

Search

Plan Your Trip

Search input field with Go button

Select a Region or Country dropdown

Select a Destination dropdown with Go button

American Express SkyMiles advertisement: INTRODUCING PAY WITH MILES, an exclusive Cardmember benefit: Redeem starting at 10,000 miles for \$100 off any Delta flight\*

A Red Carpet for Gay Weddings



Jodi Hilton for The New York Times

Michael Valenti, an owner of the White Wind Inn in Provincetown, flies the gay pride flag with the American flag. Gays and lesbians often hold ceremonies there.

By JOSHUA KURLANTZICK Published: April 11, 2008

LAST summer, when Kimberly McHugh and Laura Pazarena, a couple in Washington, decided to celebrate their union, they quickly ran into the same problems that any couple faces.

"There were so many vendors, flowers, the D.J.s, and it was getting bigger and bigger," Ms. Pazarena said. "I was just getting flooded with e-mails, I was getting so stressed."

Ultimately, in planning their ceremony in Provincetown, Mass., which will mix Irish and Hawaiian themes, the couple hired a wedding planner to help out. They plan to have at least 50 guests at the event this summer, most spending an entire weekend on Cape Cod.

Less than a decade ago, Ms. McHugh and Ms. Pazarena would not have had as much stress because they wouldn't have had as many choices. When Vermont enacted same-sex civil union legislation in 2000, it was the first state to do so, and gay and lesbian couples who came to Vermont found only a smattering of florists, wedding planners, inns, resorts and other vendors for civil unions.

But since 2000, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey and New Hampshire have legalized same-sex civil unions

Multimedia



Slide Show

Tying the Knot

Enlarge This Image



Anita Visser

Gigi B. Sohn, center left, and Lara Ballard at their Vermont ceremony. More Photos >

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL OR SAVE THIS

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE



Today's Headlines Daily E-Mail

Sign up for the free Today's Headlines e-mail sent every morning. Sign Up button. See Sample | Privacy Policy

LasikPlus advertisement: Wouldn't it be nice? Mouse over. Click Here button.

BOOK FLIGHTS



- FLIGHT HOTEL PACKAGES CAR CRUISE ACTIVITIES

Flight booking form: Leaving from, Going to, Departing (5/5/2008 11 AM), Returning (5/7/2008 11 AM), Adults: 2, Seniors: 0, Children: 0. Search for flights button.

MOST POPULAR - TRAVEL

E-MAILED BLOGGED

or marriages. (While many out-of-state couples travel to these states for ceremonies and call them “weddings,” their unions may only be recognized by a handful of states.

[California](#) and [Oregon](#) — and to a more limited degree [Maine](#), [Hawaii](#), [Washington State](#) and the District of Columbia — have domestic partnership laws.)

Throughout the Northeast, competition has spiked among wedding sites, hotels, resorts and inns as the travel industry has realized that same-sex ceremonies can draw scores of guests, who turn these destinations weddings into weekend stays.

“When my mom started our business in 1999, she would go to stationery shows and people would just look at her like she was crazy,” said Kathryn Hamm, a same-sex ceremony consultant in [Virginia](#) who deals with clients nationwide. “A couple years later she went back and all of these vendors remembered her, and now they are begging her, ‘What can we do to help?’ ”

Bernadette Smith, president and owner of It’s About Time Events, a Massachusetts wedding planner specializing in same-sex unions, said that when same-sex marriage was legalized in Massachusetts, there was not much competition from other states, but now that has changed. “The number of out-of-state couples contacting me has diminished,” she said. “The novelty of Massachusetts being the only place with gay marriage has worn off a bit.”

TRAVEL agencies, too, are catering to gay couples heading to the Northeast for civil-union ceremonies, and many Northeast states now hold gay and lesbian wedding expositions, where couples can choose among ministers who marry same-sex partners, jewelers who offer tiaras and custom rings, and numerous other vendors. In March 2007, for example, New Jersey held its first gay and lesbian wedding expo, featuring hundreds of vendors at the New Jersey Convention and Exposition Center in Edison.

