. Welcoming visitors with aqua blue waters, white sand beaches, swaying coconut trees, and endless trailing clusters of hot pink bougainvillea, Mexico is an enchanting country. If you’re dreaming of a wedding that inspires spine shivers and sighs, host it in Mexico. The two destinations that follow—one on the Pacific Ocean, the other in the Caribbean—set the scene for a big day filled with *amor* straight from *el corazón*, the heart.

### PUNTA MITA

Just 45 minutes northwest of bustling Puerto Vallarta, a deserted road leads past vast expanses of land where thickets of huisache trees teasingly hide panoramas of the Pacific Ocean. The journey doesn’t disappoint. Soon enough, the Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita emerges, set on a private isthmus in Bahía de Banderas on the Mexican Riviera. Here, white sand beaches stand in stark contrast to jungle-like terrain set off by vibrant red hibiscus. Adding their own pop of color are butterflies flitting about happily. It’s easy to understand why. This is Nirvana—and a perfect place to exchange lifelong vows.

**Accommodations** The contemporary Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita easily blends with the lush landscape surrounding it. Although golf carts transport guests along the 25-acre property, it’s more enjoyable to stroll across bridges sheltered beneath the limbs of cen-

#### solar energy

Enjoy a panoramic wedding night sunset from your suite at the Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita.



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turies-old manzanita trees and passing iguanas sunning themselves on rocks.

The resort's charming, tile-roofed, Mexican-style casitas almost seem to be smiling in welcome. The 140 rooms and 32 suites come in five categories with garden or ocean views. Each has a private terrace or balcony with hammocks, chaises and, in some cases, a plunge pool for soaking in the Caribbean vistas. Indoors, there's much that pleases as well from 42-inch plasma televisions to deep-soaking tubs. The Oasis Family Complex comes with built-in fun by way of its Lazy River swimming pool, which carries guests along on inner tubes and floats via a mild current.

Perhaps best for wedding parties are two ultra-luxe suites tucked away on Las Manzanillas Beach. The 9,150-square-foot Arena Suite is set under the shade of trees, just steps from the ocean. Actually two suites, the Arena has three connecting bedrooms. A plunge pool provides post-beach dips. Over-the-top opulence comes in the form of the 13,000-square-foot, sun-bleached white and modern Coral Suite. Celebrity couples like Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner have sought the privacy of this beach-

front hideaway with its five bedrooms and specialty media, workout, and spa rooms. Other perks include an infinity-edge pool and a 24-hour personal host to attend to every need.

**Activities** There are numerous places to recline on the property, and all of them should get their due. First stop: Cuevas Beach, where romantic canopies shade daybeds dotting the sand. Nearby is the infinity-edge Nuna Pool that gives swimmers the appearance of floating on air. Around the pool, adults kick back in cabanas or on umbrella-shaded chaises as the younger set wage pirate battles in the pool.

A bit more removed is Las Manzanillas Beach, where hammocks sway lazily beneath the trees and thatched umbrellas shade lounge chairs. Keeping things comfortable are beach attendants who make the rounds with coolers of water and ice cream. Another lure: canopied daybeds on the beach for sunbathing.

Away from the surf, the resort's adult-only Tamai Pool can function as base camp for bridal parties. The rentable private cabanas are decked out with 42-inch plasma televisions, DVD players, Bose Wave Sound, high-speed Internet

access, and iPods that can even be used while swimming. Four pools—including two plunge pools and a Jacuzzi—call for taking a dip. Pool attendants arrive to take lunch orders, drop off fresh fruit and ice cream, and schedule poolside spa treatments. The cabanas are also the place to pull the privacy curtains, sink into the heavily pillowed daybed or chaise, and let the breeze from the ceiling fan bring on a midday nap. Chilled and ready post-nap are water selections in iced champagne stands. Of course, the individual fridge and stocked bar hold thirst-quenching beverages as well. Even better yet, six types of caviar and a variety of champagnes are on tap in the evenings for pre-wedding celebrations at the Tamai Pool Champagne & Caviar Bar.

Those looking to achieve true relaxation should head to Apuane Spa. The hacienda-style spa isn't the only place to savor a treatment. Massages can be scheduled on the beach, poolside, or in a special cabana in Tamai Zen Garden. Just right for brides and grooms looking to melt away pre-wedding stress: the three-and-a-half-hour "Like Water for Chocolate" package that uses chocolate and cocoa mixtures in a scrub, wrap, and facial. More warm

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chocolate oil is smoothed over tight muscles during the warm stone massage. Take time for a happy reminder that the honeymoon awaits on a private terrace with champagne and chocolate fondue. While at the spa, the bride-to-be can check in with the salon to schedule hair and makeup styling, which can either be done on-site or in-room, for the big day.

