

Destination Weddings: The Allure of Maui

豪華な結婚式——マウイ島の魅惑——

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アブストラクト

本稿では、ハワイのマウイ島にあるワイレア地区の豪華な結婚式市場に焦点を当てている。フォーシーズンズリゾートマウイのウェディングプランナーとの広範囲にわたるインタビューは、豪華なレベルの結婚式がお客様に魅力的である理由と完璧なサービスをよりよく理解するのに役立ち。差別化のメリットは、高級ホテルにとっての主要なセールスポイントの1つであり、この論文では、花嫁と新郎の両方が彼らの大切な日に特別な気分になる方法を掘り下げる。また、オアフ島のワイキキ地区での現地結婚式の簡単な分析では、2つの異なる市場を比較することができる。ワイキキの結婚式は日本市場に合っているが、マウイの結婚式は北米とアジアのカップルに共通している。ワイキキでのクラスメートの結婚式に出席した元学生とのインタビューは、日本人顧客のためのオアフ婚礼体験の魅力を洞察するために利用されている。

Key Words : ☐ Destination wedding ☐ Maui, Hawaii ☐ Wailea
☐ Four Seasons Resort Maui ☐ Vow Renewal

Introduction

The term destination wedding is used to describe a spectacular place for couples to celebrate their marriage at a location which is often far away from home. The island of Maui, located in the Hawai'ian archipelago, remains one of the most popular worldwide destination wedding locations due to its natural beauty, scenic beaches, and temperate climate. For the bride and groom, Maui offers an ideal romantic setting to share and commemorate their special day with both family and friends.

Yet, for most Japanese people, the notion of a Hawai'ian wedding usually means Waikiki Beach on the island of Oahu. This is not by accident. Rather, it is the direct result of excellent marketing by Japanese wedding companies to steer customers toward package deals that can undercut more elaborate wedding banquets back home in Japan. Due to their proximity, overseas weddings frequently result in much smaller guest lists and create a more intimate wedding event. Since Waikiki is undeniably the most Japanese-friendly area of Hawai'i, it

offers a wide range of benefits to Japanese couples.

First, there is less likelihood of culture shock for visiting guests because so many store merchants speak Japanese and there are a host of Japanese restaurants in Waikiki. In other words, there is far less anxiety about not being able to communicate in English. Second, there are many direct flights from Japan to Honolulu which makes Waikiki a non-stop travel destination. This is an important consideration for older parents and relatives who might be concerned about the strenuous aspect of traveling abroad. Third, the island of Oahu provides an abundance of beautiful wedding spots for couples to tie the proverbial knot.

While Oahu certainly does appeal to Japanese clients, this paper is seeking answers to the reasons why Japanese couples hardly ever choose Maui as their destination wedding spot. Is it strictly for economic reasons? Or does the convenience of Waikiki and being Japanese-friendly outweigh any of the perceived positives of Maui? To better delve into this matter, interviews were conducted with brides and her friends that attended weddings in Waikiki and Maui. This personal insight will help readers come to understand the gulf that exists between Oahu and Maui destination weddings.

Destination Wedding Boom and the Allure of Maui

Today in the United States, more than one in four marriages are a destination wedding. This varies greatly compared to a more traditional wedding which occurs closer to one's hometown, follows a protocol consisting of a ceremony followed by a reception, and is quite often arranged by parents and relatives. These days, however, more independent-minded couples are deciding to personalize their wedding into an event that is relevant to them. As a whole, destination weddings tend to be less ostentatious and more casual than traditional wedding venues. For destination weddings, the focus seems to be on creating a shared experience of relaxation and building lasting memories (Malone, 2016; Sardone, 2011).

