



GET AWAY *from it all*

DESTINATION WEDDINGS HAVE A RULEBOOK ALL THEIR OWN. FOLLOW IT, AND YOUR FAR-OFF FESTIVITIES WILL BE SMOOTH SAILING ALL THE WAY.

writer NATASHA GARBER ~ photo ADAM NYHOLT PHOTOGRAPHER

The wedding, as ritual and celebration, has plenty of social, logistical and family etiquette associated with it—most of which you'll encounter for the very first time when planning your big day. For destination-wedding couples, the rules of etiquette (who's invited, who pays for what, how do we find time to be together alone, etc.) are somewhat different, and often difficult to navigate.

Q: *What are the hosts—whether the bride and groom, or one or the other's or both sets of parents—supposed to pay for?*

A: "Typically, the bride and groom pay for the rehearsal dinner for everyone attending the wedding, and, of course, for the wedding ceremony and reception food and drinks," notes Houston-based planner Deborah Elias, whose company, Elias Events, specializes in destination weddings. She

adds that some clients like to spring for extras like golf, or day trips for their guests—though these add-ons are by no means a requirement. Guests are expected to pay for their own travel expenses and accommodations, unless you are planning a very small destination wedding, or renting out an entire property for your wedding weekend.

Q: *Who should absolutely be invited to the destination wedding, and how should save-the-dates and invitations be handled?*

A: While it's a fabulous getaway for all invited, this is still your wedding. Unless you're plotting an elopement, you should plan to invite your immediate families and closest friends. Most destination wedding couples do not invite acquaintances or work colleagues—though some do. Since time off work

and travel planning are involved, it is thoughtful to send save-the-dates anywhere from six months to a full year out from the planned wedding date. Invitations should follow two to three months ahead of the wedding date.

If you're concerned about hurting the feelings of those you simply are unable to invite, due to the travel logistics and financial commitment of the typical destination wedding, plan to host a celebratory "newlywed" bash some time soon after you return home. It doesn't have to be wedding-fancy, but should be full of friends, family, food, drink, music, laughter and...fun.

Q: We're thrilled to have our nearest and dearest attending our destination wedding—but we'd like to get some "alone time," too. What should we do?

A: Most destination wedding weekends last only two to four days, max. That's not a lot of time, once you factor in staggered arrivals and departures, travel time, etc. You probably won't have this unique opportunity again, so take advantage of it. Be with your friends and family, even if it's just lounging casually on the beach, or breakfasting together on the terrace of your Tuscan villa.

Elias advises enlisting a good destination-wedding planner or a local destination management company (DMC), either of which will know all of the area's best attractions, tours and diversions, and can help you arrange activities for your guests, so that you and your new spouse can grab an hour together for a couple's massage, or a quiet stroll on the beach.

And don't forget, the best thing about a destination wedding is that once guests depart for home, you two get to stay on. Plan your honeymoon to follow directly on the heels of your wedding weekend, and

island-hop to another luxury destination in that Caribbean archipelago, tour a few fabulous European cities after your French Riviera nuptials, or simply stay put at your wedding site, reliving all the glorious memories of your once-in-a-lifetime celebration—and creating many, many more.

Q: What should I wear for my destination wedding—and what should I expect my bridal party to wear?

A: A destination wedding is not the same as a cathedral wedding or luxury cosmopolitan hotel ballroom wedding. It is meant to be a vacation, and should be enjoyed as one. While you are within your rights to wear anything you wish (this is your wedding, after all), a beach bride might want to think twice about wearing a very formal fitted gown with a long, complicated train, or a delicate

mantilla veil that might get twisted about by the brisk ocean breeze. Dressing for your destination is best, whether that means a silk-charmeuse sheath, boho-chic goddess gown or a simple silk A-line. Doing your "I do's" on the sand? Consider subbing sparkling "foot jewelry" for standard bridal heels, or forgoing a delicate cut-flower bouquet for a hand-tied bunch of beach succulents and grasses.

For bridesmaids, destination weddings are the perfect settings for mix-and-match dresses, perhaps in different styles (of each bridesmaid's choice), unified by color (like coral, blush, cerulean blue or sandy taupe).

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