

AN ELOPEMENT GUIDE TO VANUATU

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW WHEN PLANNING A ROMANTIC ESCAPE, ELOPEMENT OR HONEYMOON IN VANUATU.

Well hi there and thank you for downloading this guide, I'm Val, I am a destination wedding and elopement photographer born and raised in Vanuatu, and I have put together this guide to give you a jumpstart when planning your adventures, elopement or destination wedding in these beautiful islands.



WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO CELEBRATE YOUR LOVE IN VANUATU?

There are many incredible places to elope and get wedded, but if you are looking for a stress-free wedding experience in beautiful surroundings, if you want your special day to be a memorable adventure, if you want to go off the beaten paths and have a unique celebration, Vanuatu might just be the perfect place for you.

There are several resorts on the main islands of Efate, Tanna and Santo that have been hosting weddings for a number of years and can make all the arrangements for your special day, and I have listed a few of them in this guide. If however your wish is to have a ceremony in a deserted spot with breathtaking views, keep scrolling and see some of my favorite places around:

THE BEST PLACES TO ELOPE AND HANG WILD AND FREE IN VANUATU:

MELE WATERFALL (EFATE):

Located on the main island of Efate, Mele waterfalls can be found on the ring road going around the island, a mere 15-20 minutes drive from downtown Port Vila. Once there, there are parking, changing and bathroom facilities for guests' convenience. There is an entrance fee that is usually about 20AUD but varies from time to time so this information is only indicative.

The trek takes between 15-20 minutes and follows a small, winding path up to the main falls. A little steep, the climb isn't particularly difficult and only requires a basic level of fitness and steadiness on your feet. Shoes should be worn, however keep in mind that you will be passing through shallow pools of water and mud as you walk up so ensure your footwear is appropriate.

Last but not least, the beauty and accessibility of the Mele Waterfalls make them one of the most popular attractions around Port Vila, particularly on a cruise ship day, when hundreds of people can be seen flowing through the parking lot and up the cascade; so to enjoy the place to yourself and truly experience it's wild beauty, it's best going there early morning or mid-afternoon, when the crowd has not yet arrived or is already gone, and avoid cruise ship days.



MELE BLACK SAND BEACH (EFATE):

Following the ring road headed outside Port Vila, Mele's black sand beach is located before the waterfalls, and easy to spot. While there is not parking as such, parking along the dirt road is very easy and shouldn't be a problem. At time, a small fee might be asked by villagers.

This long stretch of black sand is a beautiful spot for sunset, with small waves crashing on the shore and fallen trees adding atmosphere and beauty to the place. The Beach Bar at one end of the beach is a popular place for drinks and pizza, and hosts a very popular fire dance show once or twice a week.

Mele black sand beach is popular with locals and village kids, so to avoid the –relative– crowd, it's perhaps best to avoid going there on weekends and during school holidays.

Lelepa Marine Reserve (Efate)

One of my absolute favorite secret gems! To get there you'll need to follow the ring road about 30 minutes out of the Port Vila. Once reaching Lelepa landing, you'll need to hop on for 20 minutes or so boat ride to the marine reserve. On your way you will be passing an incredibly scenic and private little beach that's hardly accessible except by boat and by an experienced captain who can maneuver between the colorful and live coral. Chances are extremely high you would have this little beach all to yourself, with a limestone cliff in your back and turquoise waters in front of you, and boulders rocks to each side creating intimate swimming pools all for your enjoyment; all of it with a touch of greenery sprinkled here and there, for tropical picture perfection.

After your stop at the beach, or straight from the mainland, you can head to the marine reserve, a little sanctuary for marine life, nestled in a little bay surrounded with limestone cliffs. The snorkeling there is incredible, with fish all around and crystal clear waters. The perfect spot for an underwater dream session if you ask me.

And if you are wondering about sharks and other predators, they are a possibility that cannot be excluded 100%, but in my years of going there I have never had any encounter with them and have always felt extremely safe. I also have never been to the reserve at the same time as someone else, and my couples were always able to experience it's beauty all for themselves.