While there are many themes for destinations weddings, escaping to a tropical location remains one of the top choices. Known as the Valley Isle, the island of Maui offers many idyllic spots for destination weddings. Compared to Honolulu and the island of Oahu, Maui county is much less populated and therefore has far less car traffic and congestion than the state capital. According to 2015 population estimates, Honolulu county represented some 70% of the state population while Maui ranked third in the state with 12% (Hawai'i Census, 2015). Herein lies one of the major differences between destination weddings on Oahu and Maui. For guests coming to Maui, the island offers a more remote location for a wedding. Many of the five star hotels on Maui are situated on pristine beaches. This allows wedding party guests to feel more in touch with the beauty of the island and away from the hustle and bustle of crowded tourist streets. Then again, this factor may be a demerit for Japanese clients and their

guests. Some, or even most of them, are quite comfortable staying in an urban, tropical environment. Additionally, purchasing souvenirs is almost always on their to-do list, so proximity to nearby shops is likely considered a positive.

High-End Destination Maui Weddings

On Maui, there are two main areas for luxurious destination weddings. First, on the southern part of the island is the area known as Wailea. Similar to the climate of Waikiki on Oahu, Wailea receives substantially more sunshine than any other part of the island. This is the reason so many high-end luxury hotels are situated on this side of Maui. The second area is Lahaina located on a more secluded northwest corner of the island. For brevity purposes, Wailea will be the featured destination wedding location in this paper.

In Wailea, the top wedding venue is arguably the five-star Four Seasons Resort Maui. In my extensive on-site interview—which appears throughout this section of the paper—with Marlyn Kaopuiki, wedding sales coordinator at the resort, I was informed that the main feature of the Four Seasons is the hotel's strict policy to host only one wedding per day (M. Kaopuiki, personal communication, March 23, 2016). At the Four Seasons Resort Maui, a person's wedding is reserved to be exclusive for that special day. Ms. Kaopuiki mentioned that it is common practice for other Maui hotels to book multiple weddings on the same day. This is often the norm during some of the busy wedding months. However, the Four Seasons is unique in that regard. They make it a rule for the bride not to see another person in a wedding dress on her special day.

At the Four Seasons Resort Maui, there are four people on staff to assist in the wedding event. Two designers and two coordinators designate the resort as a one-stop wedding spot. While other Maui luxury hotels will procure outside staff to assist them, the staff at the Four Seasons Resort keeps everything in house to assure the highest quality standard. Moreover, the hotel avoids offering so-called cookie-cutter or standard package plans for wedding groups. Instead, they strive to elicit specific information about the bride and groom so they are able to recommend the most suitable enhancements for the couple's wedding event. The belief here is that a more personalized approach will lead to a higher level of customer satisfaction.

To help offer prospective wedding parties a glimpse into the features of the Four Seasons Resort, there is a Pinterest account for clients to see professional photos from past weddings held at the Four Seasons Resort Maui. These pictures help couples decide which specific features they might prefer to have at their own wedding. Currently, there are 28 Pinterest boards to choose from and this form of marketing permits the staff to pinpoint clients likes and dislikes.

One major difference that Ms. Kaopuiki has noticed over the past few years is that grooms

are now much more involved in the wedding planning process compared to a decade ago. In the past, brides were relegated as the sole planner for the big day. However, recently grooms are readily participating in wedding planning details. The staff noted that this phenomenon is not limited to one specific cultural group. As a result, the hotel's destination wedding marketing campaigns have been altered to appeal to both men and women.

Second Time is The Charm

One of the fastest growing wedding trends at the Four Seasons Resort is for marriage vow renewals. These ceremonies are used to honor wedding anniversaries and often are commemorated by couples after a decade or two of sharing their lives together. Wedding vow renewals are frequently attended by a smaller group of people than the average traditional wedding event. Overall, wedding vow renewals average 60–75 people compared to traditional weddings which attract 200 guests (Marx, 2016). With divorce rates in the United States hovering around 50 percent (CDC, 2014), it should come as no surprise that happily married couples are eager to commemorate their lives together with a costly destination wedding. Maui perfectly fits this bill with its natural beauty and inviting climate to memorialize the occasion.

