



NEWS RELEASE

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DESTINATION: MAUI – THE WEDDING INDUSTRY'S SUCCESS STORY

MAUI, Hawai'i – When Carolee Higashino opened the doors of her Wailuku-based wedding planning business 17 years ago, there were only four other people doing what she was doing. The booming Maui wedding industry of today was little more than a whisper. But as the years went on, and Carolee's business, A White Orchid Wedding, Inc., continued to grow and prosper, other businesses began to pop up around the island.

Today, there are over 300 wedding coordinators on Maui. "It's crazy!" Carolee laughs. "I have seen many businesses come and go, but overall the industry just gets stronger and stronger."

In 2007, A White Orchid Wedding was ranked among the *Pacific Business News*' "Fastest 50" growing companies in Hawai'i for the sixth time. According to Carolee, much of her business comes from referrals. Word is spreading along the bridal coconut wireless that weddings on Maui are the ultimate in romance. With its warm climate, miles of gorgeous beaches, tropical foliage and photo-perfect sunsets, Maui deserves its international reputation as *the* place to get married.

Destination weddings are big business on Maui, with close to 9,000 weddings held on the island last year by non-residents. "Maui is, without a doubt, the top destination wedding location," says wedding coordinator Tammy Ash Perkins, author of "*The Best of Hawai'i Wedding Book*." It's the weather, the palm trees, the beach; everything our venue itself has to offer is very appealing to mainland and overseas couples."

In addition, Tammy says, Maui has the feel of an adventure, something out of the ordinary. “Brides today are breaking that traditional in-the-church, in-the-hometown mode,” Tammy says. “They’re trying to have a wedding that’s more of an expression of their true personality - something beautiful and fun.”

For many couples, Maui is a natural fit - the central meeting point between two families in two very different places: Australia and San Francisco; Korea and Texas; New Zealand and San Diego. For U.S. citizens, the convenience of not having to worry about passports, foreign money and foreign language is a big draw.

Tammy says 75 to 80 percent of her business comes from the mainland U.S., with the second largest percentage from Canada, and third largest from Australia. She has also been coordinating more weddings for French visitors, thanks in part to a staff member who speaks fluent French. “I think that part of Europe is really becoming more aware of their options to come to Hawai‘i,” she says.

In the eight years since Robyn I‘aea began publishing *Pacific Rim Weddings* magazine (recently changed to *Pacific Weddings*), she says the majority of her subscriber base remains heavily West Coast. “But our subscribers are definitely much more international than ever before,” she says.

What draws these visitors to Maui? For many couples - like Kelly Patterson and Afshin Devani, who married in a sunset ceremony on the Sheraton Maui’s oceanfront lawn - they may have fallen in love with Maui on vacation. Having a wedding on Maui means always having the island as a very special place to come back to year after year to celebrate.

Some couples may never have set eyes on the island. What makes its charms so irresistible? According to Gabrielle Longhi, owner of Blue Sky Weddings, the draw is a simple one. “Brides come here because they want the beach and the ocean,” Gabrielle says.

And Maui rolls out more than 30 miles of beach for romantic-minded couples: from the endless golden sands of ‘Oneloa in Mākena, to the silhouette of Pu‘u Keka‘a framing the ocean in Kā‘anapali.

Simple, intimate beach weddings will always be the Maui standard, but increasingly, weddings are becoming larger and more elegant, with more couples opting for private estate and resort weddings. Maui’s coastlines are bejeweled with hundreds of world-class resorts, staffed with wedding experts; as well as exquisite private estates that the island’s many wedding coordinators can find and secure for visiting couples.

Some of Maui’s most popular resorts have recently undergone renovations to bring them up to an even more dreamy level. For example, Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea wrapped up a \$50-million renovation project with refurbished guestrooms and suites; a museum quality art collection, featuring the original works of Hawai‘i’s finest artists; and a new premium steak and seafood restaurant, Duo. Master hale builder Francis Sinenci constructed three new oceanfront Hawaiian hale for The Spa in the traditional Hawaiian style.

