



FRANCE

cake escapes

The multitiered American wedding cake is truly a thing of beauty. But if you're getting married in a region that's known for a different type of dessert, forgoing the traditional for something a little more local can be a fun and unique way to highlight the culture, embrace your heritage or simply add a memorable element to your event. We asked pastry chefs and wedding planners from around the world for their favorite dessert picks — traditional and non — for destination weddings.

BY AMANDA MACMILLAN

MEXICO

The wedding-cake tradition is alive and well in Mexico, but a variety of local sweets often make an appearance also. Mexican wedding cookies, commonly known as *biscochitos* or *polvorones*, are always a favorite, says Zaida Marcos of Zaida Marcos Cakes in Cancun. Made of ground nuts, flour, butter and sugar, these “cookies” are actually rolled into balls or crescent shapes, then covered with confectioners’ sugar.

Good to Know If you want a cake in addition to wedding cookies, consider Mexico’s tropical climate, especially if you’re planning an outdoor reception. “A *tres leches* cake may hold up well in temperate weather, such as in Mexico City or San Miguel de Allende, but will surely melt on a Cancun summer afternoon,” Marcos says.

Try This Recently, sweets tables have become a popular way to recover the wedding-cookie tradition. “These tables combine typical Mexican desserts decorated according to the wedding’s theme,” Marcos says.

SCANDINAVIA

In the Land of the Midnight Sun, it’s customary for bakeries to create a traditional *kranskekake* cake for weddings and other milestone events. This cone-shaped tower of marzipan rings, made with almonds, egg whites and sugar, is drizzled with royal icing.

Good to Know “Instead of cutting and serving it the way we would a wedding cake, the guests are all invited up to the cake to break off pieces and celebrate with the newlyweds,” says Jann Coles, owner of the Stockholm Bakery & Cafe in Kingsburg, California, which specializes in Swedish and Norwegian desserts.

Try This Give your *kranskekake* personality by trimming it with flowers, toothpick flags, cracker favors or sweets.

JAMAICA

Caribbean countries traditionally celebrate special events, including weddings, with dark, spiced fruitcakes. “We use molasses, spices,

red wine, rum and a mixture of dried fruit that’s been soaked in rum,” says Noida Cooke, owner of Cakes by Noida in Montego Bay. The cake is usually dense with a pudding-like consistency.

Good to Know If you prefer a lighter cake, ask your baker to use less of the fruit mixture; this will give it a more carrot-cake-like texture, Cooke says.

Try This Not crazy about fruitcake? Highlight the country’s famous fruits in other ways: Serve coconut tarts or candies (known locally as *gizzarda* or drops), guava cheese (a guava fruit preserve, similar to jam, cut into squares) or sweet-and-sour tamarind balls rolled in sugar. “Our bread pudding infused with rum and served with a rum sauce is out of this world,” Cooke says.

BERMUDA

This British-flavor North Atlantic isle adds its own rich history to the tradition of spiced rum cake: “In the 1700s, nuptials were marked with not one but two wedding cakes, one for the bride and one for the groom,” says Erica Sousa, catering manager at the Fairmont Southampton resort in Bermuda.

Good to Know “The bride’s cake is garnished in an edible silver leaf to symbolize purity, and it’s topped with a small Bermuda cedar sapling to represent the couple’s new life together and how their relationship will grow and flourish over the years,” Sousa says. The groom’s cake is covered in edible gold leaf to symbolize wealth and prosperity, and it’s topped with something to represent the groom’s favorite activity or pastime.

Try This Since U.S. Customs unfortunately won’t let you bring your sapling home, ask your resort if you can plant it on the hotel grounds.

FRANCE

Can’t decide between cake and pastries? The French *croquembouche* is an all-in-one solution. This traditional dessert is made of profiteroles or cream puffs, stacked in a high, conical shape and held together with caramel.