An interesting point concerning wedding vow renewals is that it is the husband who customarily arranges this anniversary event. Ms. Kaopuiki mentioned that husbands are quite eager to shower their unwavering love upon their partner with an extravagant renewal event. As a matter of fact, wedding vow renewals constitute between 20–30% of hotel revenue at the Four Seasons Maui resort. And, based on projections by the sales staff—with demographics clearly ushering in a graying society—they anticipate vow renewal numbers will increase in the years ahead. This fact was further confirmed by a telephone conversation with the nearby Grand Wailea Resort, a wedding sales associate conveyed that wedding vow renewals represent 25–30% of their current wedding business (A. Nowakowski, personal communication, March 25, 2016).

For vow renewals at the Four Seasons Resort Maui, hotel guests tend to shun formal wear for more casual attire. Fortunately for guests, they can purchase wedding accoutrements at the nearby premier outdoor shopping arcade known as The Shops at Wailea. With more than 70 shops and restaurants, hotel guests can find distinct luxury brands and local favorites to satisfy most of their discerning needs. According to the staff at the Four Seasons Resort Maui, wedding party attendees most often choose linen clothing since it is loose, fashionable, and ideally suited for the Maui climate. With so many brand name stores literally around the corner from the Four Seasons, members of the hotel party should be able to find a wide array of clothing choices for either a traditional wedding or vow renewal ceremony.

Size Does Matter

As part of the wedding policy of the Four Seasons Resort Maui, there is a minimum wedding size of two people. This would obviously be for a couple that chose to elope at the hotel. On the other end of the scale, the maximum size wedding at the Four Seasons Resort Maui is limited to 200 people. Per Ms. Kaupuiki, the common range for wedding parties at the Four Seasons Resort Maui is 50–125 people. This permits the hotel to fully utilize its exquisite grounds and cater an event so guests have ample room to move around.

For those traveling to the Four Seasons Resort Maui, the U.S. mainland represents the largest segment of guests that come to attend a wedding event. However, there are many wedding attendees that travel from as far away as Asia and Oceania. For instance, it is commonplace for relatives and guests to attend from locations such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, Australia, and New Zealand. In that sense, Maui serves as an ideal, centrally located tropical setting for couples with family and friends located from the U.S. mainland and the aforementioned locations across Asia and Oceania.

While attendees from Asia abound, brides and grooms hailing from Japan are a far less common occurrence on Maui. Alluded to earlier, one reason for this circumstance is that Oahu remains the revered wedding spot for Japanese clientele. Sullivan (1996) wrote two decades ago that 82% of young Japanese couples preferred Oahu as their ideal wedding location. Part of this early shift to overseas weddings was to avoid the intricate social protocol that exists for weddings in Japan. Couples often feel obligated to invite numerous school classmates and co-workers which can significantly drive up the cost of a wedding. Also, the overall domestic wedding tag does not include the price for a honeymoon. Therefore, when wedding planners began offering Waikiki weddings that included limousine rides, a church or chapel service, tropical flowers, video recording, photos, hairdressers, manicurists, pampered facials, along with airfare and a reputable hotel along Waikiki Beach, all at a remarkable price of \$5,000 or less, Japanese couples signed up in droves. Furthermore, the destination wedding had an added built-in feature. The honeymoon was included as part of the wedding package.

Issues such as convenience, language, and availability of Japanese food remain three of the main reasons why Oahu continues to control the Japan wedding market. Whether this will change with the next generation of Japanese couples looking for a more exotic wedding locale remains to be seen. Nevertheless, for Japanese couples, Oahu—and the beauty of Waikiki—offers a very wide range of wedding options that can cater from low budget to those seeking a more exclusive wedding experience.

Overnight in Paradise

Wedding couples that marry at the Four Seasons Resort Maui—when travelling from the U.S. mainland—generally stay at the hotel for five-seven days. Meanwhile, family and guests of the bride and groom will typically stay an average of five nights. For those guests travelling from Asia, Ms. Kaopuiki noticed that they stay for only two-three nights. It seems like an awfully long way to travel—approximately 12 hours—only to repeat the long journey again within a few days. Yet, this likely speaks more for the work ethic or inability to stay away from one's place of employment for longer than three days than a lack of festive genes.

