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Same-sex destination weddings booming

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Surge in business for wedding planners where same-sex marriage is legal
- When California's Proposition 8 passed, more gay couples came to Massachusetts
- Gay advocates in Iowa would like to create the same kind of wedding infrastructure

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By Charlotte Savino

TRAVEL + LEISURE

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(Travel + Leisure) -- Boston-based wedding planner Bernadette Smith has helped arrange the same-sex nuptials of nearly 75 Massachusetts couples during her five-year career. But she's never seen quite the surge in business as she has during the past few months.



GETTY IMAGES/FILE Wedding planners have seen a surge in same-sex couples traveling to New England to tie the knot.

Smith's calendar first started filling up when the 1913 law that banned gay marriage for out-of-state couples was lifted in July 2008. But, she says, things became even more hectic when Proposition 8, the California ballot proposal restricting marriage to heterosexual couples, passed in the November elections.

Now Smith and other wedding planners have seen a surge in gays and lesbians traveling to New England to tie the knot. And the trend is growing quickly: On April 3, Iowa's Supreme Court found its gay-marriage ban unconstitutional; four days later, the Vermont legislature gave same-sex couples the right to marry; and on April 16, New York Governor David Paterson announced he would introduce a bill to legalize gay marriage.

Not surprisingly, hotels and resorts that cater to same-sex weddings are cashing in. One is the Hob Knob in Martha's Vineyard; its Escape & Elope package includes an intimate ceremony, along with Champagne and massages. And all their wedding packages come with access to Tulle, a destination wedding-and-gown specialist that can accommodate not just one picky bride, but two.

Another property capitalizing on the ruling is the Mayflower Inn & Spa in Washington, Connecticut. The inn's "At Last" package includes all the traditional trimmings of a wedding: rehearsal dinner, couples' massage, garden ceremony, and officiant, along with either "his and his" or "hers and hers" stylists. The hotel also offers 25 percent off room rates on the couples' wedding anniversary for life -- much better than a Tupperware set. [Travel + Leisure: 50 best romantic getaways](#)

For those who want to plan their own ceremony, Bernadette Smith suggests the Exchange Conference Center overlooking Boston Harbor -- it's where she'll be saying "I do" this summer.

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Anne P. Worcester, chief marketing officer of Market New Haven, a tourism and commerce organization for the New Haven area, suggests a few other same-sex-friendly Connecticut venues. There's the New Haven Lawn Club, known for its large ballroom and experience in gay weddings; the Union League Café ("arguably the best restaurant in all

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of New Haven," she says); and the quintessentially romantic carousel at Lighthouse Point.

For those traveling long distances, the Omni New Haven Hotel can accommodate out-of-town couples and their guests with in-house

ballrooms, restaurants and a spa. [Travel + Leisure: Great romantic weekend getaways](#)

Anne Stanback, executive director of Love Makes a Family (a pro-gay marriage organization in New Haven, Connecticut) has become an expert on same-sex wedding planning since she arranged her own nuptials without the help of bridal magazines.

"We may not see the lesbian version of Modern Bride until a few more states legalize marriage for same-sex couples, but I have no doubt we eventually will," she says.

Now gay advocates in Iowa would like to create the same kind of wedding infrastructure available in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont. Greg Nooney, who started one of the state's few gay-wedding Web sites, began receiving inquiries just days after the decision was finalized on April 3.

Nooney admits that building a roster of gay-friendly vendors won't happen overnight. "It is taking some people a little time to get their bearings," he says.

One place that wasted no time in promoting itself as gay-friendly is the Sioux City Holiday Inn. Manager Larry Jenson says the property has held commitment ceremonies in the past and looks forward to hosting same-sex couples in the future.

Despite the fast pace of change across America, however, wedding experts say all the feedback has been positive.

"People may be surprised at just how few ripples the change in the marriage law has caused here," says Anne Stanback, of Connecticut. "There has been no backlash, there have been no protests. Just lots and lots of people who are pleased." [E-mail to a friend](#) [Mixx it](#) | [Share](#)

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