



Five reasons why Raro is great:

- » It's only four hours flight from Auckland
- » Currency is NZ\$
- » It's a beautiful island
- » Accommodation options range from backpacker to luxury
- » People are friendly and helpful

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RARO or Bust

Alexandra Johnson and Kevin Fraser
20 September 2009
Te Vakaroa Villas, Rarotonga

The bride was barefoot with fruity pink/orange nail polish and the groom wore Zambesi shoes. The service was held on a beach and the warm waters of the Pacific provided the perfect backdrop.

In fact, it was a perfect day when Kevin Fraser and Alexandra Johnson exchanged vows on Muri Beach at Rarotonga's Te Vakaroa Villas in front of family and friends. Was a Rarotonga wedding a good idea? "Hell yeah!"

They sent out "Raro or Bust" save-the-date cards a year out from the wedding and 70 guests - 98 per cent of all those they invited - grabbed their suitcases and joined the couple.

It meant taking over the Te Vakaroa Villas exclusively for the occasion, which they wanted to do because they wanted privacy.

Kevin says hiring island wedding planner Lisa Sadaraka of Polynesian Moments "was the best thing we did" because it meant a personalised event without the stress.

The villas, which look across an infinity pool to the lagoon and beyond to the sleepy palms of Aitutaki was their paradise for five days, and it was also the view from the reception where champagne flowed and guests enjoyed New Zealand eye fillet and lamb racks.

For Kevin who works in hospitality (he owns Boogie Wonderland and Auckland's Lime Bar) and Alexandra, a graphic designer, good food and wine was important.

"We love champagne and made sure we had good cuts of meat because that is what we like," Kevin says.

Twenty kilograms of prime New Zealand meat was vacuum-packed and transported to Rarotonga. The champagne - Veuve Clicquot - was checked in "fragile service" and arrived unscathed.

Other essentials, vases, candles and table runners, were allocated out as hand luggage among the guests.

One thing they were adamant about - they didn't want a "package" resort wedding.

"We wanted a certain amount of say in how the day went," Kevin says.

This included designing a purpose-built bamboo frame which they draped in white silk chiffon.

"We didn't want a floral archway but we really liked the idea of creating a framework, an environment on the beach, rather than just standing there," Alex says.

Because the wedding was on a Sunday they incurred a 15 per cent surcharge but both agree it was worth every cent.

Alex did her own makeup after schooling up at the MAC counter.

"They gave me all the product I needed and tips on application."

The bridesmaids also did their own hair and makeup, and wore black TK dresses - selected because they suited so many body types and could be worn multiple ways - and matching Havaianas jandals.

The bride wore a glamorous sequin Karen Willis Holmes gown that she tried on, on a whim, because it was so beautiful and "I just wanted to say I'd worn it once". It was perfect, not like the floaty frocks she thought she'd wanted.

"I came out, Mum cried and I thought 'this is the business, but can I wear it on the beach?'"

"Hell yeah!"

For the ceremony Alex chose "tropical" neon pink/orange for her toe nails, and Kevin decided that despite the beach wedding he'd keep his shoes on. After all, his entire outfit had been inspired and built around his shoes. His grey suit was custom made by Zambesi, and his dinner shirt made to measure by Working Style.

"The suit looked completely ridiculous with bare feet and I didn't feel comfortable and it's all about feeling comfortable at the end of the day," Kevin says.

What were most important, however, were their declarations to each other, and the important role Kevin's children, twins George and Mollie, 11, played in the ceremony. George was keeper of the rings, and Mollie sang.

Tributes to each other replaced formal vows and these were formulated by friend and celebrant Rosina Webb who'd got them to fill out a questionnaire before the wedding with such things like how they first met, and what they loved about each other.

"Everyone wants to say something personal but not everyone has the skills to write it and put it into words. Often people struggle with that," Kevin says.

"It was quirky and how we would have said it, and an honest and sincere representation of how we actually are."





Tropical wedding



White sand, sunshine, warm, crystal clear water tempting you to take just one more quick dip – such is the temptation to elope to a romantic island getaway; a few friends and family in tow.

It's a lot easier than you would think, and surprisingly affordable. An overseas wedding is a wonderful alternative to getting married at home; taking your guests away with you gives them an opportunity for a well earned holiday while being able to spend quality time with you.

The idea of planning an island wedding may sound daunting but there are companies that devote themselves to planning an island wedding for you. Bon Voyage and House of Travel are two Wellington businesses which specialise in overseas weddings. Island wedding co-ordinators can organise an event to suit any budget, and can put together packages to suit you and your guests. From a five-star resort to a self-catered relaxed bach stay, they really can come up with anything.

Guests are usually expected to pay their

own way, but if given enough warning, can treat the wedding as a planned holiday.

"We can organise everything, from discounted group flights to airport transfers, catering, and wedding celebrants. It's a stress-free option that is totally affordable," Rachel Rhind of House of Travel says. "It leaves you to relax with the sand between your toes, spend time with your friends, and family."

Tonia Timmins of Bon Voyage Travel & Cruises has strong relationships with all of the resorts on her books. She personally visits them once a year so she can give a first-hand account of the resort she recommends.

"Most resorts have their own wedding planners, and I can liaise with them to plan your perfect day," Tonia says. "You can choose how much we do for you – we can simply book the flights and resort, or we can sort everything right down to the flowers and hair and makeup."

Visit bonvoyage.co.nz or houseoftravel.co.nz

Keeping the memories alive



Justine Flanagan and Andy Kirkwood of Tiare Films have a lifestyle to envy. Chasing the wedding seasons, they spend the summer in Wellington and the winter months at Justine's family home in Rarotonga.

But whether it is at home or abroad, Justine and Andy will film your wedding from the ceremony right through to the reception, and capture the priceless moments in between.

With a background in documentary filmmaking, the duo has plenty of experience in retelling real stories. Their films have screened in festivals across New Zealand, in galleries including the Wellington City Gallery, and on The Arts Channel. Justine and Andy were in Rarotonga to film Alexandra (nee Johnson) and Kevin Fraser's beach wedding on September 20. (Opposite page).

The couple say they are glad they went ahead with the video because having it done was a big decision for them.

"It was an intimate wedding and we didn't want any invasion," Alexandra says.

"The experience of working with them was absolutely outstanding. As people they are gorgeous, not obtrusive, and they captured all of the beautiful details and moments that on the day you can't possibly see. It was real fly-on-the-wall stuff. Some of the guests later commented that they had not even noticed they were there."

Kevin says it was nice to later look back on the day and experience it more as a guest.

"The days goes too quickly, it's such a fleeting moment, and it's a really nice way of lengthening the experience of it," he says.

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