

A GUIDE TO DESTINATION WEDDINGS

Does thought of running off to marry on a tropical island, in an ancient castle or near an exotic temple set your heart racing? Although planning a destination wedding can be complicated, it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience to which hundreds of couples say "I do" every year. So check out our planning points and get started creating the destination wedding of your dreams.

Location, location, location

First things first, choose the location for your destination wedding. Factors to consider include the expense of the location, the level of prowess needed to navigate local laws and requirements, available activities and amenities for you and your guests (theme parks, sports and recreation, spa services, outdoor activities, shopping), restaurant and accommodation options, and ease of travel to and from your locale.

Start Dating

Next on the list of destination wedding must-do's: choose a date for your fete. If you schedule your celebration when your destination has the best weather and the most festivities (AKA tourist season), plan on higher prices and crowds. If you travel during the off-season, you may save some money but experience weather or travel problems. Your best bet may be to wed just before, or just after, big travel season.

Check Availability

Before you plunk down any deposits, check your date with close friends and family members. Remember, if you've chosen a faraway destination, don't expect all -- or even most -- of your guests to attend. Between time off for work and school and airline tickets and accommodations, attending your nuptials may be a lot to expect from even the dearest of friends. On the other hand, if you choose a particularly fabulous destination like the Hawaii or the Caribbean where the weather is perfect pretty much year-round, you may be surprised at how many well-wishers will be eager to join you on your big day.

Legal Requirements

Most marriage bureaus require a few basic documents in order to grant a marriage license. If your destination wedding is in the United States, check with local authorities to find out what specific documents are required. If you wed abroad, however, sometimes a bit more than a birth certificate, marriage license application and blood test are needed to make your marriage legal. In Greece, national law prohibits certain interfaith marriages from taking place: brides and grooms may have to demonstrate proof of religious affiliation in order to legally wed. In Mexico, laws governing marriage vary from place to place, so it's virtually impossible to know what's required until you apply for a license - in person. In Italy, paperwork originating for the US must be translated into Italian and decreed official by the secretary of your state. If yours will be a foreign wedding, contact that country's consulate to find out what to expect.

Travel Requirements

Find out what will be needed to safely and legally travel to and from your wedding destination. Contact the United States State Department for travel advisories and to find out about passport, visa and vaccination requirements.

Add It Up

Price airfare and lodging options, and be prepared to furnish estimated costs to friends and family. Before asking your attendants if they can participate in your wedding, be up front about what your wedding will cost

them. Be absolutely clear about what costs you can -- and cannot -- cover, whether that be airfare, lodging, meals, or wedding day clothes.

Package Deals

Many hotels and resorts offer destination wedding "packages," where some or all wedding details are coordinated by on-site professional. A simple package may include a bride's bouquet and officiant. An elaborate package may include food, flowers, photography, champagne, cake, limo service, and a string quartet. If these services are available to you, by all means, take advantage of them. Having an expert coordinate the details of your destination wedding can be the nicest wedding gift you ever receive.

Professional Help

If you are planning your destination wedding without a hotel or resort package, consider hiring a wedding coordinator on location. Professional wedding planners can help you choose reliable vendors and venues, and often secure lower prices and better values.



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