Adventures abound at the Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita. Guests can start the day with a fitness session of tai chi or Pilates, or a workout in the resort's state-of-the-art gym. Even more fun is greeting the day with friends and family atop "The Rock" during a yoga flow class. Four floodlit tennis courts allow for matches during the day and in the evening. The Jack Nicklaus-designed

72-par golf course offers prime sea views. One not to miss is at the course's signature hole, the "Tail of the Whale," so named due to its location on an appropriately shaped natural rock formation.

Once-in-a-lifetime activities such as swimming with dolphins or a sea lion named Monaco can also be arranged. Sports equipment, including Frisbees, fishing tackle, and snorkel gear, is available. Great for groups are beach volleyball, paddleball, and baseball. In addition, the concierge will arrange surfing, scuba, sailing, deep-sea fishing, snorkeling cruises, boat excursions, and horseback riding. Water lovers can also take to the waves with the resort's Hobie wave and Hobie cat sailboats, kayaks, and boogie boards. For a more extravagant adventure, gather the gang aboard the Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita's three-story, 55-foot yacht for whale watching, snorkeling, diving, or exploring the nearby Mariettas Islands.

Additional fun is ahead with resort programs such as Catch of the Day, through which guests join Executive Chef Herve Fuchó to select fish fresh off the boat as they are brought ashore. Choose the fish you wish to eat that night and dictate how it's prepared. The resort's cultural center offers everything from historical tours to tequila tastings.

Although there is much to do at the property, there is also much to see in the surrounding area, such as Puerto Vallarta's art galleries and waterfront promenade. Additionally, the concierge can arrange outings from horseback riding to off-roading in the jungle to ziplining through a tropical forest.

**Rehearsal dinner** Numerous venues at the resort would make for a stunning rehearsal dinner. The open-air, modern Bahia Beachfront Grill is nestled on a cliff right on the beach. Walls made of sails are apropos for the pervasive, salt-tinged ocean breeze that accompanies the panorama of the Pacific. Watch the night's meal being prepared in the open kitchen.

For a more formal atmosphere, choose the sophisticated Aramara. A private dining room is available, but wedding parties should take advantage of the terrace, where they can view the sunset. The cuisine is an eclectic Chino-Latino mix. Adding more international flavor to the evening is live Cuban music.

Locales that provide a more casual atmosphere are the *palapa*-style Ketsi Restaurant and Bar, Nuna Pool and Nuna Bar, or the beach.

A unique setting for an evening of elegance is the Tamai Zen Garden. Cocktail hour begins in an outdoor lounging area at Tamai Pool. As

the dinner hour is announced, guests make their way over a bridge past a stream filled with lily pads. Nature serves as the rehearsal dinner's florist with ample hot pink bougainvillea at every turn. An area circled by waist-high walls emerges. In the center, a giant firepit warms during a communal meal at twilight. Later, the betrothed can slip away for private time in a palapa draped with wispy white fabrics and palm fronds that give the feeling of being lost in a private jungle.

**Ceremony and reception** Dramatic beauty is in store for couples who choose to host a *boda* (wedding) on the Pacific Ocean. Stretching right out into the deep blue waters is The Rock, an outcropping at the foot of the resort. Smaller parties can make their way up the stone stairs to a rock-lined, sandy path flanked by grass and lit by torches. The bride begins her procession down this selfsame walkway, meeting her groom at the point, where the sun setting upon the waves below serves as a picturesque backdrop. Afterward, the area is transformed for a dinner under the stars, during which guests are attended to by tuxedo-clad waitstaff carrying silver platters. Violinists serenade as the newly betrothed get close for a waltz. Suddenly, the lyrics "Well, it's a marvelous night for a moon-dance with the stars up above in your eyes" begin to take on a whole new meaning.

Also using nature to its advantage is Las Manzanillas Beach. As the proceedings begin, guests watch the bride descend a set of stairs and cross a bridge to join hands with her groom beneath the limbs of a manzanita tree. As night falls, the wedding party gathers at tables lit by lanterns hanging from tree limbs. Almost as fun as taking that first bite of wedding cake, the bride and groom make s'mores for one another, aglow not only from the flames of the firepit, but from knowing they're now husband and wife.