At the Four Seasons Resort Maui, some wedding couples choose to pay for all their guests rooms. For such generous couples, this results in a smaller wedding party of approximately 30 people. Considering a one night stay at the Four Seasons Resort Maui costs approximately \$600–800 per room, this is indeed a remarkably kind gesture. Concerning room rates, the bride and groom receive a 30% discount and often are given a complimentary upgrade.

Regarding the other guests of the wedding party, there are two systems available to stay at the Four Seasons Resort Maui. Guests have the option to separately call the hotel and state the name of the wedding party to receive a discount. However, this is based on hotel availability and reservations cannot be guaranteed. The other method is for the wedding party to contract a minimum of 25 rooms since this will offer a better discount.

With high season at the resort from December 15th until January 5th, it is imperative for larger wedding parties to book far in advance. Ms. Kaopuiki said that most wedding couples will start their planning at least one year before their big day. In the case of the Four Seasons Resort Maui, they are fully booked during the high season years before the wedding takes place. Additionally, the months of May through October are classified as the official wedding season. Therefore, those wedding parties will also book well ahead. For couples looking for a more affordable option, the best value for nuptials is between November 1st and mid-December. The staff called this slower six-week period, the proverbial calm before the storm.

Exclusivity Has Its Privilege

Guests at the Four Seasons Resort Maui generally arrange for a wedding event that consists of cocktails, followed by the wedding ceremony, and then an outdoor full course, sumptuous dinner. For culinary options, the hotel can offer a fairly wide range of dining possibilities and will cater to different cultures and religions. Gastronomy at the hotel is considered world class and the wedding planning staff is more than happy to tailor the event to any and all food tastes and needs. In recent years, the hotel staff informed me that there has been an increase in Indian wedding banquets. These elaborate weddings ordinarily last three

days and the hotel staff can provide all the necessary culinary and cultural options for the couple and their guests.

In scenic Wailea, the grounds of the Four Seasons afford three distinct settings for the wedding party. Couples can use the area called Plumeria Point for a smaller, more intimate wedding that has 50 guests. This offers expansive views of the ocean and West Maui mountains in the distant. Next, is Plumeria Gardens complete with a canopy that can host up to 200 guests. Finally, there is the area called Ocean Front Lawn which is the largest wedding venue at the Four Seasons Resort. It can hold approximately 250 people with a more elaborate set up.

Although the set time for the wedding ceremony is completely open to the bride and groom, a suggested time of an hour or two before sunset is recommended. In photographer's parlance, this is known as magic time and is perfect for capturing photos of couple on their big day. As is customary, after a ceremony of 20 minutes, wedding guests are escorted to the cocktail reception while the bride and groom pose for sunset photos.

Unlike other destination wedding hotels, couples are not locked into one specific wedding package at the Four Seasons. They can readily move up to other elements or enhancements that appeal to both their tastes and budget. This flexibility is a nice selling point for the staff at the hotel as it distinguishes their brand among other island matrimonial competitors.

The Bottom Line

At the Four Season Resort Maui, the most popular wedding is the Plumeria package. For a weekday event, the cost of the Plumeria is \$7,500 with an extra \$1,000 charge for Friday, Saturday or Sunday weddings. At this point, I would like to remind readers that none of the wedding packages include hotel room charges. Also, guests will spend \$125–150 per plate for the wedding dinner and the serving of alcohol will incur an additional charge. One nice perk is that the bride and groom can request to have their own signature drinks. These little things make the Four Seasons special. In regard to culinary options, \$13–15,000 is the average amount wedding couples spend on dinner and brunch for the following morning. In summary, a small weekday Plumeria wedding with 20 guests that includes dinner and brunch will cost approximately \$10,500. A larger 200 guest wedding will cost north of \$40,000.

One higher priced wedding package option is the Kanani, which includes a few additional services, such as tuxedo and wedding dress pressing, and costs \$9,000 for weekday and \$10,000 for the weekend. The ultimate package at the Four Seasons Resort Maui is the Kelii package which includes a 50 minute ocean side massage for two, along with a private poolside cabana for the day. The cost for this luxurious event is \$15,000 for weekdays and \$16,000 on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. Lastly, the pricing for an elopement ceremony or vow renewal is

more reasonably priced at \$5,400, but is only offered from Monday through Thursday. Again, couples can opt in for enhancements such as an ultimate dinner for two, pool cabana and champagne for the day, and an ocean side couples massage.

