



Sandra Elie-Douglas and Anthony Douglas economized by getting married on a St. Thomas beach during a Carnival cruise. Twenty friends and relatives joined them.

CRUISE WEDDINGS

Setting sail on the sea of matrimony

BY DINA SANTORELLI
SPECIAL TO NEWSDAY

It's the something blue that usually stumps them. Brides breeze through the old, new and borrowed with a sense of bravado, showcasing fashionable or heirloom jewelry and other accoutrements, yet blue is often relegated to something hidden — a garter or a pair of bikini briefs. But for Sandra Elie-Douglas of Brooklyn, Sandy Abbruzzese of Bayside, Jacqueline Balducci of East Islip, and Inge Tristram of Freeport, the choice was easy — they went for the deep blue.

Weddings at sea — in particular, "destination weddings," in which the wedding and honeymoon are held at the same location — have become popular for brides looking to tie the knot off the beaten path, and have proved convenient and affordable in the process. Carnival Cruise Lines has seen a nearly 60 percent increase in its wedding packages from five years ago, booking about 2,500 weddings a year, according to Carol Lyman, manager, bon voyage and weddings, for the Miami-based cruise line. Carnival's "Just the Bride & Groom" package starts at \$750 beyond the cruise price and includes an official civil ceremony, a champagne toast with keepsake flutes, flowers for both bride and



Sandy and Rich Abbruzzese were married in February on the Caribbean Princess.

groom, a wedding cake with cake topper, prerecorded wedding music, a decorated bridal aisle and photographic services.

Elie-Douglas and her husband, Anthony, who wanted something a little different and, at the same time, didn't want to break the bank so they could save for a house, opted for one of Carnival's more moderate packages, about \$1,300, and married on the beach at St. Thomas last June.

"We didn't know how beautiful it was until we got there," she says of the resort where the couple exchanged vows. "There was

a little area that they set up like a Moroccan tent, and we got married under there. I was so shocked on how the pictures came out. They didn't even look real — you know how sometimes you buy picture frames and they come with those pictures in the frames, that's how nice the pictures looked."

Unlike traditional weddings, where invitations arrive a month or two before the nuptials, the Douglasses mailed theirs eight months in advance so people could plan, save money or ask for vacation time. Some 14 friends and relatives sailed with them, while six flew out and stayed at the St. Thomas resort where the ceremony took place. "It was so nice and intimate," says Elie-Douglas. "I would do it again, and it was so easy. I did everything over the phone. I had two wedding coordinators — one on the ship and one on the island — and they made everything very simple for me."

Dual celebration

Rich and Sandy Abbruzzese, on the other hand, didn't have eight months to plan. "Sandy surprised me with a 50th birthday present in January," Rich Abbruzzese says of the Princess cruise scheduled for the following month. "She was planning

See DESTINATION on K32



Blue belles

Blue may be the new optional "white" of weddings. Some of the prettiest blue dresses were designed by Reem Acra. Left, her made-to-order Blue Moon. Available at the Reem Acra boutique in Manhattan, it's a delicately embroidered dress with layers of teal blue tulle. "I wanted to inject a color into my current collection," Acra explains. Teal blue, she felt, was "very couture, yet had a simple touch as well." When she does couture for a client, Acra notes the staff "has to leave the last touch to me... And that's the fun for me."

Bedazzling halter



NEWSDAY PHOTO / BILL DAVIS

Reem Acra's lace gown, cut in an Empire silhouette, falls in soft folds from the high-cut embroidered halter bodice. It's a departure from the popular strapless look. The dress is \$5,880 — available at Kleinfeld and The Wedding Salon of Manhasset.

Setting your course on

DESTINATION from K27

this for a year, and because we weren't even engaged at the time, she was just planning a birthday cruise. By the time she sprung it on me, we were already engaged, so as soon as she gave me the brochure about the weddings on the cruise, I said, "Yeah." We were both married before, so we didn't want to go through any major party."

Leaving out of Fort Lauderdale, the Abbruzzeses sailed on Princess Cruises' — yes, the "The Love Boat" cruise line — Caribbean Princess. The ship's captain officiated at the ceremony, held in the onboard chapel. "We got married on the cruise in international waters and actually got a certificate with the longitude and latitude of where we were," says Rich Abbruzzese, who agrees that getting married this way proved easy and carefree. "It turned out to be the two of us, so we didn't have to worry about invitations and combined our wedding with our honeymoon. And we got a photographer who took us all over the ship. It was wonderful."

Recently, Princess' Tie the Knot at Sea wedding program expanded to virtually all parts of

the world, as the line added its entire fleet of ships to the program. Originally offered only on larger vessels, this popular option is now available aboard Sun Princess, Dawn Princess, Sea Princess, Regal Princess, Pacific Princess and Tahitian Princess, all of which have been reflagged to a Bermuda registry, the authority under which each marriage is legally certified. At Sea weddings begin at \$1,800 for the ceremony, plus \$400 for registration and license fees.

"Destination weddings tend to be smaller than a land-based

wedding, and it's easy for family and friends to come along," says Jan Swartz, senior vice president, customer service and sales, for Princess Cruises, which, like other lines, allows guests to come aboard at the ship's embarkation point for a one-day ceremony and leave before the newlyweds set sail. And she adds: "Couples can enjoy all of the amenities of a land-based wedding, from the flowers to the cake."

Seattle-based Holland America, which promotes the option of getting married atop a majestic

Baby, let's take a cruise

National cruise lines

- **Carnival:** www.carnival.com
- **Celebrity:** www.celebritycruises.com
- **Holland America:** www.hollandamerica.com
- **Princess:** www.princess.com
- **Royal Caribbean:** www.royalcaribbean.com
- **Norwegian:** www.ncl.com

- **Windjammer Barefoot Cruises:** www.windjammer.com

Local cruise lines

- **Marco Polo:** www.marco.polocruises.com
- **Nautical Cruise Lines:** www.nauticalcruiselines.com
- **Atlantica New York Yacht Cruises:** www.atlanticany.com