

Photo Courtesy: ZANA Luxury Escapes

Hotel architecture itself is influencing wedding formats, photography and guest movement.

Beyond the Ballroom: The Rise of Unexpected Wedding Spaces

Hotels offer gardens, heritage courtyards, private terraces, art-filled interiors, poolside decks and intimate dining rooms as alternatives to the conventional banquet hall.

By Bindu Gopal Rao



Photo Courtesy: ZANA Luxury Escapes

The hotel's setting has a huge impact on the celebrations.



Photo Courtesy: MBD Group

At a hotel, the advantage lies in having experienced teams across banqueting, culinary, engineering and operation.



Keshav Baljee, Executive Director, Royal Orchid Hotels



Natarajan Balasubramanian, Commercial Director, Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy, Manyata Business Park



Nitin Srivastava, Director of Sales - Weddings, ZANA Luxury Escapes



Sonica Malhotra Kandhari, Joint Managing Director, MBD Group.

Today, hotel architecture itself is influencing wedding formats, photography and guest movement as couples want the setting to reflect their personalities.

Experience Matters

Couples want the setting—not just a hall—to say something about them. The setting shapes almost everything else.

Keshav Baljee, Executive Director, Royal Orchid Hotels, agrees. "Across our portfolio, that means courtyards, lawns, pool decks and terraces, from the gardens of Royal Orchid Brindavan Garden in Mysuru to Regenta Resort Vanya Mahal at the edge of Ranthambore National Park. Even in the city, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore offers outdoor options that feel nothing like a banquet. At a heritage hotel like Royal Orchid Metropole, the architecture sets the tone, so décor can be lighter. In the hills or at our resorts in Kabini and Goa, the view does what flowers and drapes usually do, and the photographs are better for it."

Natarajan Balasubramanian, Commercial Director, Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy, Manyata Business Park, says, "For a poolside terrace such as ours, the key question is how the space will operate once the complete wedding setup is installed. A mandap, buffet, entertainment and production equipment all compete for usable space. Weather contingency must therefore be agreed upon alongside the primary layout. Pool-edge safety, wind exposure, electrical protection, sound direction and food-service routes also require specific attention."

Doing It Right

Several considerations are required when transforming unconventional spaces into functional wedding venues, particularly in terms of weather, guest movement, lighting, sound and service logistics. Every outdoor plan needs a weather backup, and paths need to work for elderly guests. Evening events need proper lighting for photographs, and sound must carry without disturbing others. Behind it all, the kitchen and service routes must be close and out of sight.

Nitin Srivastava, Director of Sales - Weddings, ZANA Luxury Escapes, says, "The hotel's setting has a huge impact on the celebrations, as it can serve as a built-in décor element and influence the overall design direction. The architecture, colours and views can impact how the

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Francis Ebenezer, Director of Sales, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, Mahabalipuram



