

Your Destination Wedding In Italia!

by Jess Clarke, contributing author



Launched in April 2006, RainbowWeddingNetwork Magazine is your inside source for all the current events, planning resources, trends, home and family ideas and other vital issues for GLBTQ couples, our families, advocates and allies. Exclusive interviews, community connections, political dialogue, fashion and fun. RainbowWeddingNetwork Magazine is committed to bringing you the information you need for a stress-free union, happy family life and bright future!

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The Italian destinations even sound romantic – Amalfi, Calabria, Ravello, Salerno, Tuscany. And beyond the names are the storybook scenes: a Tuscan castle with fireworks and a medieval sword-throwing act, folk singers and dancers in the Italian countryside, hills above the Mediterranean, violinists greeting guests at a garden villa with champagne, a banquet of pasta, roasted peppers, meat, fish, fruit and cheese.

More gay couples are creating these and other fairy tales as they choose exotic locales and adventures for their commitment ceremonies, weddings and honeymoons. Though Tuscany is among the most popular places, some couples are fulfilling their fantasies in such spots as Argentina, Croatia, Indonesia and Vietnam.

A destination wedding takes place outside a couple's hometown. What started as a quest for a simple getaway ceremony, sometimes to escape family issues, now trends toward traditional ceremonies with elaborate details, says Lisa Light of Lisa Light Ltd., which owns DestinationBride.com, based in Chatham, N.Y. For her clients, a package usually includes a marriage license, wedding ceremony complete with officiant services, bouquet or boutonnieres, champagne, cake for two, photography, and music. Couples also customize packages.

"It's like taking your very, very closest friends and family on the trip of a lifetime" with such excursions as a spa party, sunset cruise, golf tournament or African safari, says Light, who wrote "Destination Bride: A complete guide to planning your wedding anywhere in the world." (North Light Books)

It's true that many people choose Italy for their trip of a lifetime. In addition to Tuscany, the Amalfi and Calabria coasts are draws, too. "Americans especially love to come to Italy. The food is wonderful. The lifestyle is wonderful," **Rabbi Barbara Aiello** of Calabria says. She officiates at Jewish and Jewish interfaith weddings for gay and straight couples.



photo: Stephanie Vuolo

Aiello, who has wed people from Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States, tells couples that the Italian lifestyle they choose for their wedding may come with some adjustments. The pace is slower. "One must always remember that you cannot go to Kinko's at 2 a.m.," she says. "You cannot get things done at the last minute here like you can in the United States." She encourages couples to arrive early enough to adjust and absorb the culture. "Italian culture has a particular style all its own," says Aiello, a Pittsburgh native who grew up there with her Italian parents. "It's a celebratory culture. Italians are not considered to be dour, stiff or distant."



photo: Nathalie Dulex

Food is paramount in Italian life. At wedding receptions, a menu of what will be served usually is provided, a tradition most of Aiello's American clients follow. The menu itself often is a keepsake. At one of her weddings, real violets adorned the menu.

A Los Angeles couple Aiello worked with held their wedding at a cooking school in Tuscany where the pair had spent a week learning to create traditional Italian dishes. On the last day of the class, after the rabbi married them, the students served a banquet that included spinach and ricotta tortellini, bruschetta and anchovy paste. The traditional wedding cake in Italy is a large torte with fruit inside and glazed fruit on top, sometimes an apple torte topped with apples, pears and strawberries. "What brings on the oohs and aahs in America is a tiered cake. In Italy, it's a torte large enough to give 200 people each a piece," Aiello says.

It's not just torte that thrills couples in Italy. Gardens burst forth wildly. Forsythia, petunias, cyclamens and other flowers spill from window boxes. "There is beauty everywhere you look. The small, winding streets, the villages, small vegetable vendors," Aiello says. "People greet each other on the street, kissing and hugging, saying 'hello.' It is an ambiance in Italy."

The ambiance is part of the package for destination weddings. What's included in the package depends on the wedding coordinator in Italy but often entails food, flowers, bus transportation or rental cars, the brides' dresses, set up if the ceremony is outdoors, alternative arrangements in case of rain and the wedding program, Aiello says. Some packages include a honeymoon. Her clients have honeymooned on an archaeological dig in Sicily, hiked ancient caves in southern Italy, lounged on pristine beaches, explored the Mediterranean by cruise or toured Pompeii or the breathtaking island of Sardinia.



photo: Alberto Seveso

Sometimes the guests also indulge in a honeymoon. And on occasion couples put together tour packages for guests who arrive early, Aiello says. Trips to art museums in Florence. Tours of Rome and Florence from a Jewish perspective with visits to synagogues, cemeteries and museums. Aiello has phone interviews with couples so she can design and personalize the entire dream package. Attendance at her ceremonies has ranged from the intimacy of seven people to 200 guests at a villa or castle.

With Aiello's events, guests usually pay for air fare and lodging though the couple may pay for travel for the wedding party and immediate family members. She estimates a destination wedding in Italy costs a minimum of \$10,000. Light's destination weddings start at about \$100,000. A wedding Light was involved with in Bali, Indonesia, cost \$500,000. Some budget resorts offer a free wedding for couples who stay for five nights and, for the very budget-conscious, destination weddings can range from \$800 to \$1,500, Light says.

In planning a destination wedding, it's important to figure out the budget first and then decide whom to invite. "Really study that guest list. Before you choose a destination, you want to be sure you know what's going to be comfortable for these guests," Light says. The wedding couple may have to pay travel expenses for guests who can't afford to. Communicate details to guests about accommodations, how to reserve a room and the itinerary, and give guests a gift when they arrive to thank them for making the trip, she says.

Besides logistics, Aiello's interfaith couples have other considerations. She offers counseling for gay and straight couples to discuss how they can celebrate both religious traditions and how children can be involved. She encourages people to bring up children in one tradition or another. "The best defense to anti-Semitism is to give children a pride in their Jewish tradition," Aiello says. "Interfaith couples are the hope of the world. The joy is not only are you and your partner talking about love, tolerance and acceptance, you are putting it into practice daily. The challenge is how to incorporate both religions under the same roof."



Gay pride is important, too. Some gay couples have issues with family members about their union. Parents may be "steeped in the traditional view of Judaism. They need a lot of help and encouragement," Aiello says. "This has to do with who you are and celebrating who you are and respecting who you are. It's my job to create a wedding where these things can be experienced joyfully."

Aiello says she is Italy's only full-time female rabbi and only reform rabbi. Reform is the most progressive stream of Judaism. While she conducts same-sex weddings, gay marriage isn't legal in Italy. And as a woman, she's not a licensed member of the clergy in Italy so the weddings she conducts for straight couples are not recognized legally there. "If you want all of the benefits that legal marriage gives you, wherever you live you need to have a civil ceremony there," she says, or hold one in Italy.

Legal or not, many of Aiello's ceremonies are truly memorable and her website, RabbiBarbara.com, offers more information. Country weddings on Italian farms with vegetables, cheeses and other food grown on the site. Parasailing off the coast of Sardinia with rings exchanged on the boat, vows exchanged in the air and bouquets in the water.

Whether in midair, in the countryside or somewhere else, "Whenever a couple wants to invite God into a partnership, we clergy should do whatever is necessary to make it happen," Aiello says.

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