Honeymoon Beach (Efate)

A locals' favorite, Honeymoon beach is your typical white sand beach, nestled in a palm tree fringed bay. Located about 20 minutes drive from downtown Port Vila, past Pango village, it is rather well known and easy to reach. The downside of this being, while certainly not overly crowded, you may not have the place all to yourself.

Honeymoon beach is also a beautiful spot for a sunset swim; just check the tidal forecast when planning your trip there, as this beach is most scenic and best enjoyed at high tide.

For anyone interested in underwater couple photography, there is something about how the light hits the water there that is nothing short of magical.



Pango Lighthouse (Efate)

Another hidden gem, completely off the beaten tracks: the Pango Lighthouse is another one of my Efate favorites. From downtown Port Vila you'll need to head towards the Pango area, and drive for about 25 minutes, past Honeymoon Beach, to the end of the road. From the parking area, you'll need to walk for about 10-15 minutes on a flat, grassy terrain which presents absolutely no difficulties, however the last 100 meters follow a narrow, rocky path tucked between bush and barbed wire. It isn't particularly difficult at all, but do bear this section in mind when planning your way back as it no fun to walk it in the dark.

The Lighthouse itself presents no interest, but the coastline is spectacular, with soft rocky boulders, natural salt water pools, and massive surf break that create a myriad of little waterfalls everywhere, this place is simply stunning. And, it simply can't be beaten when it comes to sunset viewing around Port Vila.

Another bonus: apart from the occasional dog walkers, there's hardly ever anyone there. This wilderness is all yours!



Eton Beach (Efate)

Eton Beach is located on the eastern coast of Efate, about 40 minutes drive outside of Port Vila and is reputed to be one of the most scenic beaches on the island. If you are thinking palm trees, white winding and crystal clear waters for your romantic escapade and photos; this would be your place to go.

Eton beach is easily found on the Efate ring road, with parking facilities, changing rooms and shed tables all accessible for a small fee upon arrival. While its location out of town makes it less crowded than iconic places such as Mele waterfall, you have better chances to get the place all to yourself during week days.

Yasur Volcano (Tanna)

Mount Yasur Volcano is certainly one of the main reasons to visit Vanuatu.

About an hour or so flight from Port Vila (Efate), depending on what type of plane you will be flying on, and with as much as two or three flights per day, the island of Tanna, with its world renowned active volcano and other hidden gems is easy to reach, and options for stays and accommodation cater for most expectations and budgets.

The volcano itself is super easy to access with a wonderfully wild four wheel drive through lush rain forest and lunar ash plains that will get you as near as 150m from the volcano's crater rim. Once you have reached the parking lot, it's a short walk, about 10 minutes, along an ascending but not particularly steep or difficult marked path to make it to the rim.

