



LOVE IS IN THE AIR

BY BELINDA BRUCE

West Coast Destination Weddings

A wedding in a far-flung location can be the most romantic wedding of all.

Once considered the exclusive territory of celebrities and the elite, destination weddings have in recent years become popular and accessible for couples looking for a touch of the exotic in their nuptials. In fact, 10 percent of weddings today are considered destination weddings.

While Hawaii, Jamaica and Mexico have long ranked high on lists of romantic settings for that special ceremony, there is growing interest in British Columbia as an exceptional wedding destination.

With its breathtaking mountains, sparkling seas, towering rainforests, white shelled beaches and dreamy secluded bays, the spectacular landscape of B.C.'s West Coast is as dramatic a setting for a wedding as any global destination. And warm temperatures with low humidity throughout the summer

months makes the Coast an ideal spot for weddings from late May to early October.

Soha Lavin, of Countdown Events, is one of Vancouver's hottest event planners. For over six years she has been orchestrating weddings and other swanky special events in B.C. and afar. "B.C. has definitely become a hot spot for destination weddings for clients from Asia and the U.S., including Japan, China, New York, San Francisco and L.A.," she says.

Vancouver, Whistler and Vancouver Island are the top wedding spots on her client list. "We saw attention increase after Vancouver won the 2010 bid," she adds.

But it's not just people from elsewhere who consider the West Coast an ideal location for a destination wedding. For one Vancouver couple, "exotic" was not much further than their own backyard.



Rebecca Walker and Corey Davis exchanged vows on Newcastle Island, B.C. (Bantilleon Weddings)



Wedding ceremony on the lawn of Sooke Harbour House (Andrei Fedorov)

Last August, Rebecca Walker and Corey Davis exchanged vows on a warm sunny day under a canopy of Garry Oaks on Newcastle Island, B.C., located just a short distance from Nanaimo Harbour. Standing on a grassy knoll inside a heart of oyster shells their friends had created moments before the ceremony, with the Pacific Ocean and the snow-capped coastal mountains as their backdrop, the couple knew they had chosen the perfect place to be married.

Although they had considered locales farther afield, says Rebecca, "We really wanted an outdoor, West Coast wedding. A lot of friends and family wouldn't have been able to afford to attend if we held it in a traditional exotic locale." Newcastle Island held special significance for Rebecca who had worked there on a seasonal basis for four years. "It's known mostly as a Marine Park, but it's a beautiful place, steeped in history."

This charming isle just off the shores of south-central Vancouver Island was purchased and developed as a resort in the early 1930s by the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company as a destination for steamer excursions from Vancouver, B.C. The historic Newcastle Pavilion where the couple held their reception is the last standing dance pavilion built by the company on the West Coast.

Rebecca and Corey made it a weekend affair—shed pre-wedding jitters at the floating pub on nearby Protection Island on Friday night, held the wedding and reception on Saturday and a barbecue on Sunday. Most out-of-town guests travelled between Vancouver and Nanaimo by Harbour Air, and stayed at accommodations in the harbour.

"Most of my family is from Ontario, so for them the location was quite exotic," says Rebecca. "Yet, it was still a fun, new getaway spot for my local friends. Many of them want to come back."

From the secluded and tranquil to the majestic and awe-inspiring, the West Coast sparkles with inspiring locations to tie the knot.

Ranking third in the top 10 islands in the world, Vancouver Island is a Pacific paradise. With its temperate climate and diverse ecosystem, the Island is not only habitat for a range of wildlife but also an ideal location for all kinds

of outdoor pursuits including whale watching, kayaking, golf, hiking, boating, scuba-diving, rock climbing and cycling.

Colour and charm define the capital city of Victoria, from heritage buildings and totem poles that reflect its First Nations and British history to the picturesque Inner Harbour and downtown core. Boasting the mildest climate in Canada, Victoria is in bloom year-round and a popular launch point for outdoor adventure.

A jewel in the crown of Victoria Harbour, the grand, turn-of-the-century **Fairmont Empress** hotel will make bride and groom feel like royalty. This timeless setting, backed by nearly a century of expertise, is the ultimate in romance and elegance. From the crystal chandeliers and magnificent architecture of the Crystal Ballroom, to the stunning harbor views of the Empress Room Harborside, the Empress has a number of sumptuous spaces to choose from. The Rose Garden is ideal for photographs and the Willow Stream Spa adds a luxurious option for pre- or post-wedding pampering. From an intimate group of 10 to a grand affair of 300, the Fairmont Empress offers a variety of customized options to suit every occasion. The hotel's professional team of wedding and catering coordinators will ensure that each couple's special day is the enchanting fairytale they have always imagined.