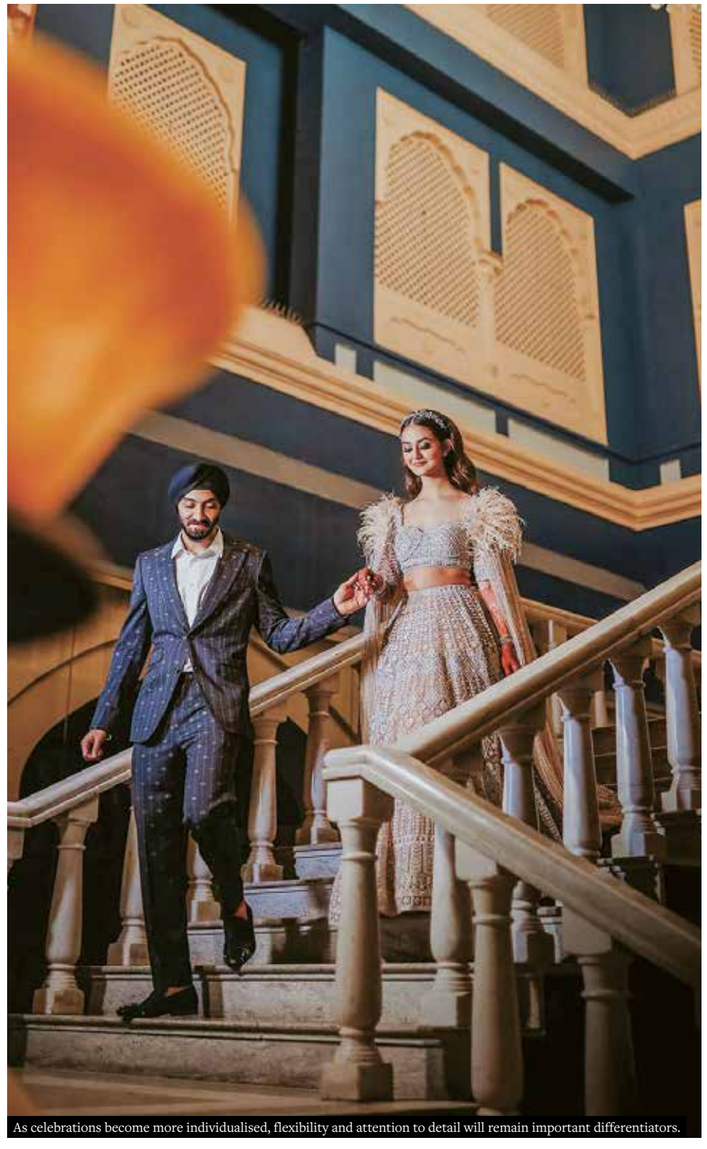
Vineet Arora, COO, Antara Cruises



Gurmeet Singh, Assistant Vice President, Brigade Hospitality



Ahemer Shaikh, Director of Sales & Marketing, The Westin Mumbai Garden City



As celebrations become more individualised, flexibility and attention to detail will remain important differentiators.

"A property with lush green landscapes, open spaces and distinctive interiors offers a natural canvas, allowing décor to complement rather than compete with the setting."

- Ahemer Shaikh



Photo Courtesy: Antara Cruises

A luxury river cruise offers the opportunity to create distinct experiences within a single journey.



Riverside wedding reception at dusk

"The hotel's setting has a huge impact on the celebrations. The architecture, colours and views can impact how the décor, floral palette and lighting come together."

- Nitin Srivastava

décor, floral palette and lighting come together. Our resorts have the added advantage of using our own natural surroundings as part of the décor."

A Venue for Each Function

Couples are increasingly opting for multi-venue wedding celebrations within a single property. The success of an unconventional wedding venue depends as much on planning and operational execution as it does on its visual appeal. Open-air and non-traditional spaces require careful assessment of weather contingencies, power and lighting arrangements, sound requirements, catering access and guest movement.

"These considerations must be addressed at the planning stage, rather than being treated as last-minute operational details. At a hotel, the advantage lies in having experienced teams across banqueting, culinary, engineering and operations who can work together to anticipate requirements and manage the event end to end. The scale of a wedding may vary, but the expectation of a seamless experience remains the same. Our responsibility is to ensure that every element, from food and service to logistics and guest comfort, works together without disrupting the celebration," says Sonica Malhotra Kandhari, Joint Managing Director, MBD Group.

Francis Ebenezer, Director of Sales, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, Mahabalipuram, adds, "Our indoor event spaces provide an elegant alternative for formal functions, while the resort environment allows couples to plan multi-event celebrations that bring families and guests together over several days. By combining the destination experience with personalised planning, culinary offerings and attentive service, we aim to create weddings that are both seamless and memorable."



Photo Courtesy: Fairmont Jaipur and Raffles Jaipur

Luxury lies in the ability to make every detail feel considered, while ensuring that the experience remains effortless for the couple and their guests

Thinking Out of the Box

Luxury today is not just about the setting; it is about making the entire experience feel effortless, personal and thoughtfully orchestrated.