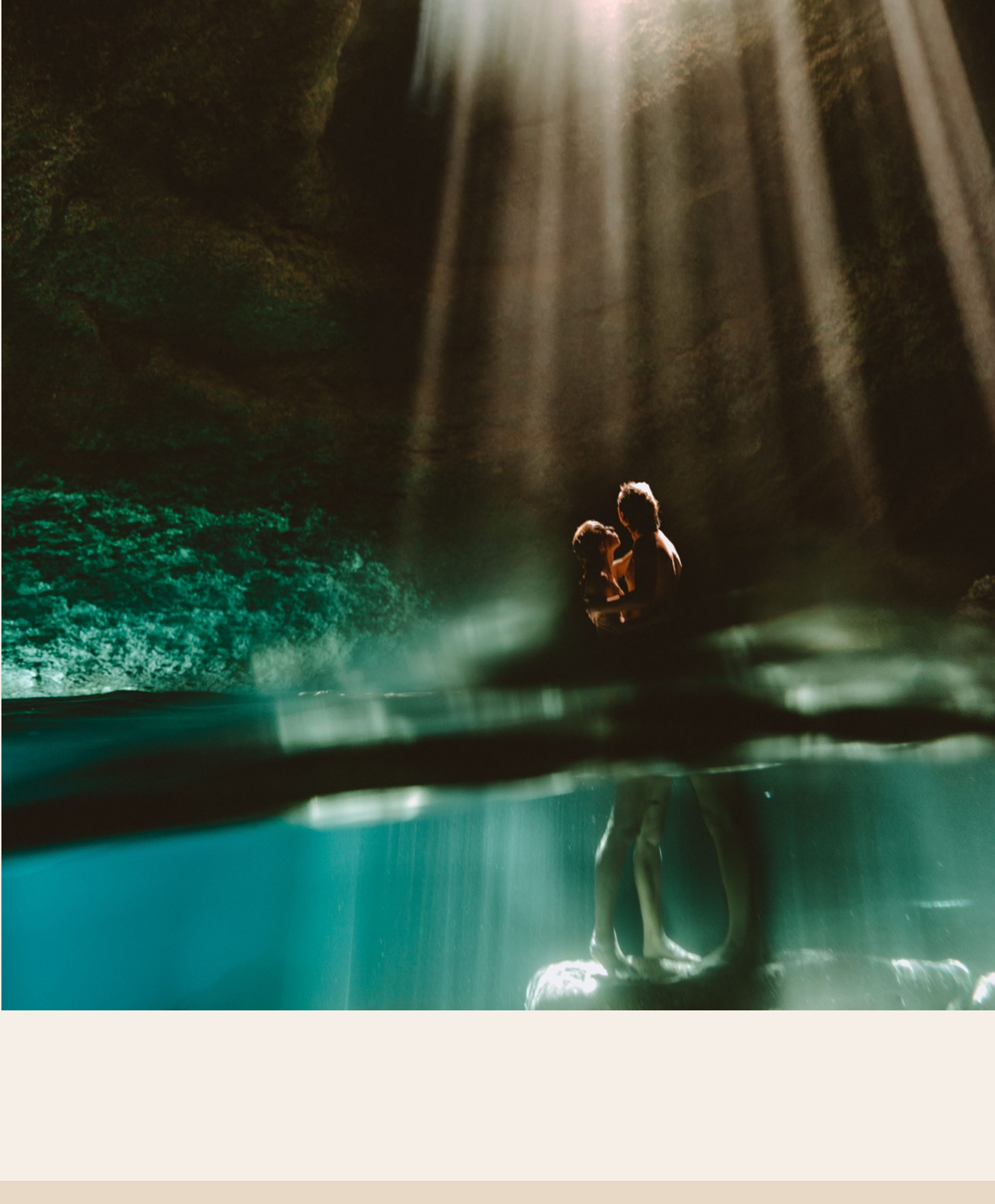
How far you can explore along the rim is based on activity levels and security considerations, but unless the weather is so bad there is no visibility at all –in which case I wouldn't recommend going at all, the view up there and the experience, are something to be remembered through a lifetime.

There is no need to be particularly fit to visit Mount Yasur, but one needs to prepare for the raw, brutal display of nature's force up there. To some, it is uniquely exhilarating, to others, it can be terrifying. In the latter case, heading back to the parking lot is always an option.

In terms of photography, the opportunities in the ash plain, all infused with a sense of adventure, wild and free spirit, and once in a lifetime experience.

Unless you have arranged to stay in bungalows down at the foot of the volcano, most resorts and hotels are located about an hour drive away, so packing snacks and drinks, mosquito repellent and warm clothes might be a good idea.





Blue Cave (Tanna)

Up until recently, the Blue Cave of Tanna was definitely an off the beaten path, well hidden gem that would be rather difficult to reach without luck or proper contacts within the local community. Getting exposure has made this place more accessible, and boat rides there –the most common access to the Cave, can pretty easily be arranged.

The cave itself is accessible by swimming through a hole in the cliff that can seem intimidating but is actually easy to manage. At low tide you can swim right under the rock ledge that takes you into the cave and at high tide you will need to swim underwater for a very short distance (less than a meter) before coming up in the cave. If the idea makes you nervous, I would recommend going at low tide, so you don't have to swim underwater to get in.

The cave is quite large and has a hole in the roof that provides a beautiful light, which shines into the cave highlighting the blue water and creating great photo opportunities.