With five wedding/bridal packages to choose from including *The Fairmont Platinum Honeymoon Program* and the *Royal Wedding Package*, the Fairmont Empress can take care of all wedding details in style. For more information contact Jill Olson at 250.995.3607 or jill.olson@fairmont.com.

Sooke Harbour House on the southwestern tip of Vancouver Island is an idyllic wedding spot. Nestled beside Whiffen Spit, just a 45-minute drive from Victoria, this unique inn is splendour defined. Filled with local antiques, collectibles and original art from 120 B.C. artists, and renowned for its fine, locally-inspired cuisine and award-winning wine list, Sooke Harbour House delights the senses. Each of the 28 guest rooms is decorated according



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With many more breathtaking West Coast places to explore for a dream wedding, love is definitely in the air.

to a unique coastal theme and guests can opt for a trademark Sea-zenity spa treatment in their room.

With three outdoor locations to hold the wedding ceremony—the upper garden, lower garden or beach—and four gorgeous, covered wedding/reception venues, this enchanting setting is a favourite of many Vancouver and Island wedding photographers. The qualified staff will assist with every detail, from the cake to flowers to photography. “We specialize in excellent food and wine, wedding cakes, bridal flowers, spa and a wide range of other services.” Or inquire about their “*We provide the mood, you provide the food*” wedding option in their dazzling Summer Pavilion. For more details see www.sookharbourhouse.com or contact 1.800.889.9688, functions@sookharbourhouse.com.

On the rugged west coast of Vancouver Island is the **Wickaninnish Inn**. Located in Tofino, B.C. on spectacular Chesterman Beach at the gateway to Pacific Rim National Park and Clayoquot Sound, this magnificent spot has 75 rooms, each with a fireplace, balcony and ocean views. Hold your ceremony on the beach amidst bleached driftwood and surrounded by old-growth forest, or in the fine-dining Salal Room, which can accommodate up to 50 people for a sit-down meal or 60 for a standing reception. “We host on average about 100 weddings per

year. We know weddings!” says Jane Ince, the inn’s public relations manager.

The Wickaninnish can customize menus and packages to fit any taste and budget. Offering only fresh seafood, free range meats and organic produce; non-traditional wedding cakes; a stellar wine list, and deluxe services at the Ancient Cedars Spa, they know how to take care of their guests’ every desire. For a more intimate ceremony, there’s the “*I Do*” Elopement Package. For info, check www.wickinn.com or contact 1.800.333.4604, sales@wickinn.com.

The charming and wild Southern Gulf Islands are a group of small islands just off the coast of south-eastern Vancouver Island near Victoria, B.C. Blessed with a Mediterranean-style climate, rural landscape and a wealth of wildlife, these islands



Above: The Verandah at Hastings House (Hastings House Country House Hotel)

Left: Sooke Harbour House overlooks Whiffen Spit (Andrei Fedorov)





are famous for outstanding arts and crafts, country inns, exceptional restaurants, kayaking, cycling, hiking and breathtaking scenery. Major communities are based on Gabriola, Galiano, Saltspring, Mayne, Saturna, and Pender islands.

Saltspring Island is the largest, most populated and most visited of the Southern Gulf Islands. This splendid haven is bursting with artists, craftspeople, entrepreneurs, organic farmers and a host of amenities including hotels, restaurants, and shops. Ganges is the island's biggest town.

Hastings House Country House Hotel, a small luxury country resort, spa and restaurant, rests on 22 acres of gorgeous waterfront on Ganges Harbour. Cresting the property is the 11th-century Sussex-style Manor House where guests may dine, mingle and lodge. Other accommodations include the restored historic Post Cottage and one of 18 distinguished suites.

With sumptuous gardens, distinctive indoor and outdoor wedding venues, elegant accommodations, on-site spa and fine cuisine with fresh herbs and produce from the estate gardens and orchards, Hastings House Country Hotel is a resplendent spot to host a wedding. They customize each wedding and can accommodate up to 60 guests.

"We also do small intimate weddings from two to twenty people," says proprietor Shirley McLaughlin. "Our expert on-site wedding planner will help each couple create their dream wedding." For more information, contact info@hastingshouse.com or see www.hastingshouse.com.

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Beautiful grounds, inviting lodges and gourmet food await at Hastings House (Hastings House Country House Hotel)



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