



Weddings At Sea

You want to get married on a luxurious cruise ship... the wind in your hair, the sun on your face and the water glistening.....now back to reality. Getting married on a cruise ship is a wonderful experience, but one which can be rather complicated, and one which you will require the services of an experienced cruise consultant to plan on your behalf.

There are many things to consider - do you want to be married at sea or in a port? On the ship or on a Caribbean beach? Who will you invite? Do you want these guests to travel onboard with you? (If you plan to fill eight or more cabins with your guests, your party constitutes a group and may qualify for additional amenities.)

Many people imagine the Captain in his white uniform standing before the happy couple, reciting their vows as the ship sails through the water. Unfortunately, this romantic ceremony rarely happens - only two cruise lines actually perform weddings at sea, Princess and Cruise West. On the Grand Princess, the Golden Princess and the Star Princess, you can be married in international waters by the ship's Captain. These Princess ships are registered in Bermuda and the ships' captains have Bermuda licenses, which allows them to perform these weddings. Cruise West can perform your wedding at sea as well, with the Captain officiating at the event, but only within Alaska waterways in the areas surrounding Haines, Ketchikan, Juneau, LeConte Glacier, Misty Fjords, Petersburg, Skagway, Sitka, Tracy Arm and Prince William Sound. The Captain can obtain a temporary permit to officiate your wedding. After this event, the Captain will send the license to the appropriate courthouse to ensure your marriage is registered in time.

Beside these weddings at sea, there are two other ways that couples can be married on a cruise. These weddings take place in port, either on the ship itself or at a land site on shore. Some of these exotic destinations include Kona, Hawaii; St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands; Vancouver, Canada; Catalina Island, California; Acapulco, Mexico; Juneau, Alaska; Barbados; St. Vincent; and Montego Bay, Jamaica. With these port weddings, couples are rarely married by the captain of the ship. Instead, the cruise line will arrange for a notary public or nondenominational minister to be the officiant, unless you personally arrange for someone else to preside over the ceremony.

Onboard weddings tend to be intimate ceremonies, because only a limited number of guests are allowed on the ship, depending on which wedding package you purchase and the restrictions determined by the cruise line. Most of these weddings take place at the port of departure before the cruise embarks, between the hours of noon and three o'clock. Your wedding will be held inside, possibly in the ship's library, a reception room, or one of the entertainment areas. For couples who plan to wed on the day of embarkation, we strongly recommend arriving a day before departure. Your cruise consultant can arrange for an early flight and hotel rooms the day before the wedding.

An onshore wedding at a port of call during your cruise can be a wonderfully exotic and personal ceremony that reflects the beauty of a special day. You might exchange vows on a beach in the Bahamas, a church in St. Thomas, or beside a glacier in Alaska. With onshore marriages, you could celebrate your wedding with just the two of you, a wedding officiant, and witnesses supplied by the cruise line. Or you could have your friends and family sail with you or meet you in the port of call to celebrate the occasion. You may even design your wedding independent of the cruise line's personal wedding coordinator, but we don't recommend it.

Guests can be a complicated issue for someone planning a cruise wedding. Security has been tightened on all ships, and there are new restrictions on the regulations they impose on non-sailing guests. The wedding package you purchase through the cruise line will determine the number of guests you can invite to your ceremony and reception. Guests who are paying passengers on the cruise are always allowed to participate in your wedding. Non-sailing guests are generally allowed to come aboard for weddings and receptions, but you will most likely have to compile an accurate list of your guests, including their names, birthdays, and/or state-issued identification numbers and give this to the cruise line. Your guests will then be asked to show the proper identification upon boarding. The strictness of these regulations varies by cruise line and port. In some ports, particularly foreign ports, you may not be allowed to bring non-sailing guests onboard at all.

Cruise wedding packages may be basic or elaborate. A basic package with just the bride and groom or a few friends will cost you around \$800-\$900. Carnival's "Just for the Bride and Groom" package in Key West, Florida, costs \$695 and provides an officiant, a bridal bouquet and matching boutonniere, a bottle of sparkling wine for the champagne toast, champagne flutes, a wedding cake with a keepsake topper, recorded wedding march music, professional photographer and photo album. Or if you prefer a wedding on shore, packages generally run between \$800 and \$2000.

Royal Caribbean's Royal Romance at Megan's Beach, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I., costs around \$1300. Royal Caribbean will escort you to a beautiful island beach site and take care of the music, officiant, cake, champagne and photography while you get married on white sand with a bouquet of tropical lilies. Also for around \$1300 (and the same amenities),

Royal Caribbean will whisk you on shore to the Rainforest Glacier Gardens in Juneau, Alaska, to exchange vows amidst spectacular scenery. For a more elaborate wedding and reception, expect to pay \$2000+.

Starting at \$2400, Princess's Diamond package will provide you with everything you need for a memorable Wedding at Sea - the ship's Captain as your officiant, candlelight, fresh flower arrangements, Dom Perignon champagne, a three-tiered wedding cake, bouquet and boutonniere, a deluxe photo package, music performed live by a string quartet, a video recording of the ceremony, a lithograph painting of the ship signed by the Captain, and a reception with beverages and hors d'oeuvres.

In addition to the cost of the wedding package, you will have to pay marriage licensing fees. You are responsible for obtaining your marriage license from the place you will be married, and you must learn about the regulations involved in obtaining a marriage from that place. Some places require you apply in person, others will allow you to submit an application over the phone or through the mail. Licenses can cost anywhere from \$25 in Alaska to \$150 in Florida. The cruise line wedding coordinators will help you obtain your marriage license (sometimes for a fee), or will provide you with the information you need.

Once you have decided that you wish to be married on a cruise, you should check with your Cruise Consultant to determine which cruise lines provide the kind of wedding services you need. Cruise lines allow only a limited number of weddings per sailing, so you should plan and book early. All cruise lines require that you book a cruise before you reserve a wedding package. The Cruise Authority can secure your cabin while we put you in touch with the wedding coordinator who can confirm availability for your ceremony, reconfirm cruise line policies and answer any questions you may have. Then it's time to start planning your wonderful wedding at sea!

Vow Renewal

It's also possible to renew your wedding vows at sea. Vow renewal programs and vow renewal packages are much like weddings and wedding packages, except without the headache of calculating license fees! You are not required to obtain a marriage license or any other legal document before your vow renewal service. All you will need with you is proof that your marriage is valid. As with weddings, once you decide you want to renew your vows, you need to select a cruise and book it. Then we will put you in touch with a wedding coordinator or special services agent to design the perfect ceremony.