While an exploring tour is easily booked nowadays, arranging to visit the cave outside of an organized tour, so you can have its magic all to yourself and capture incredible photographs without a soul around is something that requires a bit more planning, but is absolutely feasible and most definitely worth it.

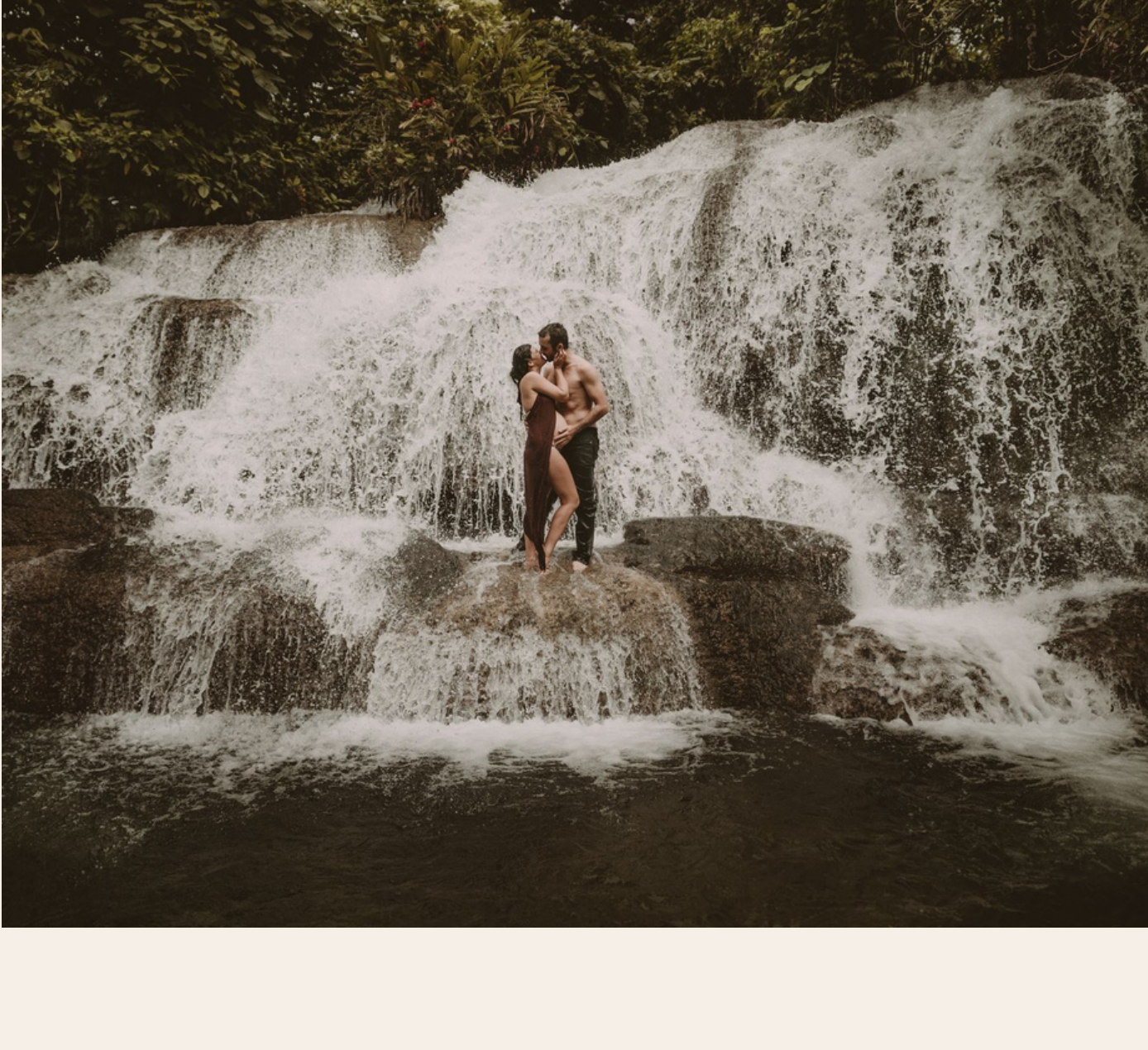
Matevulu Blue Hole (Santo)

The Matevulu Blue Hole is the largest in Santo and definitely a must-do when visiting this island. Its crystal clear, deep blue waters are surreal and only enhanced by the fact that it is nestled amongst lush rainforest and giant banyan trees.