The luxury hotel destination wedding experience at the Four Seasons Resort Maui offers guests a magnificent place to get married. However, one could surmise that the wedding cost is prohibitive for most people. Conversely, Ganaden (2015) reported that the well-known wedding planning company, Watabe, handles more than 1,000 couples per month during the busy seasons on Oahu. Simple math indicates that Watabe is producing a mind boggling 33 marriages per day! They are the Henry Ford of the destination wedding market. Most of Watabe's clients choose a wedding that goes for around \$8,000, not including hotel and flights. This is significantly less than the base model offered by the Four Seasons Resort Maui.

Destination Wedding Feedback

To better comprehend the difference between an exclusive wedding on Maui compared to those being offered on Oahu, I spoke with a former student that got married on Oahu and had a separate conversation with her wedding guest. The bride stated that she and the groom chose a destination wedding in Hawai'i because it better suited their own image for their special day. Also, by inviting a small group of approximately 10 people, it kept the costs down so that was an added benefit. Their wedding was held at The Kahala Hotel & Resort which is situated along the water in Waikiki. And similar to the Four Seasons Resort Maui, their wedding was held just before sunset. Overall, the couple expressed that they were extremely happy with their destination wedding.

The basic Sapphire wedding package at the The Kahala Hotel & Resort costs \$3,600 and includes many of the same amenities as some of the aforementioned luxury destination wedding hotels (www.kahalaresort.com). At the Kahala Hotel in Waikiki, the bride and groom receive one hour of photographer services and are handed a package of 24 4" x 6" size pictures. However, at the Four Seasons Resort Maui, couples receive two hours of photographer services and walk away with 50 high resolution pictures on a DVD. Although this may seem like a small point to some, having a professional photographer to capture that special day is quite important. Readers should be aware that a professional wedding photographer will often charge \$3,000 to document the couple's wedding day.

A guest of the wedding party in Waikiki remarked that the setting and climate seemed to be a picture perfect place to celebrate one's wedding day (N. Yamazaki, personal communication, December 9, 2016). In this communicate, she remarked that she was envious of the bride and expressed a desire to have her own wedding in Hawai'i. The wedding itself lasted for almost three hours and included photographs, dinner served at a long table, and offered dancing for

guests. In her mind, the romantic backdrop and beautiful surroundings made for a fairytale like experience. When posed with the question whether she would be willing to pay almost double for a wedding at a more exclusive Maui location, the conversation came to an abrupt halt. After a short pause, she responded that it would not make much sense to pay an extravagant amount for a wedding elsewhere when a Hawai'ian paradise is available for so much less in Waikiki. Another point mentioned was that Honolulu has a direct flight from Japan and that is a big consideration for older relatives and guests.

Conclusion

For cost conscious couples, nothing rivals the destination wedding mills of Waikiki. A wide range of companies vie for the lucrative wedding business and competition will likely assure affordable prices going forward. With so many Japanese companies marketing their services throughout Japan, there is little need for matrimonial couples to turn elsewhere. All the wedding arrangements can be made in their first language which helps eliminate much of the anxiety that accompanies planning for the big day. Also, the majority of Japanese are quite accustomed to living and working in crowded places. Therefore, waiting one's turn to get married as the previous couple vacates the premises may not be viewed in as much disregard as people hailing from North America or other less populated countries.

For brides and grooms in search of the ultimate wedding venue replete with sumptuous courses of gourmet food, the ambience of the Four Season Resort Maui is in its own class. It offers a highly personalized wedding experience, with superior customer service, overlooking one of the most spectacular views in the Hawai'ian islands. For clients willing to spend lavishly for a lifetime experience, an extravagant destination wedding event is attainable. Regardless whether couples choose the luxury of Wailea on Maui or the affordable cookie cutter plan along Waikiki Beach, a destination wedding in Hawai'i can create an unforgettable memory to cherish with family and close friends. In the end, producing that shared memory may be the most important thing of all.

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