

CONSUMER

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# Top destination wedding spots for Canadians and things to consider



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Dreaming of a destination wedding? There are plenty of romantic spots you can get married without leaving the country.

So you're newly engaged and thinking of a destination wedding.

Experts say that option can be considerably cheaper for the bride and groom, since the guest list is usually much slimmer.

"The magic number tends to hover around 30 guests," said Tara Soloway of Luxe Destination Weddings.

Excluding travel costs, which of course will differ based on the destination, she says there isn't really an average price or rule of thumb to determine cost.

"For those on a strict budget, many hotels have wedding packages that include a basic wedding and reception in one of the hotel's restaurants, ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

"But the level of sophistication in key destinations has now upped the ante for what can be done in destination. So it just depends on your wedding budget."

"Generally the most economical destination is Cuba, but great deals can be found in Dominican Republic and Mexico."

The first step to planning a destination wedding is, of course, choosing a destination. The decision can be an overwhelming one.

So we asked travel expert Ann Layton to help you narrow it down. Here are her recommendations:

### 1. Romantic staycation



“With the Canadian dollar low,” she said, “I would make the recommendation to stay a bit closer to home this year.”

“Canada has no shortage of wildly romantic places for a destination wedding, and you don’t suffer from the exchange rate,” Layton said.

“Add on a train ride instead of flights to make it more of an occasion for your guests.”

Her personal picks for the most romantic hotels in Canada are:

- The Ritz Carlton in Montreal
- Auberge St. Antoine in Quebec City
- Langdon Hall in Cambridge, Ontario
- Windermere House in Muskoka, and
- Jasper Park Lodge in Alberta



## 2. The Dominican Republic



The Dominican Republic was just listed by Travelzoo as one of the top five value destinations for 2016, Layton pointed out.

“[The island] is especially good at destination weddings with many large resorts having on-site wedding planners to make it as simple as possible.”

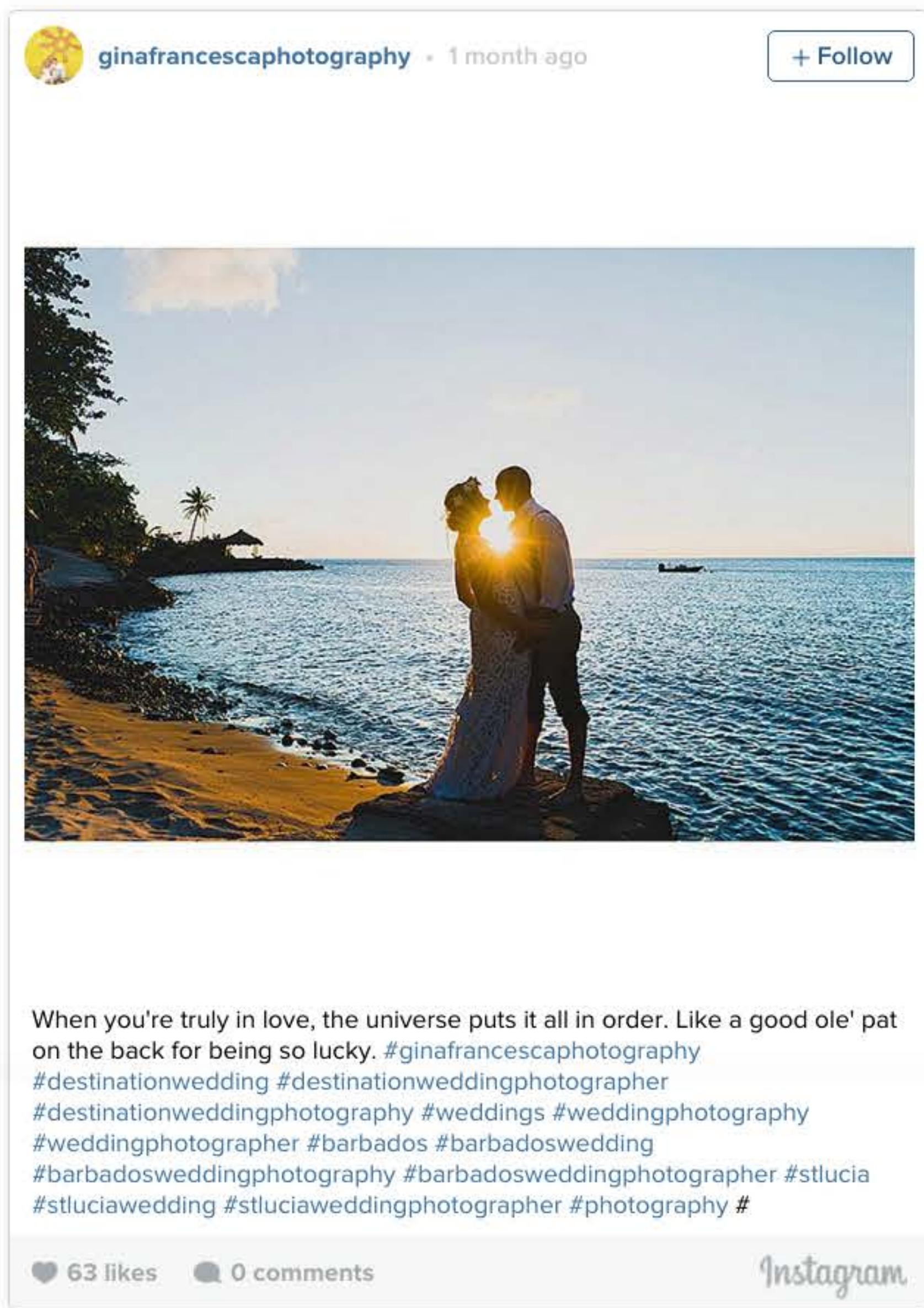
Air Canada Vacations has a special [group travel and wedding planning guide](#), she said. For weddings of ten guests or more, the bride and groom could be eligible for perks like upgrades, a dedicated wedding coordinator, an anniversary travel credit of \$500, and free nights at the hotel.