The blue hole is very easily accessible, either by a 30 minutes kayaking ride up the Matevulu River, which is an experience in itself, or simply by car. Either way it offers a fantastic reward for rather little effort.

The Matevulu Blue Hole is a fantastic place for anyone keen to take underwater photos. The clarity of the water is extraordinary, and the tree branches above the water create streaks of light underneath the surface that are positively otherworldly.

There is an entrance fee of 500vt per person to be acquitted at the entrance, and changing and toilet facilities available for visitors.



Taffuntari Waterfall (South Santo)

This picturesque waterfall is located about an hour drive out of Luganville, Santo, and perfect for a half day excursion. It is possible to visit the Venui Vanilla plantation on the way with a little extra time.

Once at Taffuntari, it is a mere 5 minutes walk down the waterfall.

The path down to the waterfall and back up to the parking lot is short and safe, but a little steep and it can get slippery if it has been raining or if your feet/shoes are wet from your swim. A little caution might be advised.

The waterfall itself consists of one short fall over boulders that can be climbed and jumped from. Depending on how much time you have the surroundings can be explored by foot and are equally gorgeous.

Taffuntari waterfall provides beautiful photo opportunities for relatively small efforts and is definitely worth adding to your tour of the island, especially if you are not spending a lot of time in Santo and can't afford to drive to more remote areas.

Rock of Rah (Banks)

Located in the Banks Islands, on the island of Rah specifically, the Rock of Rah is a wonder. After an easy 15 minutes walk from the village of Rah through a beautiful rain forest with tons of photo opportunities, you'll get to the foot of the rock itself.

Climbing up requires moderate fitness and is not the faint of heart, or anyone suffering from vertigo, but the view from up there is definitely and by far a worthy reward, and the experience, hanging up this rock simply feels like true adventure.

Beware there is a colony of fire ants living up the rock, so wearing proper repellent before heading up is a basic precaution, along with clothes covering as much skin as possible and closed shoes. Our first time climbing up we didn't know this and came down with burning bites all over, but the second and following times we were prepared and all went great. Carrying water with you is also recommended.



Twin Waterfalls (Banks)

The twin waterfalls are as off the beaten tracks as it gets, a wonder for the adventure seekers. Located on the island of Vanua Lava in the Banks group, they are usually accessed by boat, and the ride alone will fill your soul with wilderness.

As the name suggests, the Twin Waterfalls consists of two strikingly identical falls, with the added particularity that they directly face the ocean. The fresh water pool they feed is in fact right on the beach, and from behind the falls, you can see the endless ocean and waves crashing on the shore.

As they are located in such a remote area, it is most likely that you would have the whole place to yourself when visiting. To make this the most enjoyable experience, it is recommend to pack any essentials you might need (water, drinks and snacks, bug repellent, towels and wind jackets for example).

The mix of lush green waterfall and blue ocean landscapes create a truly unique environment and photo opportunities in the area are abundant.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO ELOPE OR GET MARRIED IN VANUATU?

Weddings in Vanuatu are recognized legally worldwide. Couples don't need to attend the Registry Office in person and documentation can be mostly organized prior to departure. At least a month prior to the ceremony, however, you will need to email your weddings organizer -or friendly kickass photographer, copies of the following:

- 1. Your passports and birth certificates
- 2. Divorce papers or former spouse's Death Certificate if applicable
- 3. A completed Notice of Intention to Marry Form
- 4. Completed Witness Forms – 2 witnesses are required but the wedding coordinator can organize witnesses if you don't have guests with you. Witness details needed include names, dates of birth, place of birth, parents' names, place of residence and occupation. Your wedding organizer can email you the required forms.

On the day, following the ceremony, you will sign the Registry, have that witnessed and be presented with your Marriage Certificate.