At the Moose Meadow Lodge, an inn in Waterbury, Vt., one of the owners, Willie Docto, has hosted roughly 185 civil-union ceremonies since Vermont legalized them. Many have been all-inclusive plans — Mr. Docto offers three options, with prices ranging from about \$2,750 to over \$4,000 — where couples celebrate their union at the lodge and then have the entire place to themselves and many of their guests for the weekend. The lodge holds 200 people for the ceremonies, and it has four guest rooms that sleep eight people. (For those seeking the most modest of ceremonies — just two people — the lodge will add \$199 to the room rate, which gives couples the services of an officiant and other ceremony perks.)

Gigi B. Sohn and her partner, Lara Ballard, had their ceremony at the Moose Meadow last August. The couple had stayed at the lodge before, so picking it for their ceremony was a natural.

“We paid for the civil-union package at the lodge, and we got all the rooms for immediate family — people were coming in from California, Virginia, [Texas](#), [Pittsburgh](#),” Ms. Sohn said.

The weekend civil-union package is catching on. In New Hampshire, which legalized civil unions just this year, Lesley Marquis quickly waded into the market. At her Rosewood Country Inn in Bradford, a Victorian mansion built in 1850, she built a civil-unions package and has already held two ceremonies and booked two more for this spring and summer.

“Summer is so busy that if couples want to marry then they have to plan well in advance,” said Rob Tosner, an owner of the White Wind Inn in Provincetown and chairman of the Provincetown Visitor Services Board. At the Oxford Guest House, also in Provincetown, Stephen Mascilo, one of the owners, reports that he already has wedding ceremony bookings for the coming summer and has actually had to turn away some requests.

Same-sex couples may be an even more attractive market than their straight counterparts. The Travel Industry Association found that gay men tend to spend more on travel than

1. [Journeys | Oxford, England: A Pub Crawl Through the Centuries](#)
2. [Munich Redux: Germany's Hot Spot of the Moment](#)
3. [36 Hours in Chiang Mai, Thailand](#)
4. [Weekend in New York | Martinis: Places That Put the Proper Prefix on the -tini](#)
5. [Practical Traveler | Air Fares: Early-Bird Discounts for Business Class](#)
6. [Heads Up | Tonalá, Mexico: Skeletons, Earthenware and SpongeBob Piñatas](#)
7. [Bites: Florence, Italy: Cammillo Trattoria](#)
8. [Florida's Flows of Clear, Cool Water](#)
9. [Explorer | The Marquesas: Where Many Ended Their Search for Paradise](#)
10. [36 Hours in Napa Valley](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)

The New York Times OPINION  
nytimes.com/opinion



**Bloggingheads: Hillary's Sexism**

Also in Opinion:  
[Bloggingheads: Mrs. Obama's Anger](#)  
[Bloggingheads: Cash for Grades](#)  
[Watch more Bloggingheads video on NYTimes.com](#)

All the news that's fit to **debate.**  
nytimes.com/opinion

All the news that's fit to debate.

ADVERTISEMENTS



heterosexuals do, and most unions in the Northeast involve out-of-state couples — in Vermont, over 80 percent. And a study by the School of Law of the University of California, [Los Angeles](#), found New Jersey alone will make over \$102 million annually from same-sex unions.

Allowing unions may also make a state seem more same-sex friendly, attracting more gay and lesbian travelers, over all. According to an analysis last year by Community Marketing, a research firm, an overwhelming majority of gay and lesbian travelers say gay-friendliness is the most important factor to them in choosing a hotel.

“Legalization of same-sex unions does have a financial impact,” Ms. Hamm said. “Legal validation helps couples feel more confident about ‘coming out’ with their relationships and leads them to celebrate their commitments in larger fashion.”

