

keeping tradition

by Katie McElveen

From performing a sand ceremony to sharing sugared almonds, adding a regional custom to your celebration is a lovely way to connect with your locale or heritage. Here are 12 enduring rituals easy to replicate and sure to commence a lifetime of special memories.



TOMMY COLBERT PHOTOGRAPHY



ribbon pull: ENGLAND

In Victorian England, small silver charms were attached to ribbons and placed between the layers of the wedding cake. Prior to the cake cutting, bridesmaids and unmarried female guests were invited to choose a ribbon and pull it out of the cake. Whatever charm was attached told their future: Hearts, horseshoes and clovers meant good luck; anchors stood for adventure; and flowers indicated love. One maiden's ribbon would hold a ring, signifying she'd be next to marry.

HOW TO DO IT A secondary ribbon cake will keep your wedding cake looking picture perfect for cake-cutting photos. Kelly Allen, a wedding coordinator at the Marwell Hotel, in Hampshire, suggests including additional charms, such as a rocking chair for longevity and a wreath for a happy home.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE Surround yourself with the lush backdrop of Jane Austen's England and marry in the hills and heaths of Hampshire.

KEEP IN MIND Be sure to have enough ribbons and charms for all of your unmarried female guests, says Allen.

FROM TOP: MASTERFILE COURTESY OF ECRATER OPPOSITE: IMAGE SOURCE/ALAMY

maori infinity loops: NEW ZEALAND

As ancient Maori tribes didn't have a written language, they used symbols to communicate beliefs and ideas. The infinity loop — usually carved from greenstone, *pāua* shells or bone — dates to this time; the never-ending sculpture resembles a figure eight and signifies eternity.

HOW TO DO IT Darren Brown, a Maori priest who plans and performs weddings with New Zealand Maori Weddings, often presents the couple with a greenstone carving in the shape of a *koru*, or spiral, to represent new life and new beginnings.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE In New Zealand, the Maori legend of the endless love of Princess Hinemoa and Tutanekai took place in the North Island city of Rotorua. Say your vows in a *marae* — a traditional outdoor sacred space — perched atop Mount Ngongotaha, with views of the city below. Or opt for Mokoia Island, where the star-crossed lovers were finally united.

KEEP IN MIND The sweetest Maori wedding tradition of all is the *hongi*, which is the pressing together of the bride's and groom's noses.



jumping the broom: THE BAHAMAS

In the book *Jumping the Broom*, author Harriette Cole explains that the ritual, which originated in Africa, was adopted by New World slaves to honor their unions. Surrounded by a circle of friends, a marrying couple sweeps the floor to symbolize sweeping away their old lives and welcoming the new. When the floor is clean, they set down the broom, hold hands and jump over it.

HOW TO DO IT Create a keepsake by decorating a broom with ribbons, flowers and other small mementos with your bridesmaids.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE Paulette Davis of Amour Affairs, in Nassau, on New Providence, recently planned a beachfront wedding that featured a twist on the broom-jumping ceremony: After the minister sprinkled sand on the ground to represent potential struggles, the couple swept the grains into the ocean before jumping over the broom.

KEEP IN MIND The custom was followed throughout the Caribbean, the American South and almost everywhere else that suffered legalized slavery.



wedding quilt:

FRENCH POLYNESIA →

Crafted from intricate fabric designs painstakingly cut with sharpened clamshells, Polynesian quilts, called *tifaifai*, were traditionally brought out only for the most important occasions, such as the customary wrapping of a newly married couple. "The more quilts you had wrapped around you, the higher your status," says Tahitian-quilt expert Didi McElroy.

HOW TO DO IT Sadry Ghacir, concierge at InterContinental Bora Bora Resort & Thalasso Spa, says couples should let their wedding officiant bring his own *tifaifai* to their ceremony: "The more couples the priest unifies with that particular *tifaifai*, the more love it collects, bringing good luck to each new couple who uses it."