Brides and grooms can also seal their love with a wedding at sea by hopping aboard the resort's three-story yacht to exchange vows on its moonlit bow.

Couples who wish to marry in a church or cathedral can consider off-site settings like the famous La Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe in Puerto Vallarta. There is also a church of the same name that is closer to the resort in the village of Sayulita.

To learn more about Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita, Mexico, call 011-52-3-291-6000 or visit [www.fourseasons.com/puntamita](http://www.fourseasons.com/puntamita).

## RIVIERA MAYA/CANCUN

Hidden away on a nature preserve beside the Caribbean Sea, Paraiso de la Bonita & Thalasso (translated, it means “Paradise of My Beauty”) offers a prevailing sense of peace. A feeling of love emanates upon entering the 14-acre, adults-only oasis that’s part of The Leading Hotels of the World collection. This may be attributed to the resort’s history. Owner Carlos Gosselin originally intended to build a home on the site to honor his “La Bonita,” his wife, Elisa. The globe-trotting pair chose instead to open their doors to travelers as a means of sharing treasures from the couple’s extensive journeys.

Two Balinese tigers greet guests in front of the red Yucatan palapa-inspired main building. Inside, reflecting pools, fountains, and airy courtyards offer welcome. The Gosselins’ international collection of artwork and antiques seem right at home in the seaside locale. Family photos are sprinkled about the premises. In a setting filled with such warmth and beauty, it’s no wonder that film studio exec Alex Young is said to have proposed to his girlfriend, actress Kate Walsh, at this resort. Indeed, this is a place where love stories unfold. Write a chapter of yours by planning your nuptials here.

**Accommodations** Wander the grounds of Paraiso de la Bonita and you’ll likely share pathways with preening peacocks and ducklings “all in a row.” These winged creatures reside in the adjacent bird sanctuary in a field of mangroves. Get a wink of acknowledgement from sun-worshipping iguanas, too.

Red and yellow hacienda-style buildings add color to the sunwashed surrounds and house the resort’s 90 suites. Each is named after a geographic location visited by the owners and accessorized by décor from regions in China, the Caribbean, Africa, Bali, the Mediterranean, and India. Grand arches and columns make the accommodations feel palatial. In the living area, a love seat and banquette-style sofa brim with pillows. Balconies or terraces offer cozy seating with pillowed daybeds that showcase the sunrise. Some quarters also have open-air showers and plunge pools. Bubble baths can be had in the marble bathroom’s sunken tub for two, where water spills from the mouth of a stone lion’s head. And because the Gosselins know where priorities should lie, suite beds have been elevated so guests can wake up to a view of the ocean from their boudoir.

Bridal parties will like the Uxmal Suite, which has two entrances. Mexican textiles in



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fuchsia pink and spring green brighten the suite's two bedrooms, two marble bathrooms, oversized living rooms, full kitchen, dining room, and conference room. A wraparound terrace with dual plunge pools is ideal for entertaining outdoors. A 24-hour butler service is on alert with chilled cocktails.

**Activities** The resort's cobalt blue-tiled central pool magnetically draws guests to the double chaises circling it. Frog statues spout water into the tri-level pool and hot tub, in the center of which concrete loungers promise extra chilling properties. Four-poster "double beds" on the beach are great for basking in the sun. Pool attendants keep everyone supplied with frosty beverages, chips, and killer guacamole.

Hidden away at the far end of the property is the Thalasso Center Spa, which has its own outdoor seawater pool, heated to body temperature. Indoors, the spa also uses therapeutic, fresh seawater in many of its treatments. One on the menu that does not involve water is the Uxmal Massage. Mayan essential oils are applied during this procedure, in which spagoers embark on a Mayan journey that results in ultimate relaxation. More bliss follows in the coed Jacuzzi and sauna. Side-by-side massages outdoors on the pier are perfect for the bride and groom.

Three other components are part of the spa experience. A new Anti-Aging Center offers cutting-edge anti-aging medicine and treatments. A structure called the Temazcal draws on ancient practices; a Mayan sweat lodge-like ritual is performed inside. The salon opens its doors for hair styling and makeup applications, keeping the bridal party camera-ready.

Guests can stay on track with workouts in the gym or at outdoor yoga classes. Or combine fun and calorie expenditure: Go windsurfing or kayaking and play tennis on-site. Snorkel and scuba expeditions to El Jardin, the world's largest protected reef, get underway on a catamaran. Other water activities offered are sport fishing, setting sail on a sunfish or Hobie Cat, or catching the resort's tender boat for a jaunt to Puerto Morelos, a small fishing village.