The novelty of same-sex ceremonies may be wearing off in some places, so planners like Ms. Smith have to become more inventive. “I had a pagan wedding complete with a hand fasting,” she said, referring to a ritual in which the couple’s hands are tied together. “And then the party traveled across [Boston](#) by trolley. I had a science-themed wedding at the Museum of Science, where they had the flowers in beakers.”

Other proprietors have started casting a wider net. Mr. Docto advertises on the Web, searching for clients nationwide who might travel to Vermont.

“More and more gay and lesbian couples inquiring about civil unions are from the South,” Mr. Docto said. “Perhaps that’s the geographic target: red states with little chance of having same-sex marriage.”

In Provincetown, long a gay haven, inns play on the area’s history to attract clients. A lot of couples have “shared experiences/memories created in Provincetown, and they want to make their commitment in this very special community,” Mr. Tosner said.

“I just love Provincetown, and I wanted to have Laura experience a living, thriving gay town,” Ms. McHugh said, noting that her partner had never visited there. The event, for which Ms. McHugh will arrive dressed in Irish tartans, will mix a ceremony at the beach with a reception at a beach house.

Massachusetts is the only state where gay marriages are on the same footing as heterosexual weddings (the civil unions available in other states have a separate status). Last year, Massachusetts hired a marketing specialist to woo gay and lesbian travelers.

And Vermont’s gay-friendly reputation had a role in Ms. Sohn and Ms. Ballard’s choice. The women decided they wanted to have their ceremony there to honor it for being the first to legalize civil unions. “It was really important for us to reward Vermont in as many ways as possible,” said Ms. Sohn, who tried to buy almost everything for the event from Vermont producers.

Yet even as the same-sex market heats up, some planners are realizing that couples, whatever their orientation, may not be so very different.

After planning so many same-sex weddings, Ms. Smith has found a constant theme. “Everyone,” she said with a sigh, “wants a beach wedding.”

[Next Article in Travel \(12 of 19\) »](#)

[Need to know more? 50% off home delivery of The Times.](#)

Ads by Google

what's this?

[Fort Lauderdale Getaway](#)

3 nights for \$63/nt Special internet offer.

[www.wyndhamtrips.com](http://www.wyndhamtrips.com)

**Costa Rica Family Tours**

Take your family to rain forest and beaches. Top guides & accommodations  
Wildland.com/Family-Costa-Rica

**London Luxury Hotel**

The Epitome of Modern Elegance. Newly Renovated. Book Direct.  
www.InterContinental.com

**Past Coverage**

WEEKEND IN NEW YORK | A CITY HALL WEDDING; You May Now Kiss the Clerk (September 23, 2007)  
PARIS JOURNAL; Japanese Find Romance and Rituals Far From Home (August 7, 2007)  
IN TRANSIT; Remembering the Royal Wedding of 1947 (June 3, 2007)  
THE REGISTRY; The Couple Who Travel Together (April 29, 2007)

**Related Searches**

Travel and Vacations **Add Alert**  
Weddings and Engagements **Add Alert**  
Homosexuality **Add Alert**  
Hotels and Motels **Add Alert**

**Mentioned in This Article**

Cape Cod | Oregon | Pittsburgh  
| Vermont | New Jersey | New  
Hampshire | Washington State |  
Virginia | Massachusetts | Los  
Angeles | Maine | Texas |  
Provincetown | Boston |  
Washington | Hawaii |

California | Connecticut

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



THEATER »



Dramatic Power Couple:  
Theater Is Their Castle

OPINION »

**City Life: A Day at the Opera, a Snack for the Soul**

Popcorn and soda bring a whiff of a first encounter with opera.

U.S. »



Silence Replaces Bids and Moos at Stockyards

WORLD »



In Cairo, You Can't Hear Yourself Scream

MEDIA & ADVERTISING »

**He Wrote 200,000 Books (but Computers Did Some of the Work)**

OPINION »



Stanley Fish: Charlton Heston, Large Than Life