REAL LIFE DESTINATION WEDDING

STUNNING SIMPLICITY

ANDREW BALJEU & SONYAH TOMS

Childhood sweethearts Sonyah Toms and Andrew Baljeu had been engaged for two years when they eloped on the private island of Motu Akitiro in Aitutaki to say I do. On Friday 25 April 2008 (a very auspicious ANZAC Day) the couple exchanged vows before a local Cook Islands minister at the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa, with the world's most beautiful lagoon as their venue.

The couple wanted a simple Beach Sun wedding, opting for the charms of picture-perfect Aitutaki Lagoon. Says Sonyah: "I had heard of the Cooks from the 'Getaway' television show, and it was also on the website of our travel agent. I found out after the wedding that one of the hosts, Catriona Rowntree, recently honeymooned at the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa too."

Photo: Paul Sidler / Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa

1. Was there anything that didn't turn out as planned?

The rings were left back in our bungalow. Our photographer (and mum) was good because – while our Wedding Planner went to fetch them – he had the opportunity to move us all slightly to a better plateau, so it turned out well!

2. The best part of a destination wedding?

The location!! Getting somewhere we had never been before was a little daunting, but was just magic! We had only been in Aitutaki for one night before we got married, so the beauty still blew us away.

3. Any advice for couples planning a similar wedding?

Keep it simple. Always plan. Don't stress. Having our Wedding Planner on the island and the travel agent organised the details for our wedding day was wonderful.

4. What is your most memorable moment of the day?

The Ceremony. Us saying our vows in that beautiful location was just magic. We hope to have another holiday in the Cooks! Except for our job interviews, we both would have loved to make the trip longer!

"Aitutaki Lagoon where we had our wedding was absolutely fabulous. Yes, it was a little daunting, but was just magic! **Aitutaki's beauty blew us away...**"

For more information about the new wedding packages, special Honeymoon Suites wedding offers and new Cinema Wedding Pavilion at the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa visit:
info@aitutakilagoonresort.co.ck
www.AitutakiLagoonResort.com

Getaway host honeymoons in Aitutaki

MANY PEOPLE will recognise Catriona Rowntree from Channel 7's long-time favourite Australian travel show *Getaway*.

Ever since Catriona travelled to Aitutaki in the Cook Islands, she announced that it was her favourite destination of all the world.

After 10 years of globetrotting Catriona is still in very much in love with Aitutaki ... so much so that she introduced her new husband to the destination by taking him there on their honeymoon.

Catriona and her husband, Ben, chose the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Piscatello's new luxury private pool villa, Villa Te Manu – Royal Honeymoon Pool Villa, and in an exclusive Overwater Bungalow at the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa.

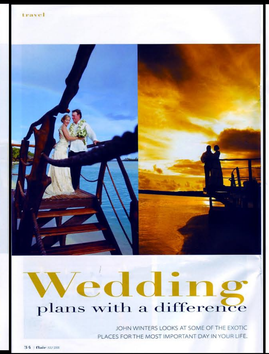
The Lake 2008 issue of the Australian *Women's Weekly* (Australian edition) features the couple's game on their together in Aitutaki, and the story is at www.AitutakiLagoonResort.com

The couple were able to enjoy some unique experiences on Aitutaki, some including their passion for fishing and learn to play golf.

Catriona caught up on some great rocky, a bit of sun time and lazing on the sand, and together they took bicycles, were a local trophy (pipe, hose & barrel), drank aplenty! Champagne on a sunset motor and dined by candlelight on serene beach.

Ben, who is a keen golfer, enjoyed the challenging course, Aitutaki. And the feeling is mutual, with Aitutakians looking forward to welcoming the couple back to their balmy island in the sun.

Photo: Paul Sidler / Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa



Wedding plans with a difference

JOHN WINTERS LOOKS AT SOME OF THE EXOTIC PLACES FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT DAY IN YOUR LIFE.

LOCATION, LOCATION, location is not only the mantra of the property market, it is also the key to a business that is also equally important by the most important day in your life – your wedding day.

More and more couples are choosing to hold that so special occasion offshore.

Where are the most ideal locations for this memorable moment in your life? The Cook Islands is an obvious choice with its incredible lagoons and beautiful beaches.

It would certainly be difficult to pick a more dramatic or idyllic location for your wedding than each non-bathed tropical islands in The Cook Islands' capital, Rarotonga, or its sister island, Aitutaki.

Couples can exchange their vows while standing on white sandy beaches fringed with palm trees, gently lulled by the gently lapping waves of the clear, blue lagoons, the shimmering of atolettes and the sweet scent of frangipani.

After services are likely to take place for a Rarotonga or Aitutaki wedding.

Wedding planner services for organising the wedding of your dreams, island-style entertainment for music, song and dance, photography and video options, hair and beauty services and, of course, accommodation.

