

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Luxury hotels are ready for lavish, post-pandemic weddings

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*Many couples are looking to spend on intimate gatherings that offer their guests unforgettable experiences. Image credit: Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts*

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By KATIE TAMOLA

With more post-pandemic weddings on the horizon, experts are identifying intimate gatherings, heightened expectations and musical performances from famous musicians as a few rising trends.

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After more than a year of restrictions on most large gatherings, engaged couples are channeling their anticipation into making their weddings more intimate and luxurious. Identifying a valuable opportunity, luxury hotels and resorts are ready to give consumers the luxury weddings of their dreams.

"I think the pandemic gave couples and their families a new perspective about events and what they're willing to spend on," said Lauren Grech, luxury wedding/event planner and CEO of **LLG Events**. "They saw the importance and impact these gatherings have on their lives, getting together with loved ones and sharing an incredible meal or experience.

"Now couples want to make these celebrations even more memorable and intimate," she said. "You're about to witness a surge in the events industry specifically within the luxury wedding market for 2022."

Something old and something new, something luxury and something blue

A contemporary wedding seemingly requires countless decisions. For many, the location or venue is at the top of the list.

Whether couples are yearning for a destination wedding after a year of no travel, or looking for something intimate to gift each of their guests an incomparable experience, luxury hotels and resorts are at the ready with several offerings.



*Many luxury properties offer packages that cater to a couple's vision, even pairing them with planners or coordinators. Image credit: Four Seasons*

"It's all about what experiences, or extras, that venue or hotel is offering," Ms. Grech said. "What is a key differentiator of your area, hotel, or region that you cannot get anywhere else? That's what you should be selling to your couples.

"They're looking for those dreamy experiences, the ones you can't find on Instagram but if you know, you know," she said.

Hotel group Mandarin Oriental is currently offering wedding packages for couples who want to get married as soon as they can.

At the brand's Boston hotel, the Your Moment Elopement Package offers a customizable elopement experience with a two-night stay in a residential-style suite, an intention-setting session the night before the ceremony with a spa specialist at the property's spa and a private elopement ceremony with a photographer. The package also includes a private, candlelit dinner four-course dinner for two, wedding night Champagne and orchid turndown service.

Mandarin Oriental Boston is also offering "micro wedding" packages, where couples can entertain guests with exclusive use of the property's event floor. Couples must spend a minimum of \$3,000 and will receive a one-night stay in a renewed residential suite and a complimentary guided intention setting session with a spa specialist.

The property has already booked 15 wedding packages this year and is on pace to hit a historic high.

The Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C. is appealing to affluents who value a scenic option, offering hotel garden weddings large enough to accommodate both the ceremony and reception, including a sit-down dinner with customizable bar options.

For history lovers, the hotel also has the presidential soiree package, an offering for an intimate gathering of 8 people in the Presidential Suite, with views of the Tidal Basin, Jefferson Memorial, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, and more. This package includes two bottles of Veuve Clicquot, three displayed canaps, a four-course meal with wine pairings, in-room breakfast for two, guaranteed late check-out, assistance with photographer and florist recommendations and more.

*From grand weddings to cocktail parties and small dinners, Mandarin Oriental, Jakarta aims to meet any couple's vision*

Mandarin Oriental is not neglecting its beach-loving clientele either, with private beach wedding or ballroom gathering options at its Miami location. The venue can be transformed to meet any vision, offering guests the option to exchange vows on the hotel's private beach or get married on the south lawn overlooking the palm trees and oceanfront vistas.

The Miami property can also arrange a honeymoon in St. Vincent and the Grenadines at the Mandarin Oriental Canouan package for seven nights.

For affluents looking to travel or for properties that may include more expansive offerings, Shangri-La's Le Touessrok Resort & Spa in Mauritius has a Jade Wedding package that offers makeup and hairstyling for the bride, a facial for the groom the night before the wedding, photograph, tropical flower centerpieces, one bottle of sparkling wine, wedding dinner for the couple on the beach and cabana experience on Ilot Mangenie, the resort's private island. This package comes with a wedding coordinator, special turndown service, a private wedding location,

pressing of the couple's wedding attire, a custom wedding cake made by the resort's culinary team and more.

This location also offers add-ons including flower crowns, decoration for the boat transfers, full HD video recording, fireworks and more.