Note that while legally recognized worldwide, for all intent and purposes, after getting married in Vanuatu you may not be able to register the marriage with your country's Births, Deaths & Marriages, as the wedding would have been officially registered in Vanuatu. If this is of concern, it is simple to arrange for a civil ceremony in your home country and then have a romantic vow ceremony in Vanuatu.



WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO GET MARRIED IN VANUATU?

Vanuatu has a tropical climate, which makes it rather nice and warm all year long. However weather-wise, it is usually cooler and dryer between April to October, which makes it an ideal time to visit in most local's opinion. The low season runs from November to March when the weather is hotter and wetter. Prices are cheaper then and there are less tourist crowds.

GENERAL ADVICE ABOUT TRAVELLING TO VANUATU:

While the main towns of Port Vila (Efate) and Luganville (Santo) and some resorts on the Island of Tanna offer a wide range of budget and upscale accommodation, food options, activities, and all the modern amenities one can hope for, Vanuatu in general remains a rather wild and raw destination. Outer islands such as the Banks for example offer some level of comfort but remain basic and rustic; so depending on how adventurous you are or want to get, it might be wise to always inquire about the amenities available in a particular place before making any bookings.

WHERE TO STAY IN VANUATU? A FEW IDEAS...

- RATUA ISLAND RESORT

My personal favorite, Ratua Island Resort is "a wild, magical place with authentic people who offer a simple and warm reception in a naturally beautiful environment."

<https://www.ratua.com/>

- THE HAVANNAH

Set on Efate's North-West coast, about 30 kilometers from Port Vila, this upscale and award winning boutique resort is everything idyllic and perfect for elopements and romantic escapades.

<https://thehavannah.com/>

- THE MOSO

Barefoot luxury in a secluded paradise, the Moso Resort is located on the island of the same name, just up North from Efate. Relax, unwind, take in the turquoise blue waters and whispering coconut trees...