Many of the services for the wedding alone without accommodation or flights, cases start from as little as $1000 and go up to $5,000.

And this year The Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa has launch its stunning new Cinema Beach Chapel, Aitutaki's first dedicated wedding venue.

Now couplers can say "I do" with the world's most beautiful lagoon as their witness.

The Cinema Beach Chapel has a thatched canopy of Cinema Chapel, beneath which the Chapelgoer celebrant stands on Sunset Beach on the private isle of Motu Akitiro.

The Cinema Beach Chapel is the perfect venue for the bride and groom alone in paradise, yet is just as ideal for a couple celebrating their big day with three they love, accommodating up to 70 guests.

"Named in honour of Tetuaia's Cinema, one of the 24 residents brought to Aitutaki by legendary warrior and navigator Chief Ru in the voyage of discovery, the Cinema Beach Chapel is also ideal for private cocktail parties, wedding receptions and also for private dinner parties.

"To celebrate the launch of this stunning new wedding venue at Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa, we are offering a special Wedding Spa, Dining Beach Chapel's dining offering and Aitutaki Lagoon Bunny Pampgaze (season December 08 through to February 09 and November 09 through to February '10 at its various free charge, minimally 08 707 5) book this special, quote the code CNBPCM.

This year there are some incredible new wedding packages not only available at the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa, but also at her Cinema Beach Chapel, Aitutaki's first dedicated.

Changing to price from $1,999 to $2,999. Prices these new Stay-n-Paradise Wedding Packages are for sale to 31 March 2009 for travel up to 31 March 2010 (visit www.aitutakilagoonresort.com for more details.

"No other place in the world matches the beauty of the Cook Islands with its warm location, friendly people and wearing environment.

"Particularly sightseeing in the Cook Islands is the Aitutaki Bequia. In his book Unforgettable Places to See Before You Die, Steve Darcy wrote "No artist's palette could ever conceive of a perfect, more luminescent turquoise than that of the lagoon of Aitutaki, arguably the most beautiful in the world".

Aitutaki has indeed been capturing imaginations for many centuries. Its unique and spectacular lagoon has made the Aitutaki home with over a thousand years ago.

In 1789 Captain William Bligh and the men of the HMS *Bounty* were the first Europeans to arrive, reputedly taking with them the succulent papaya.

In the 1900's a new wave of adventurers arrived by glamorous Sidney Pearing Boat for a leisurely refuelling stop along the Island Hopping Pearing Boat Service from Sydney to Papeete.

Much more recently, the prestigious Condé Nast Traveler arrives, observing that "Aitutaki is an exquisite atoll" with "the most vivid lagoon whose presence has ever seen" The issue featured The Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa on its cover, saying "The Aitutaki Lagoon is the resort on the beach. Nowhere could be more idyllic" As the only resort directly on the world's most beautiful lagoon, the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa is ideal for a wedding, honeymoon or romantic vacation spent in one of several ways, either respects, too.

It is the only private island resort in the Cook Islands.

It is the only Cook Islands resort to offer the exception of Heuvelle romantics – the Overwater Bungalow.

And it is the only resort on Aitutaki with a fully Polynesian Fiancé, an robbers can body rancher and the South Pacific's famous Ru.

Dr Mitch Mitrak (who is a non-medical practitioner, immunologist &

island of Aitutaki by small private ferry, the isle is encircled by broad, expansive beaches the colour of Champagne.

If Rarotonga is not your ideal spot, then Australia offers a huge choice. But, if it's farther afield, then Bali and Thailand must also be very much in the running.

Australia offers a choice of wedding locations. If Sydney – voted Number One City in the world by readers surveyed by the world's two leading international travel magazines *Conde Naste Traveler* and *Travel and Leisure* – is not to your taste then there are a number of other options.

Sydney offers Opera House weddings, luxury yacht weddings, beach weddings, garden weddings and traditional church weddings.

The Gold Coast also has beach and garden weddings, plus Skytower weddings and traditional chapel weddings.

Or there's Australia's tropical paradise, Cairns, with beach weddings, rainforest weddings and also traditional chapel weddings.

Moving farther afield, Bali can be a rewarding experience.

The Indonesian resort caters for you whether your wedding dreams call for a simple, romantic ceremony on the beach or a more elaborate event in the most romate area of Bali.

Wedding packages at Kuta hotels are around the US$1,000 mark, which does not include flights and accommodation.

However, if you really want to go the distance, then Thailand is another popular choice.

Among the wide choice available are Thai weddings on Koh Samui. These packages include a Secular Beach Wedding, a Buddhist Beach Wedding a Buddhist Temple Wedding, a Mountain House Wedding or a Traditional Thai Wedding.