Good to Know “Its creation is credited to Antonin Carême, one of the early masters of haute cuisine,” says Yanique Lalin, an event coordinator

SCANDINAVIA



with Wedding Light Events in Paris. “He would create very large, elaborate pieces for diplomats and prestigious events. But now they’re common at most weddings in France, regardless of social status or size.”

Try This Couples often incorporate personal touches in their *croquembouche*, adding extras such as flowers, strawberries, chocolate or toppers. And when it’s time to dig in, anything goes. “As elegant and elaborate as these cakes are, the process at most receptions is just having guests pull at pieces they want, knowing that there will be crumbs here and there,” Lalin says.

NEW ENGLAND

The debate rages on as to whether whoopie pies were actually invented in Maine or Pennsylvania Dutch country — but bakers in the Northeast aren’t letting that stop them from offering up trays of these treats at weddings and other special events. The traditional whoopie pie consists of vanilla icing sandwiched between two chocolate cakes.

Good to Know “You can buy whoopie pies in literally any convenience store in Maine, but they’re usually made with shortening and preservatives — and not very good,” says Carol Ford, owner of Cranberry Island Kitchen in Portland. For your wedding, take it up a notch. “We took an old family recipe that uses all the best ingredients and created a gourmet version that tastes amazing.” And they have the bragging rights to prove it,

In Scandinavia, it’s customary for bakeries to create a traditional *kranskekake* cake for weddings and other milestone events. Give your *kranskekake* personality by trimming it with toothpick flags.





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defeating Bobby Flay in a whoopie-pie bake-off on his Food Network show *Throwdown*.

Try This The flavor possibilities are endless. "Carrot cake with maple cream-cheese filling is really popular, and so is our vanilla cake with lemon and lime," Ford says. And while a plain circular sandwich is always a safe bet, Ford has crafted everything from lobsters and scallop shapes to X's and O's.

HAWAII

If you're heading to the Aloha State for your wedding, consider capping your celebration with malassadas. These Portuguese holeless donuts, an iconic dessert in Hawaiian culture, are deep-fried in oil, coated in granulated sugar and sometimes filled with custard or chocolate cream.

Good to Know "We typically serve them at the end of the evening, when they're made fresh and served warm," says Lahela Takaki, wedding and catering sales manager at the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows on Hawaii's Big Island. "They're a comforting indulgence!"

Try This No need to nix the cake-cutting ceremony, though: Hawaiian favorites like guava cake and pineapple upside-down cake are also popular wedding choices, as are cupcakes. "We bake them in an assortment of island flavors such as coconut, pineapple and passion fruit, using fresh, locally grown ingredients," Takaki says.

THE AMERICAN SOUTH

"Red velvet conjures up memories of the South: church picnics, covered-dish suppers," says Peg Hambricht, owner of Magpies Bakery in Knoxville, Tennessee. "Every community had the lady who was famous for making the best red-velvet cake." Red velvet is buttermilk-based with a small amount of cocoa powder added, Hambricht explains. "The most unique thing about it is that vinegar is added to the baking soda, then stirred into the batter at the last minute. It has a little tang to it, and it's not too sweet. And of course, it's a great vehicle for cream-cheese icing."

Good to Know Keep in mind that red-velvet

cake is made with food coloring — there's a good chance you'll want to brush your teeth before posing for any post-dessert pics.

Try This When cut, the cake's deep red interior makes for great photos, especially when paired with traditional white frosting.

FLORIDA

When brides tell Key West Cakes' Ava Marinitti that they want plain white cake and buttercream icing, she replies: When on the island, do as the islanders do! In other words, serve Key lime pie. "You want to give your guests a flavor that is unique to the area and to their wedding," she says. "There are three main ingredients: egg yolks, sweetened condensed milk and Key lime juice."

Good to Know Traditional Key lime pie is made with meringue as a topping, Marinitti says. "The 'conchs' — that's what they call people born here — love a good meringue topping."

Try This Marinitti has created extra-large versions of Key lime pie for couples to cut, served along with individual pies for guests. But bakers in Key West also use the flavor in cakes, cupcakes and cake fillings.

