



FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2010

Anna Maria Island Wedding Festival



A few weeks ago, I was fortunate enough to attend the third annual Anna Maria Island Wedding Festival on Florida's Gulf Coast. We stayed at the charming Tortuga Inn Beach Resort — situated right along the intracoastal waterway and across the street from a private beach. I instantly fell in love with the area and its pristine beaches, turquoise water and expansive crimson sunsets. But Anna Maria isn't your typical beach town. A three-story building limit on hotels and resorts protects the town from becoming overdeveloped and

saturated with tourists and traffic. Very few chain stores are allowed on the 7-mile island and free trolleys provide transportation, adding an old-town vibe. The locals are not only friendly, but are filled with a sense of pride about Anna Maria that shines through in their businesses. With such beautiful surroundings and genuine camaraderie, it's no wonder the island hosts more than 1,500 weddings per year.

Event Spaces:

There are many beachfront resorts and restaurants along the island, ready to host your big day, but these were two of my favorites:

Sandbar Restaurant Not only does the Sandbar Restaurant have delicious food, but it's ideal for beach weddings. Its location near the end of the island means plenty of powder-white sand for your ceremony. Restaurant patrons gather on the deck to watch the sunset, so don't expect a private affair; instead, feel like a celebrity when everyone cheers you on after saying I do.



A mock wedding at the Sandbar Restaurant concluded the festival



MOON DANCE

A LUXURY VILLA PROPERTY, SET ON A SWATH OF PRIVATE BEACH

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ABOUT US:

The editors' blog for *Destination Weddings & Honeymoons* magazine is dedicated to staying on top of trends, tips and ideas especially related to destination weddings.

Join us on our travel adventures to get the latest on everything wedding and honeymoon, from the only travel magazine dedicated to brides and grooms.

MEET OUR CREW

Susan Moynihan: Editor in Chief and Travel Connoisseur

Tara Bradley: Managing Editor and Beauty/Fashion Guru



Floating Chapel on the Bay Can't decide between a church or waterfront ceremony? Get the best of both worlds with this one-of-a-kind wedding venue. The floating chapel sails around Sarasota Bay and is complete with stained-glass windows, cathedral ceilings and pew seating for up to 100 guests.



Personal Highlights:

Acqua Aveda Salon & Spa Specializing in bridal packages, this salon and spa offers the ultimate in pre-wedding pampering. Schedule a day of beauty with your maids and indulge in manicures, facials, body treatments, full-body massages plus hair and makeup services.

Dining The restaurants in Anna Maria Island range from casual beach fare to oceanfront fine dining. For a laidback welcome party, the babyback ribs at BBQ joint, Mr. Bones, are crowd pleasers, and the debate for best beach cheeseburger — Duffy's vs. Skinny's — is still going strong. (Locals tend to favor the former.) The fancier **Beach Bistro** is a prime rehearsal dinner spot — try the Floribbean Grouper and mushroom crème brulee; or head to the scenic **Waterfront Restaurant** for their famous fish tacos.

Beach Bums To get the lay of the land, stop by this rental shop and grab a bike or a golf cart to start exploring. Or, for a different perspective, take a kayak tour with Captain Scott, who will give you a history of the island, point out wildlife and guide you through mangroves.

Rebecca

Erika Hueneke: Associate Editor and Bridal Aficionado

Rebecca Kinneer: Web Editor and Real Weddings Buff

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