

Destination Planning 101- Nancy Barkley

Published in Perfect Wedding Guide, available on Amazon.com

Twenty years ago, I planned my first Destination wedding, my own! Since I had such a wonderful experience, I have made my profession planning Destination Weddings for others. Everyone tells me that I have so many stories that I should write a book, so I will begin with a chapter. I hope my insider insight of obstacles and solutions in planning a Destination Wedding will be of help to you.

So, you want to have a Destination Wedding? Something different, unique, nontraditional, that is great. However, do your guests want to be part of a Destination Wedding? This is the first dilemma when you decide on having your wedding in a different country or state. Aunt Sue, who does not have a passport or has never been on a plane, does not want to fly anywhere, yet alone to a country where she does not speak the language. Brides and Grooms, my first piece of advice is to make a list of absolutely “must be there” guests and make sure they can attend. The last thing you want to do is get six months into the planning and then have somebody back out. Of course, I have planned Destination Weddings, with the above being the very reason for the couple chose to have a Destination Wedding, knowing Aunt Sue will not go- if that is the case, then carry on and have your Destination Wedding, you know your family and friends best.

Location, Location, Location- where to have your Destination Wedding? A lot of this depends on where you and your guests are physically located and how far you would like your guests to travel. If you are traveling to another county, researching air lift helps prevent many troubles before they begin. Also, looking at a map helps the geographically challenged, trust me, one cannot drive to Hawaii.

When to have your Destination Wedding? Mother Nature is an important part of the wedding party. The Caribbean is a popular choice for many couples, with summer being popular because children are out of school and summer usually provides more vacation time for guests. However, summer starts Hurricane Season in the Caribbean, so it is advisable to plan on a different time. In this situation, advance planning is key to allow guests enough time to request off. You can perhaps take advantage of long holiday weekends that will not be during hurricane season, or typhoon season or weather events at your destination. While on the topic of children, if you would like an adult only event, the same rules apply to a Destination Wedding as a local wedding.

Save the Dates and invitations should be address only to those who are invited, meaning if the children names are left off, they are not invited.

So you have the date, you have the location, what type of wedding are you going to have? Legal, religious? Symbolic. For legal weddings, many countries require you to be in their country a certain amount of time before wedding and have blood tests taken locally as well as papers translated. For religious, it is not always easy to find say a priest or rabbi in certain areas. For many the religious ceremonies, it is less complicated to fly, your rabbi with you to perform ceremony. All of this can be done when planned ahead of time. Also, just because you have chosen an exotic destination, you can still walk down a literal church aisle. Many venues provide a traditional chapel at their location. If choosing a legal ceremony, I find more and more brides getting married legally ahead of time and doing symbolic ceremony at location (which can look exactly like a legal ceremony) if you do not wish your guests to know, they will be none to the wiser.

Regardless of when you have to arrive at your destination for residency requirements, please allow yourself an extra day, especially if you are flying. Weather and flight cancellations can delay travel and giving yourself extra time can avoid a problem before it happens. Also, I do not suggest shipping your wedding dress, EVER, I cannot tell you the horror stories of dresses being caught up in customs. Same goes for gifts you bring on the flight for guests. Ideally, purchase locally or bring with you unwrapped.

Being a bit of control freak myself and having planned my own Destination Wedding, I quickly learned you need to let go of some of the control. So, if you are a hand-on bride, be forewarned, to avoid a lot of unnecessary stress, give up of some of the power. If at all possible, I always suggest visiting the destination you have chosen and meeting all the players that will be involved in your wedding. If this is not possible, make sure you work with reputable travel and wedding professionals who provide references and then call the references that are most recent. Once you are comfortable that your Destination Wedding Team is prepared to handle everything, introduce them to your Decision Making Team. Establish an initial conference call. Discuss the entire wedding process and establish a realistic time line for everything involved for your wedding and who will be doing what. From there, you can send pictures and detailed description of exactly what you are envisioning for flowers, table

settings etc. Just like communication is vital for your marriage, it is very important with your wedding planner.

Have your Destination Team recommend a local photographer at your destination that has knowledge of the local area, for some great unique photos you will always cherish. Always have a Plan B for wedding location. You do not want to think of inclement weather for your wedding day but it happens, and having an alternative location selected ahead of time will help you avoid undue stress.

This is your day, decide on exactly how both of you envision it, communicate it with your Destination Wedding Team and let them take it from there. When planning a Destination Wedding, try not to get caught up in making everything perfect, roll with whatever comes your way and it is your wedding day and it will be amazing!