

Destination wedding Basics: 13 Must-Read Tips

Whether you desire an intimate wedding or a far-flung celebration with family and friends, destination weddings offer lots of options!

Here are some basic tips you should know before planning a destination wedding!

1. Ask for Help

If you've signed up for a wedding package, the services of a planner are probably included. If not, try to earmark part of your budget (about 10 percent of the total) for a wedding planner. He or she can shoulder the burden of researching, auditioning, and securing local vendors -- especially valuable if said vendors speak English only as a second language. She is also the behind-the-scene queen, creating gift bags for guests, greeting everyone at the airport, keeping people busy with fun activities once there, vetting special requests (babysitters, dry cleaners, etc.), and getting everyone where they need to be on time.

2. Schedule a Test Drive

Remember, unlike a wedding in your hometown, guests are dependent on you once they reach the destination. Make sure you provide transportation to and from the airport, as well as to all the events of the weekend. Insist that bus drivers do a dry run of the route so they don't get lost between the ceremony and reception.

3. Take a Trip

If you've decided not to hire a wedding planner (or one isn't provided as part of a wedding package), plan to visit the destination after you've finalized your guest count. You'll need to scout and secure your key venues -- church, reception, hotels for guests, rehearsal dinner venue -- and local suppliers such as caterers, florists, photographers, etc. Next -- or during a second trip -- you'll need to schedule "tastings" with your caterer, see sample bouquets from the florist, plan a hair/makeup session with a salon, and organize activities (golf, tennis, walking tours, museums) for everyone.

4. Vendor Checkups

If you must hire your vendors sight unseen, ask for a portfolio of pictures and at least three references. Be sure the references are people for whom the vendor did an event similar to yours. For example, a recommendation from a couple who had 10 guests doesn't help if you're inviting 100. Also ask for the names of other vendors who worked those events and use them as further references regarding the company in question.

5. Be Gracious

A good way to make nice with the local vendors is to send handwritten thank-you notes and even little gifts when you book their services. (Remember that they can literally make or break your wedding, and a little goes a long way toward getting them on your side.) During the event itself, it's wise to have plenty of small bills on hand for palm-greasing, especially in foreign countries and resorts.

6. Bring Your Own Pros

Don't hesitate to fly in talent you trust from home for critical aspects such as photography, hair/makeup, and decor design (lighting, flowers). They usually work with local vendors in a supervisory capacity and the locals often benefit because they learn tricks from the city-slicker pros.

7. Forewarn Your Friends

Tell your bridal party about the destination before you ask them to stand by your side so that they can gracefully decline if finances are tight.

Other vendors you need



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8. Get a Grip

Don't be upset if some of your closest friends or relatives don't attend. While you are, in a sense, footing some of the food bills, their fees for travel, hotel, and car rental can really add up, especially for a family. And while your wedding is, in a sense, a mini-vacation for you, it may not be the one they want to take!

9. Mind Mother Nature

Don't forget to consider the climate when choosing your dress. You'll be swimming in sweat if you pair your fairy-tale satin ballgown with tropical humidity. Whether your dream location is specifically a beach or simply outdoors, dress for no stress.

10. Be a Zen Bride

Don't keep a constant eye on the time. Remember that many tropical islands run on "island time" -- things happen when they happen -- and keep an open mind. Minor mishaps can sometimes make for the best memories.

11. Pack Right

Whatever you buy to bring with you, you have to lug along. Don't forget to allow ample room for The Dress.

12. Call On a Courier

Don't forget to plan for potential wedding presents. If you've got a ton of wedding gifts to take home, ask if someone who lives in your city can take them back and keep them for you until after the honeymoon -- or even drop them at your home for you. Or, pack an extra duffel bag to bring them home yourselves. Figure this out before the wedding so you'll have a plan of action if you need it.

13. Welcome Your Guests

Be sure to place a gift basket in each room that is full of essentials for the trip (suntan lotion, bug spray, etc.) and goodies that will remind them of the setting -- calypso tapes, cookbooks or samples of native food, or crafts from local artisans, for example.

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