“For more independent-minded wedding planners, the Dominican Republic has a host of wonderful small boutique properties that are incredibly romantic.”

Her favorite small hotels there include:

- Sivory in Punta Cana
- Sublime Samana in Samana
- The Gansevoort Playa Umbert, Puerto Plata
- Amanara, Playa Grande
- Casa Bonita in Barajona

### 3. Barbados



Barbados is currently running a [promotion](#) that celebrates the 50th anniversary of its independence. And it could save you some money.

“Brides and grooms would need to act fast: if you book between Jan. 15 and Feb. 14, you will get a whopping 50 per cent off your room rate.”

The discounts apply April 15 to June 30, and Sept. 1 to Oct. 31.

Layton decided to marry in Barbados and found the process for obtaining a wedding permit to be quite well-organized.

“You only need to be on the island for a few days before you can get a permit.”

However, to maximize your time in the tropics, she advised couples to legally marry at city hall back home.

**WATCH:** What documents you need to have when leaving for a destination wedding



#### 4. Bahamas



This is a perennial favourite among brides and grooms, according to Layton.

There are plenty of unique wedding and reception venues to choose from, ranging from the intimate to the grand.

Layton said [Atlantis](#) offers a dedicated on-site wedding planning team with packages for couples, and options that can be customized.

**READ MORE:** [Wedding Planning 101: What to do as soon as you get engaged](#)

#### 5. An Anguilla villa



The tiny island of Anguilla, off the coast of St. Maarten, is reportedly experiencing a burst of popularity.

"Similar to St. Barts or Nevis, in that it is a bit harder to get to, Anguilla is nonetheless romantic and a bit off the beaten track.

"Justin Bieber was photographed there recently and rap star Ludacris is a regular."

This option might be best suited for those with a bigger budget.

The accommodations Layton suggested are [luxury five-bedroom villas](#) that float over the water, each with a private pool.

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## Top destination wedding locations



Top destination wedding locations



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### Things to consider

Whatever destination you choose, Layton said to be mindful of older guests and those flying in from overseas.

“Direct flights are always preferable.”

Soloway listed a few other important factors to consider.

“Legal requirements by country are important considerations as some countries have specific residency requirements as well as medical tests, like bloodwork, required in order to be legally married.

The time of year is another big one. You don’t want to book your dream destination during hurricane season.

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You need to do your homework in advance.

“Find out wedding locations and vendor rules if you choose to marry at a large resort,” Soloway added.

“For example, if you have your heart set on a private beach ceremony, only to find out that beach weddings are held only at a central beach gazebo filled with onlookers, this might steer you in a different direction. Or if you are dying to wear your new heels for your wedding, make sure the venue can accommodate this.”

And always be prepared for the unexpected.

“One of my biggest tips,” said Edmonton-based wedding planner Jennifer Bergman, “is if you’re not going to be able to be there beforehand, you have to be easy-going with the wedding planning process.

“Especially in another country.”

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