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE Throughout the islands of Tahiti, couples are transported to and from their ceremony sites separately, the bride by land and the groom by canoe. But you'll leave together, still wrapped in your *tifaifai* and wearing fragrant flower crowns.

KEEP IN MIND Now that Tahiti has changed its residency requirements for weddings, American visitors can legally marry in this tropical paradise.



← cedar sapling: BERMUDA

Valued for their fragrance and strength, cedar trees in Bermuda have been protected from export since the 17th century. Couples often top their wedding cakes with a small sapling to represent fertility and their ever-growing devotion to each other. Bermudians serve two cakes at their weddings, one for the bride and one for the groom. The bride's three-tier fruitcake, covered in silver icing, denotes their fruitful marriage, while the groom's single-tier poundcake is iced with gold frosting to signify prosperity.

HOW TO DO IT No matter where you choose to marry, follow the super-romantic Bermudian tradition of planting your sapling in a secret location. As the tree matures, so will your love.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE With its dramatic rock formations and secluded beach, Astwood Cove Park, in Warwick Parish, is a favorite of brides. "You can marry on the beach or on a grassy point overlooking the ocean," says wedding planner Allister Simmons of the Bridal Suite Bermuda Weddings. "It's beautiful and not as crowded as some of the other beaches."

KEEP IN MIND No matter how much your wedding sapling means to you, U.S. Customs won't allow you to bring a live plant into the United States from another country.

FROM TOP: HELENE HAWARD BORA BORA WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER; FREDERICKAL VERHAEGEN/GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE: ARIANO FAGUNDES



second-line parade: NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Accompanied by a band, these spontaneous parties lead you, your wedding party and all your guests from the ceremony to the reception in style! Although the tradition's history is linked to jazz funerals (the "second line" is anyone who follows along to hear the music), it's become one of the most anticipated parts of a NOLA wedding.

HOW TO DO IT As the bride and groom leave the ceremony site, they lead the way, carrying parasols decorated with bling and fringe. Then comes the band, followed by participants waving white handkerchiefs.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE The French Quarter, with its variety of venues in a relatively small area, is a great neighborhood for a second-line. Or go big and take it down Canal Street, the city's main drag. And consider offering another form of transport, like a van, for older guests who may not want to walk. Holding your events all at one venue? No worries — second-lines can even spring up inside a restaurant or reception hall.

KEEP IN MIND No matter how small your street parade, you'll need a police escort — it's the law.



henna: INDIA

These ornate temporary designs are applied to the hands and feet of the bride, as well as her female friends and family members. And they're not just decorative: The mahogany-hued dye has been used since ancient times to increase the flow of blessings to the bride and groom. Henna artist Nisha Agrawal of hennaarts.com, based in Austin, Texas, says the stain is typically applied as a sacred ritual that begins two days before the wedding.

HOW TO DO IT Gather your bridesmaids for an afternoon of food, music and henna application. Traditional henna tattoos include dedications to Hindu gods and goddesses and depictions of sacred symbols; today, brides often meld the name of their beloved into the intricate artwork.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE The charming lakeside town of Udaipur is home to white marble *havelis* (private palaces), many of which have been turned into sumptuous hotels perfect for weddings.

KEEP IN MIND The torrid heat of spring and summer often gives way to monsoons, so plan your India wedding for fall or winter.

bomboniere: ITALY

Since the Middle Ages, five sugared almonds — representing health, wealth, fertility, happiness and longevity — have been presented to guests at weddings and other special occasions as a thank-you for support and an offering of good wishes.

HOW TO DO IT Jamie Zorn of Confetti Pelino, a family-owned company that has manufactured the treats since 1783, creates keepsakes by arranging the five almonds into a flower and presenting them in a pretty box. "You can also have your names inscribed on the almonds with edible ink," she says.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE "One of my absolute favorite places in Italy is the gardens at Casina Valadier, in Rome," says wedding planner JoAnn Gregoli. Perched on a hill in the Villa Borghese, the Casina offers glorious views of the city.

KEEP IN MIND Although bomboniere usually contain five almonds, feel free to use any odd number of treats; odd numbers can't be divided and thus symbolize unity.



