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Weddings

August 15, 2008

Location, location, location

Have a romantic destination wedding closer to home

By [Elyse Glickman](#)

Your congregation is there for you when you need it, but there are times when you're tempted to think outside the synagogue -- such as your wedding.

Destination weddings in spots like Hawaii or the Caribbean are a romantic way to start a new life with someone, but changes in the economy and fuel prices are forcing many couples to rethink the concept of getting "married away." While money may be no object for some couples and their families, they also have to now consider how far their invitees will be willing to travel to be a part of the big day.

Couples living in Southern California are lucky to have some of America's best wedding escapes just a few hours' drive away. And better still, many of them either cater specifically to Jewish clientele (from kosher catering to sourcing a rabbi and chuppah) or else are just so fabulous that they have boasted a Jewish following for years.

The best place to start -- and finish -- is a wedding location that speaks to your shared personality as a couple and respects your faith. Whether your wedding planning is a solo effort, includes family or a wedding planner, you should do your homework to determine which Southern California locations are willing to help you with the essentials, especially as Jewish weddings have different requirements than other faiths.

"The great thing about Jewish weddings today is that -- except in cases of ultra-Orthodox weddings -- couples can choose elements to the wedding day that truly represent who they are as a couple, especially when approaching how they want to do the ketubah signing, blessings, kosher food, use of challah during the service and other traditions," said wedding planner Melissa Barrad, who founded event company I Do...Weddings! in 2003. "You should ask prospective venues and caterers about any specific directions they have with kosher food. As there are more opportunities for better kosher food and caterers in Los Angeles, be sure hotels will either allow you to bring in food from your caterer of choice or have the capabilities and certifications to prepare the meals in-house. Also look into such details as rooms with high ceilings for the raised chairs and the horah, and rent a sturdier chair for the bride."



Westlake Village Inn

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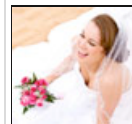
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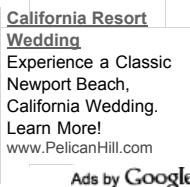
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Barrad also advises couples not to neglect the issue of raising a chuppah at the site, as the structures can be difficult to find and some synagogues won't rent theirs to non-members. Also, if some hotels do offer a chuppah for rent, look at it to see if it will fit into your wedding aesthetically.

However, she notes that many couples are making their own; craft stores and home improvement emporiums offer a wealth of materials that will enable couples to make their own design for the same cost as or less than a rental. She also suggests asking venues to provide photos from other Jewish weddings it has hosted and access to other Jewish couples who have exchanged their vows there.

Once you have all the right questions at hand, here's a short list of exceptional California venues to consider, including several that provide a variety of services for Jewish couples:

Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina

The Sheraton San Diego features a stunning new wedding lawn adjacent to a marina that's perfect for erecting an outdoor chuppah, as well as an extensive selection of indoor and outdoor event space with panoramic views of the San Diego Bay and downtown San Diego. The hotel's on-site wedding planners will cover every detail required for kosher-style weddings, while all four catering managers on staff are proficient in Jewish weddings and the cultural specialties involved with these events, from the ketubah signing to the horah.

Hard Rock Hotel San Diego

Even with its rock 'n' roll spirit and location at the entrance of the buzzing Gaslamp Quarter, the Hard Rock Hotel San Diego has the goods and gear Jewish couples want. One of its unique spaces for a wedding is Woodstock, the hotel's 9,200-square-foot outdoor urban garden, which can accommodate up to 1,000 people as well as a chuppah, dining tables, lounge area and a large dance floor. Before, during and after the wedding, the couple and their guests can party like rock stars, thanks to the 420 suites, 17 "Rock Star" VIP Suites, nightlife destinations created by Rande Gerber and a Nobu restaurant by celebrated chef Nobuyuki "Nobu" Matsuhisa.

The Prado at Balboa Park

Prado not only offers the splendor of its Balboa Park location, but is owned by a Jewish family (the Cohns). While they don't offer strictly kosher meals, the management is sensitive to various dietary restrictions and has made a variety of accommodations for the many Jewish couples who have wed there.

The Viceroy

In Palm Springs, the Viceroy is ideal not only for its hip Hollywood Regency ambiance but also its hands-on approach to wedding planning.

Saddle Peak Lodge

Although Saddle Peak Lodge is not specifically kosher, the management notes that about half of the weddings they do are for Jewish couples, and they offer a list of nearby resources and vendors to assist couples with their wedding's special needs. It is also a fitting place for film-buff couples to start their own personal history. Built in 1880 as a hunting lodge, it became an escape for the elite of Golden Age Hollywood, including Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, Errol Flynn and Clark Gable. Saddle Peak also takes advantage of nature's bounty on many fronts, from a kitchen that uses sustainable ingredients from local farms and vendors to a backdrop of trees, waterfalls and the majestic Santa Monica Mountains.

Westlake Village Inn

Halfway between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, the Westlake Village Inn is well suited for couples seeking the detail-oriented luxury of a boutique country inn. There are several garden settings to choose from, from the Lakeside Gazebo to The Waterfall. Couples yearning for the look and feel of a "wedding away" in Europe will love the Mediterraneo Gazebo where a slightly raised Romanesque gazebo takes a "chuppah-like" effect, or the Tuscan Garden.

Lodge at Sonoma

Those who've dreamed of a wine country wedding should look into The Lodge at Sonoma, offering the perfect balance of country inn warmth, boutique hotel glamour, Northern California architecture and wine country trappings.

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