"A luxury river cruise offers the opportunity to create these distinct experiences within a single journey. Onboard spaces such as the decks, lounges and dining areas can be curated around the character of each function, while a specially planned shore excursion or off-board celebration can add another dimension to the celebrations," says Vineet Arora, COO, Antara Cruises.

Pawan Chahar, General Manager at Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa, adds, "Transforming an unconventional space into a functional wedding venue requires careful consideration of both the setting and the practical requirements of the event. Weather contingencies, guest movement, lighting, sound and service access need to be assessed in advance, particularly for outdoor functions."



Photo Courtesy: Brigade Hospitality

Hotels need to balance the visual appeal of unconventional venues with practical requirements

Architecture Call

A hotel's architecture and surroundings often become an integral part of the wedding story. They influence everything from the colour palette and décor to photography and the way guests experience each celebration.

Gurmeet Singh, Assistant Vice President, Brigade Hospitality, explains, "The space decides the story. A club with mature trees and open greens suits a relaxed, garden-style celebration. A convention centre with grand volumes suits a bigger, more formal look. We start with what the space naturally offers and design the decor around it, instead of covering it up. This also helps photography, because couples get natural backdrops that don't need heavy styling."

Ahemer Shaikh, Director of Sales & Marketing, The Westin Mumbai Garden City, adds, "A property with lush green landscapes, open spaces and distinctive interiors offers a natural canvas for creative wedding concepts, allowing décor to complement rather than compete with the setting. Guests are increasingly looking for theme-based venues and distinct settings for different wedding functions rather than opting for a conventional ballroom for every occasion."

Storytelling at the Fore

Hotels need to balance the visual appeal of unconventional venues with practical requirements such as guest capacity, accessibility, catering, privacy and comfort.

Abhishek Sadhoo, General Manager, Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, says, "Thoughtful décor complements the architecture rather than competing with it, while natural light, greenery and open spaces bring depth and authenticity to wedding photographs."

The wedding market is becoming more diverse, and hotels need to offer more than standardised packages.



Abhishek Sadhoo, General Manager, Shangri-La Eros New Delhi



Anant Leekha, General Manager, Novotel Pune Nagar Road



Pawan Chahar, General Manager at Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa



Rajat Sethi, Cluster General Manager, Fairmont Jaipur and Raffles Jaipur.



Photo Courtesy: The Westin Garden City Mumbai

Indian weddings are increasingly being planned as a series of unique moments, rather than a succession of ceremonies held in a single venue



Photo Courtesy: Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa

The future lies in personalisation, flexibility and experience-led celebrations

"Beyond aesthetics, the property's sense of place can be reflected in the guest experience through regional cuisine, cultural elements and personalised touches that reflect the couple's preferences."

- Rajat Sethi

"Heritage properties can draw on their history, boutique hotels on their intimacy, and urban hotels on accessibility, convenience and operational flexibility. For a contemporary hospitality property, the ability to accommodate different celebration sizes and formats is an important advantage," avers Anant Leekha, General Manager, Novotel Pune Nagar Road.

Bespoke Cues

Weddings are deeply personal occasions, and the role of a hotel extends beyond providing a venue. It involves understanding the family's expectations, anticipating practical requirements and ensuring that the experience comes together as envisioned. As celebrations become more individualised, flexibility and attention to detail will remain important differentiators.

"Beyond aesthetics, the property's sense of place can be reflected in the guest experience through regional cuisine, cultural elements and personalised touches that reflect the couple's preferences. When these elements come together, the architecture and landscape become part of the wedding narrative, creating a celebration that feels personal to the couple while offering guests a meaningful connection with Rajasthan," says Rajat Sethi, Cluster General Manager, Fairmont Jaipur and Raffles Jaipur.

Ultimately, a successful wedding is not defined solely by the scale of the venue or the grandeur of the décor but by how comfortably guests come together and how meaningfully the occasion is experienced.