← sand ceremony: FLORIDA

To symbolize a loving union impossible to separate, you and your intended pour sand from separate vessels into a single bottle. For breezy beach weddings, it's a memorable replacement for lighting a unity candle.

HOW TO DO IT Key West planner Kate Bentley of Kate Bentley Events suggests bringing sand with you from a beach you both love and combining it with sand from your wedding locale. "Large shells make gorgeous vessels for pouring," she notes.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE The Gulf of Mexico joins the Atlantic at Fort Zachary Taylor beach, on Key West, adding even more symbolism to your nuptials. Bentley also likes the Florida Keys' historic Overseas Railroad bridge at Bahia Honda for its serenity and views.

KEEP IN MIND Be sure the top of your bottle is large enough that you and your partner can pour in sand at the same time. And remember to bring a stopper so you can take the bottle home without spilling its contents.

FROM TOP: FOOD PASSIONATES/CORBIS; ALEXANDRA OAT PHOTOGRAPHY; OPPOSITE: GLEN JOHNSON/AFETUREPHOTOGRAPHICS



← coins:

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

During the wedding ceremony, 13 gold or silver coins — *arras* in Spanish — are blessed by the priest, who then passes them to the groom. In turn, the groom gives them to the bride. This exchange is a token of prosperity and the material goods the couple will share. The number 13 is considered a lucky number, representing Jesus and his 12 apostles.

HOW TO DO IT “In the Dominican Republic, children often carry the arras down the aisle,” says Tulio Baruch, catering director at the Sanctuary at Cap Cana. “They give the coins to the officiant.”

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE Loaded with Latin culture, the Dominican Republic is easily accessible from most parts of the United States. Beach weddings are picture-perfect in Punta Cana, while Catholics can marry under the soaring Gothic arches of Santo Domingo’s 16th-century cathedral.

KEEP IN MIND Add another local twist to your reception with a live merengue band.

shaman blessing:

RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO ↔

Officiated by a shaman, Maya weddings emphasize great strength and energy. Expect a blessing in Maya and a kaleidoscope of flowers (they’re used to mark the four cardinal points on the compass on your altar and are worn as bracelets and crowns), as well as the hauntingly beautiful music of flutes, rattles, drums and seashells.

HOW TO DO IT Even without a shaman, you can share a cup of *balché*, a sacred liqueur made from honey and the bark of a local tree said to promote feelings of love.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE Resorts along the Riviera Maya can transform the beach into a gorgeous Maya-ceremony site. “Maya weddings are mystic and mysterious, but they’re rooted in love, honesty, respect and mutual support,” says Brenda Carriedo, romance manager at Banyan Tree Mayakoba. “Your wedding is unique but still meaningful.”

KEEP IN MIND You can’t marry at any of Mexico’s ancient Maya ruins, but they make amazing photo ops during your visit.



FROM TOP: IAN SANDERS/ALAMY; JACQUELYN GREENBERG & CHRIS BROWN/JASTUDIOS; OPPOSITE: BLOOMMAGE/GETTY IMAGES



sake ceremony: JAPAN

Sake expert John Gauntner explains that *san-san-kudo* literally translates to three-three-nine-times, and it’s a ritualized drinking of a small amount of sake (three sips each from three different cups) by the bride and groom. Part of a religious ceremony that binds them in matrimony, it usually takes place on the grounds of a Shinto shrine, presided over by a Shinto priest.

HOW TO DO IT Japanese weddings celebrate the blending of two families, so including your parents or other relatives in a sake toast is a lovely nod to tradition.

TRY IT AT THE SOURCE For nearly a century, the 20-acre Kubota Garden, located in Seattle, has welcomed visitors to its oasis of streams, waterfalls and 12,000-year-old stones. A stroll over the Moon Bridge — hard to walk up and hard to walk down — is said to symbolize the difficulty of living a good life.

KEEP IN MIND Some Japanese gardens don’t allow alcohol, so be sure to check before planning to bring sake into the site. ■