The Renaissance Wailea Beach Resort will be rebuilt as an ultra-luxury hotel, to be called

Baccarat after the French maker of fine crystal. The Wailea Baccarat will have 193 units, with 13 low-rise buildings that include units up to four bedrooms. The new resort and spa is expected to open in 2010.

The Royal Lāhaina Resort in Kā'anapali completed \$33 million in renovations, refurbishing the guestrooms and suites in its 12-story Lāhaina Kai Tower and adding new "island-inspired" art and décor. In addition, the resort replaced all bedding, carpet and paint in its garden and oceanfront cottages and redecorated the lobby and dining areas.

The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua, is completed an extensive \$180 million transformation and re-opened in January 2008, featuring 445 remodeled guestrooms and the addition of one- and two-bedroom residential suites. The resort will add a 14,000-square-foot spa offering Hawaiian-inspired treatments, private outdoor shower gardens and new couples cabanas; along with an oceanview fitness center and yoga studio, expanded lobby area and restaurants, all with Hawaiian-inspired design.

Four The Four Seasons Resort Lāna'i at Mānele Bay has opened a 13,582-square-foot oceanview ballroom and terrace called Hale Halawai ("meetinghouse"). The state-of-the-art space (which cost more than \$10 million) is perfect for large weddings or corporate and social events, designed to accommodate a full buyout of the resort: 500 guests for dinner; 600 for a reception.

Hawaiian traditions and the loving spirit of aloha lend themselves naturally to the romance of a marriage ceremony. A Hawaiian marriage ceremony offers couples a spiritual approach that connects with the host culture.

"Ancient Hawaiians were not monogamous; there was no 'forever and ever,'" says Hokulani Holt, director of cultural programs at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center and respected kumu hula or hula master. "The continuation of the race was the main reason to bring couples together. Were there marriages for love? Surely. Was there love involved? Definitely. But the main purpose was continuation of the race."

In ancient Hawai'i, marriage rites were mainly reserved for the ali'i (chiefs), and it is from this ancient union of highly respected beings that today's traditions have evolved. Western adaptations have added new elements to the essential spirit of ho'ao pa'a - the binding of a man and woman in a lasting union.

Roselle Bailey, a respected Native Hawaiian kupuna (elder) and kumu hula (hula teacher) in the Maui community, occasionally performs weddings as a licensed kahu. She incorporates in her ceremonies what she calls "the essence of a Hawaiian wedding, plus whatever the couple would like that is special to them."

Today, Hawaiian ceremonies typically include a kahu (minister) wearing a kīhei, or shawl, and an elaborate lei or lei po'o. He or she may blow the pū, or conch shell, and perform chants, prayers and blessings. These include the exchange of lei – often an open lei woven from fragrant maile leaves for the groom, and a sweet-smelling lei of tiny white pīkake blossoms for the bride. Sometimes the couple gives lei to their new families, symbolizing their joining

together.

The typical Maui destination wedding doesn't begin and end with the big day. According to Robyn I'aea, couples tend to extend the celebration on both sides of the event. "A majority of couples will come to Maui and usually be here for at least a week with family and friends,"

Robyn says. "They may have different events the week prior, like going to a lū'au or a sunset sail one night, and then maybe having a brunch the day after the wedding."

Weddings on Maui have the support of an entire industry humming behind them. This is no isolated island where it would be hard to find that perfect centerpiece. Brides have all the options of a mainland wedding: ministers of all faiths, musicians of all varieties, white doves or butterflies for release, flowers of every description, whatever brides need to make their ceremony unique and special.

And here's the big surprise: a Maui wedding won't break the bank. While it's certainly possible to go all out and indulge every fantasy a bride has ever had for her wedding day – and yes, many brides do, just ask Tammy Perkins! – many couples find out it's relatively the same or less expensive to have the festivities on Maui versus the mainland.

"Currently, I have a bride who got quotes on a mainland wedding for \$30,000; now all her family is flying over and doing it here on Maui for \$25,000," Tammy says. "She's pretty happy to be saving \$5,000 for their honeymoon!"

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