Shangri-La Hotel Toronto has implemented a wide range of flexible packages that cater to disparate event requests, with different price tiers and guest count offerings. This location has a Museum Room with floor-to-ceiling windows, meeting a 24-foot ceiling, allowing natural light and beautiful city views.

The hotel is known for its picturesque event space featuring a terrace garden that offers views of downtown Toronto and University Avenue.

"We anticipate larger weddings will be more in demand for 2022 and beyond, couples will want to spend more to celebrate with all their loved ones, as a result of being unable to for so long," said Maurice Dalupang, director of events at [Shangri-La Hotel Toronto](#). "Having said this, there will still be a large demand for smaller intimate weddings into 2022 and these will yield a higher spend per person than larger weddings.

"The reason being that couples are now able to spend a little bit more due to fewer guests with increased spending on premium beverage selections, elevated dining, upgraded florals and dcor," he said.



*Expectations are high for couples and guests alike for post-pandemic weddings. Image credit: Shangri-La Hotel Toronto*

There may be a trend of intimate weddings on the rise, but affluents are still looking to ensure that their small weddings are unforgettable.

"Intimate weddings are definitely the new normal," LLG Events's Ms. Grech said. "For 2022 we've seen more couples start off at a reduced guest count but are willing to spend more on the experience, florals, catering et cetera.

"We have also seen an increase in private celebrity performances and entertainment," she said. "Imagine Alicia Keys signing your first dance song? Or Andrea Bocelli signing as you walk down the aisle? A lot of couples have opted to spend on a once-in-a-lifetime performance and this is certainly not going away any time soon."

Mark Steiner, CEO at [GigSalad](#), an entertainment-booking website, has also seen renewed interest in couples securing exclusive wedding entertainment.

"One of the biggest ways I think people will add luxury to their weddings is through live entertainment, the thing we've all missed a great deal of over the last year," Mr. Steiner said. "So many talented musicians have been out of work, and numerous concerts have been canceled or postponed.

"We're going to see planners abandoning the more affordable music options and springing for bigger party bands and classical ensembles for their big days," he said. "Brides and grooms are going to be excited and motivated to add more of what everyone has been missing to give themselves and their guests an amazing experience."

#### Making memorable moments

Another rising wedding trend is buy-outs, which entails couples securing privatized locations.

"A luxury wedding is a celebration that goes beyond expectations," said Claudia Fanini, founder and chief experience officer at [The Italian Planners](#), a Milan-based luxury event and travel agency. "Trends for post-pandemic weddings include smaller weddings, elopements, outdoor celebrations and privatized locations or buy outs."

Ms. Fanini noted that since the COVID-19 pandemic forced so many wedding postponements, the pressure is on both couples and venues to provide an extraordinary experience.

"Guests should be surprised and amused from arrival to departure," Ms. Fanini said. "People are so fed up with this situation, especially couples who have planned their wedding in 2020 and have rescheduled multiple times.

"Especially in the case of luxury weddings, couples have raised the bar to cope with the rising expectations of their guests," she said. "They know that for many people traveling from abroad, it will be the first travel after a long time, so they want to make sure everyone will have the time of their life and a party to remember forever."

Although conditions in several countries are improving after the COVID-19 pandemic, some believe that habits and preferences, including reverence for intimate gatherings, may remain for years to come.

Luxury properties have been continuously adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic and began offering viable alternatives in 2020 that promoted safety while allowing couples to go through with weddings.

Even as the hospitality industry was tremendously impacted last year, both travel and weddings were still sought-after experiences ([see story](#)).

Similarly, hospitality brands offered services for couples that meet COVID-19 restrictions while keeping a romantic ambience this past Valentine's Day. With pent-up demand for travel among affluents, hotels are looking to capitalize on the holiday by offering everything from lavish and remote travel packages to gourmet take-out, socially-distanced pampering and staycations ([see story](#)).

Pre- and post-pandemic, some things will never go out of style, especially weddings and the celebration of love.

"When planning a luxury wedding, it's all about the ambiance, venue, service, food and experience it's the right combination of these elements that makes a wedding truly luxurious," LLG Events's Ms. Grech said. "How is the food presented, how are the waiters dressed, what's the first thing your guests see when they arrive? Is it a trapeze artist? A 10,000 rose floral wall display? Or perhaps it's Bruno Mars singing at your after hours? The possibilities are endless when you're planning a luxury wedding."

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