Keep the wedding festivities rolling in the shade with tequila tastings or cigar sampling at the Library's bar. Get civilized at the Bird Lounge's afternoon tea in which English and Chinese traditions are combined.

Off-site, golfers can get their fix at the fairways of nearby Moon Palace Golf Course, El Camaleon Mayakoba, or Playacar Golf Course. Concierge-



**pair-worthy pursuits** Tie the knot on Paraiso de la Bonita's pier as waves gently lap, the sun streaks the sky, and guests look on from under the thatched-roof palapa.

arranged outings include tours of the ancient ruins of Chichen Itza, Uxmal, and Tulum. Also fun for exploring are the five-million-year-old Grutas de Aktun Chen caverns. And don't miss swimming with dolphins and diving with sea turtles.

**Rehearsal dinner** Hippos Bar and El Chiringuito Beachside Grill are on hand to offer low-key revelry for rehearsal dinners. Both offer spectacular ocean vistas (as does the entire resort). Lip-smacking grilled fare is paired with dipping sauces at El Chiringuito, where you can host a beach barbecue that will be remembered. The two wooden hippos for which Hippos Bar is named add quaint romance to a celebration in this casual, open-air bar by the central pool.

The atmosphere goes "wild" at Kaax Restaurant, in which a wraparound jungle mural bathes the walls in shades of green, orange, and yellow. Taking center stage is a dinner of regional specialties on the establishment's Mayan Menu. As night falls, head the party onto the adjoining terrace, which is shared with the Sikil Bar, for wedding weekend toasts.

Enjoy a refined dinner of "Cuisine de los Soles" in La Canoa Restaurant's private dining room. A communal table is scattered with red xiora flowers and set with silver inlaid plates from Taxco. The 5,000-bottle wine cellar keeps signature bottles of champagne ready for lauding the bridal party.

A pre-wedding Mayan ceremony is unforgettable. Couples enter Paraiso de la Bonita's Temazcal for this shaman-led ritual. Bequeathed with a blessing, the bride and groom surface among family members who are clad in white and deliver

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good wishes to the duo as they begin their journey together. Steps away is a candlelight dinner on the spa lawn. Overlooking the proceedings from the spa pool is a statue of the god Kukulcan, the feathered serpent. During toasts, the betrothed share a smile knowing that a glorious day is ahead.

**Ceremony and reception** There are myriad sites for tying the knot at Paraiso de la Bonita. Couples can say “I do” at sea aboard the resort’s 50-foot private catamaran, *La Bonita*. Another place to be at one with the ocean is on the pier. The candlelit deck affords a perfect entrance for the bride. Waiting beneath the thatched-roof pier are guests who watch as the bride joins her groom. Gently lapping waves and a sun-streaked sky combine to create the ambience.

Nuptials of distinction get underway with a ceremony held in the Birds Lounge. Leading to the courtyard is a red breezeway with majestic chaka beams and columns. The sun peeks through the thatched roof, casting artful shadows as the bride makes her way down the pebble-inlaid path decorated by symbols representing the sun, water, air, and fire. The couple convene at the flower-laden table in the center of the lounge, where an officiant begins the ceremony. After the vows, the party can easily spill into the adjoining Kaax Restaurant and onto the terrace of Sikil bar for panoramic vistas of the Caribbean.

A Mayan ceremony is another option. The resort’s main pool serves as a unique outdoor chapel with a wooden bridge built over its center. The couple stands before a shaman as pre-Hispanic instruments play Mayan music. A spiritual ceremony spoken in Mayan brings the four elements of fire, water, air, and earth into play. The shaman blesses the betrothed with love, happiness, and hope. While reciting their vows, the bride and groom don flower crowns and share wine and fruit. Symbolic gifts are exchanged, followed by their pronouncement as husband and wife. Signaling that the union has begun, flower petals rain over the newlyweds.

Couples looking to marry in a church or cathedral can consider venturing off-site to Cristo Resucitado in Cancun or Cristo Rey in Puerto Morelos. Back at the resort, a full-moon reception on the beach is magical. Lunar lighting sets the married couple aglow as family members raise glasses to their future. The tide rolls in and out as stars twinkle above. The bride leans against her husband, content. Yes, marriage can be paradise.

To learn more about Paraiso de la Bonita, call (866) 360-6288 or visit [www.paraisodelabonita.com](http://www.paraisodelabonita.com). ■