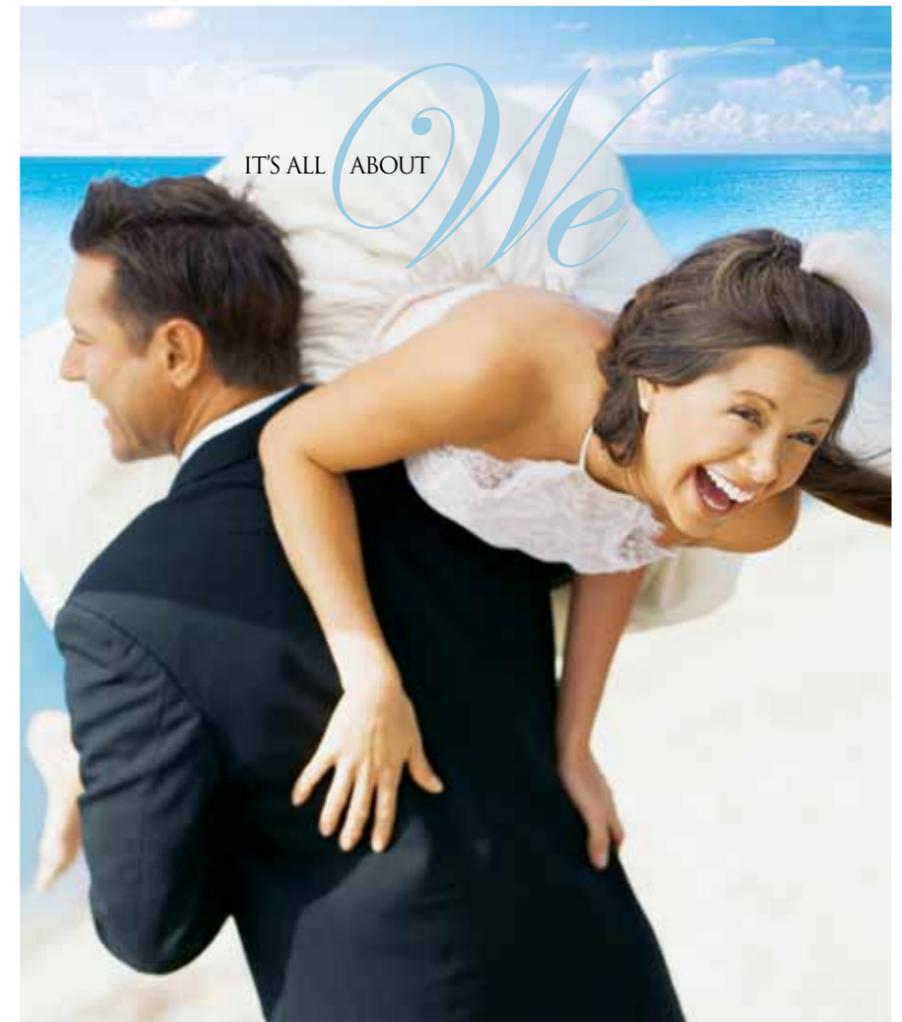
ITALY

Until recently, it wasn't even possible to find an American-style cake baker in Italy, says Judy Witts Francini, owner of Divina Cucina cooking school in Florence. Instead, native Italians and destination brides alike opted for the traditional *millefoglie*, or Neapolitan "cake," consisting of two or three puff-pastry layers with a cream filling.

Good to Know "The light pastry cream is made even lighter with the addition of whipped cream, then finished with a dusting of powdered sugar," Witts Francini says. The *millefoglie* is then filled with bittersweet chocolate chips or strawberries. "It's the perfect finish to what is usually a food orgy at the wedding party," she adds. "Italians do not go light!"

Try This Ask your pastry chef to prepare the dessert table as a surprise for your guests — the presentation will rival the flavor. ■

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