<https://www.themosovanuatu.com/>

- ERAKOR ISLAND RESORT

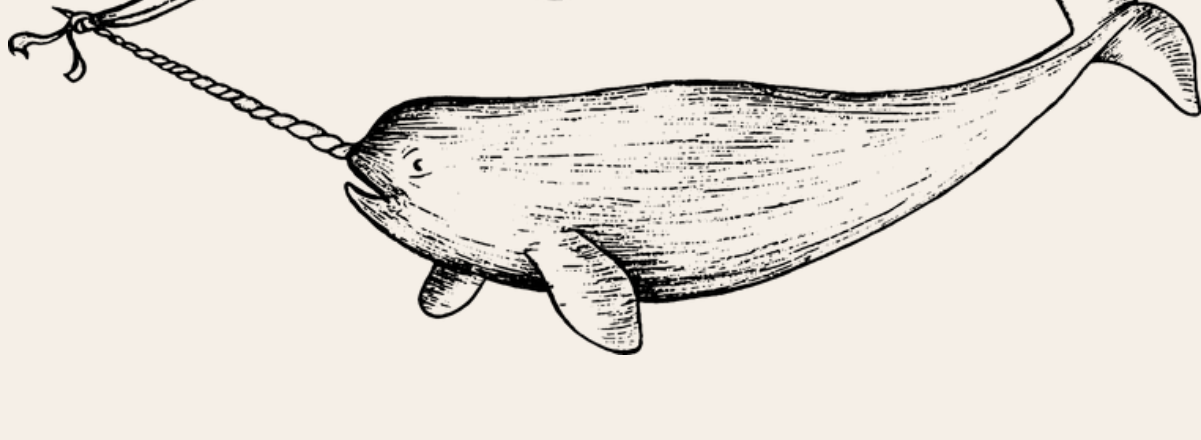
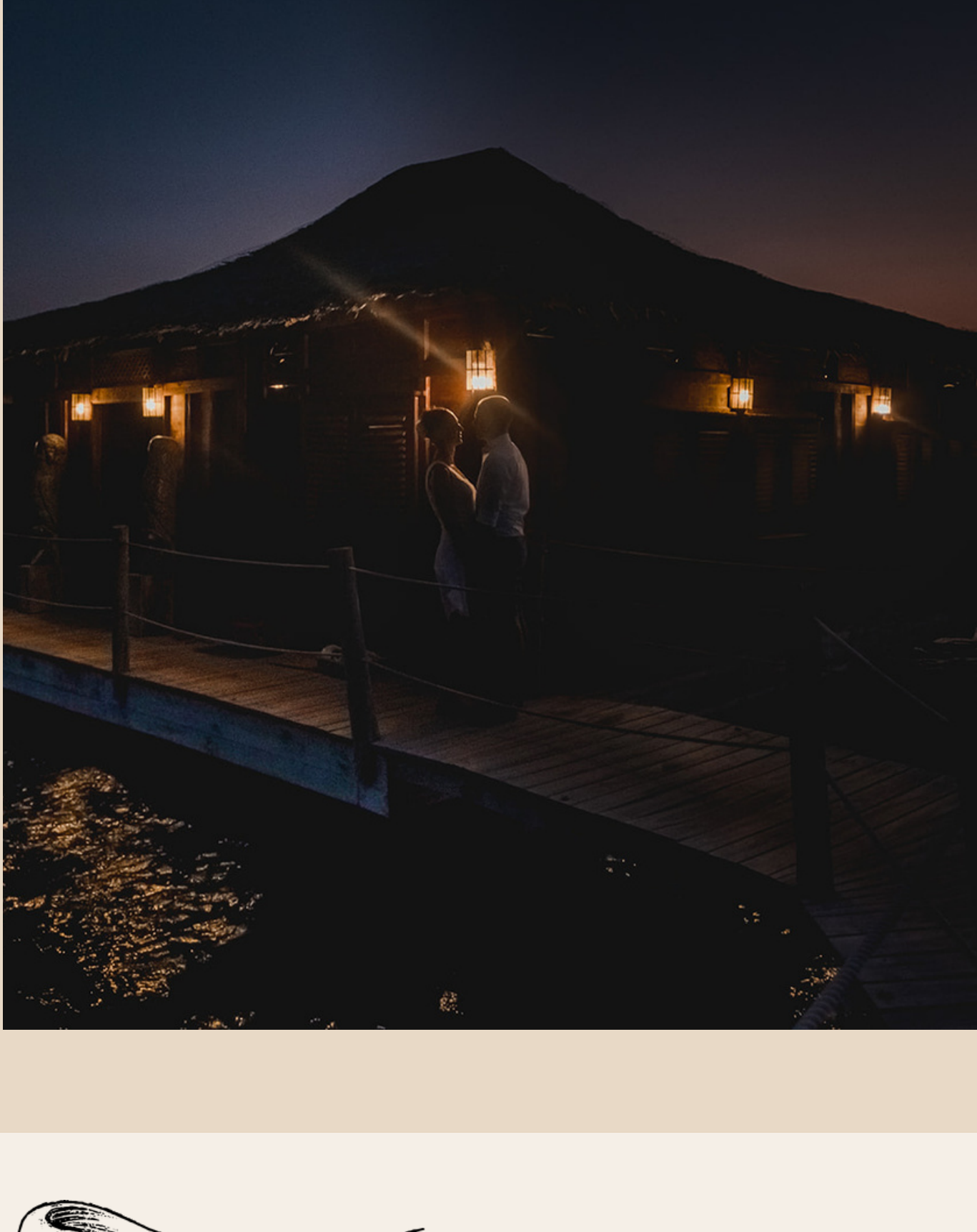
Set on a charming private islet, Erakor Island Resort is a very popular and affordable choice for simple, all inclusive beach vibes weddings and honeymoon.

<https://www.erakorislandresort.com/>

- WARWICK - LE LAGON

Just a few minutes drive from downtown Port Vila, the Warwick Le lagoon, with its golf course, lush gardens, infinity pools, water activities, restaurants and spa is ideal for larger group weddings and for leisurely stays.

<https://www.warwickhotels.com/warwick-le-lagon-vanuatu>



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