

# Sun, Sand, and I Dos

by Julie Thompson Adolf

*If you're looking for added ambiance on your wedding day, nothing compares to South Carolina sea breezes and surf.*

Two years ago, when my husband, Peter, proposed on New Year's Eve, we knew that we wanted our wedding to be different. After all, we both grew up with a love of the ocean—he as a sailor, racing sloops in Europe, me as a die-hard beach bum, visiting South Carolina's coast twice a year throughout my childhood. Now, faced with the formidable task of planning a wedding that included family and friends from around the world, we agreed that we needed to incorporate our mutual love of the beach into our wedding festivities.

## *Scouting for Sites*

Part of the fun in planning our beach wedding involved what Peter and I like to do best—visit beaches! From the simple elegance of **Hilton Head Island** to shabby chic **Pawleys Island**, we spent a weekend touring several locations. A plantation in **Myrtle Beach** boasted of ghostly visitors. **Folly Beach**, we heard, was a terrific location due to its state-of-the-art pier. **Kiawah Island**, we read, was voted as one of the country's most romantic beaches. The **Crowne Plaza Resort** in Hilton Head Island provided an outdoor deck that overlooked the water, as well as a grassy area close to the beach. **Sea Pines Resort**, also located at Hilton Head Island, offered several locations for weddings, including the **Sea Pines Beach Club**. We ultimately decided that **The Boardwalk Inn at Wild Dunes Resort** on Isle of Palms provided the perfect set-

ting—elegant accommodations on a beautiful beach where our guests could relax and enjoy a mini-vacation after the ceremony, with Charleston nearby for the culture and history buffs.

## *The Details*

As with planning any wedding, flexibility is important. Saturday is the most popular day for beach weddings, and hotels are often booked far in advance, so we chose a Friday evening instead.

The Boardwalk Inn Grand Pavilion provided the actual stage for the big day, with the ceremony held under the gazebo overlooking the ocean and the reception taking place around the swimming pool. With a beach wedding, few decorations are needed—the ocean provides the perfect backdrop and the sunset adds great mood lighting. We wanted our guests to absorb the Southern flavor of seafood and the shag dance music—a highlight of the evening involved shag dance lessons, which had our European and Northern friends shag dancing as if they had been born on the beach.

While Peter and I chose formal attire for our attendants and ourselves, we requested our guests dress for comfort. After all, guests passing out from heat exhaustion have a way of dampening festivities. Additionally, we left personalized sand buckets in each guest's hotel room, filled with sunscreen, snacks, information about Charleston and Isle of Palms, and for the kids, beach toys.

## *The Big Day*

At 6 p.m., the guests sat under the gazebo sipping lemonade, a string quartet played Pachelbel's Canon, and Peter waited with the ocean at his back. We couldn't help grinning like two little kids —

we were beginning our married lives exactly as we hoped, surrounded by our family and best friends, with the ocean as a romantic backdrop. Everything was absolutely perfect.

Well, almost perfect...there were those ominous black clouds looming in the distance, gathering and swelling—then bursting open during dinner by the pool.

Ah, the beauty of a beach wedding... thankfully, our wedding guests proved to be good sports, dashing for cover under the gazebo, which by this time was open to and occupied by hotel guests. Slightly soggy, we all danced and drank and cut the cake with the wind whipping rain horizontally into the gazebo. Everyone became a little closer that evening under the gazebo—Europeans learned to shag dance with my Chicago friends, hotel guests soon became wedding guests and joined us for cake, and Peter and I laughed and kissed and celebrated our marriage as lightning struck over the ocean.

## *And Later That Evening...*

The reception flew by. Too soon, the party ended and we made the traditional exit to our honeymoon suite at The Boardwalk Inn. As soon as we arrived, we kicked off our shoes and headed back to the beach. Like magic, the rain vanished, with only flashes of lightning visible over the ocean. My husband and I strolled along the beach, still in our wedding attire but barefoot, holding hands and talking a mile a minute about the day's events and our future together. Then, as we turned to go back to our room, Peter caught my arm. There, in the sand next to my foot lay a perfect sand dollar. Definitely a sign, we agreed, that we're destined to have a perfect life together.