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Weddings Made Easy

Master The Basics For Organizing Your Big Day Away. By Ivette Manners



Planning a destination wedding involves a lot of logistics, but this big event is well worth the effort. Here are expert tips to help you pull off your best day ever—whether you're wedding on an island, in a big city, or out in the countryside.

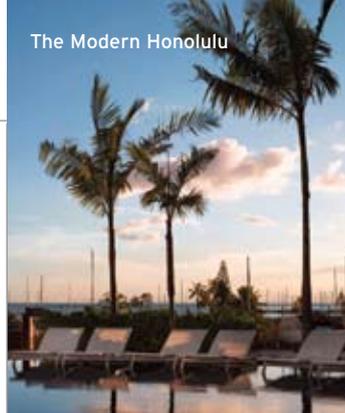
CHOOSE THE RIGHT DESTINATION Location is key for a destination wedding; it should be somewhere that is meaningful, represents you as a couple, and makes your celebration special and unique. “Take a moment to envision your perfect wedding day,” says Michelle Johnstone Clark of Waterlily Weddings (waterlilyweddings.com). “Then make a list of your top five must-haves for a destination.” **BEACH:** Keep in mind that not all islands offer beaches where you can hold a private affair. For example, all of the beaches in Hawaii are public, so there may be passersby or other nuptials going on at the same time. Some isles, like Saba, don't have beaches at all, but may boast breathtaking mountainside resorts. Do some research and choose the island that best suits your dream wedding. **CITY:** The allure of a city are the sights and energy, so pick one that will add to the excitement of your celebration with activities and tours around town, suggests Wendy Ramos of Just Wenderful Event Planning & Design (justwenderful.com). **COUNTRY:** A rural wedding can be an unforgettable fête at a vineyard, farm, private estate or ski resort; it can also mean that you may have to bring in a caterer and rentals.

CONSIDER FAMILY & FRIENDS Your destination wedding will be an investment—both in time and money—for your guests. You will want to make it memorable to ensure they will be happy they attended, says Merryl Brown of Merryl Brown Events (merrylbrownevents.com). Doing things like working with a travel agent to find the best flights or tailoring your menu to incorporate your guests' tastes will make you the super star host. "Remember that your event will be a mini-vacation for your family and friends," says Elena Karpechenko, Special Events Manager and Wedding Specialist at The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman (ritzcarlton.com). "In addition to scheduling activities that will appeal to everyone in your group, leave some downtime in your itinerary, so that they can relax and take advantage of the destination." **BEACH:** Chances are your beach wedding will be at a resort that offers wedding packages, and these hotels make it easy for guests to plan their trip. "Have one point of contact at the resort and create a booking code for the wedding party to use without having to go through you," says Karine Vanhee, wedding coordinator at The St. Regis Bora Bora (stregis.com/borabora). **CITY:** Hotels in big cities can be pricey, so give your guests a couple of great options. Have welcome bags placed in their rooms with maps, transportation informa-

once-in-a-lifetime experience, but be sure your venue and hotel offer a variety of accommodations to keep your guests comfortable and entertained, says Sylvia Wallnutt, the Wedding Coordinator at The Lodge at Doonbeg in County Clare, Ireland (doonbeglodge.com).

HIRED HANDS The benefits of hiring a wedding planner are having access to their creativity, relationships with vendors, and professional know-how for producing a successful soirée. When you're getting married in another destination you not only need an expert on weddings, but someone who is also knowledgeable about the location you've chosen.

BEACH: Many resorts include the services of an on-site wedding planner (also referred to as a wedding coordinator/event manager/wedding specialist) in their wedding package. "If your venue doesn't offer a wedding planner you should hire your own," says Ed Cotton, COO of DestinationWeddings.com. "Wedding planners are familiar with all of the nuances of putting together a destination wedding." **CITY:** Even if your venue does offer an on-site planner you may want to hire a private one who can handle specific details like help you manage your budget, scout out particular vendors, or put together an ethnic wedding. **COUNTRY:** Planning a wedding from several miles away in a destination that you may be unfamiliar with can be challenging. A wedding planner is there to be your right hand and will help you save on



The Modern Honolulu



The Carneros Inn



The Ritz-Carlton Cancun

a lot of the research, legwork, and money.

SCORE THE BEST DEAL According to TheWeddingReport.com, the average destination wedding costs less (thus one of the many reasons why they are so popular). As with any thing you're dropping major cash on, you want to get the most for your money. Consider holding your event off-season, which is when resorts and vendors offer reduced pricing, not to mention lower airfares. "Also, remember you are bringing in a nice piece of business with the size of your group, so don't be afraid to negotiate and get discounts for things like complimentary breakfast, spa services, and activities," says Correale.

BEACH: Compare resorts, says Ramos. "Some hotels offer free wedding packages, honeymoons, or rooms for the bride and groom if you hold your event or have a certain amount of guests staying there." The more inclusive your package the more you'll save. Know what is included in your package; it should include details you want for your event, such as hors d'oeuvres and open bar, adds Kathy Ackley, CMP, wedding planner at Fess Parker's DoubleTree Resort in Santa Barbara (fessparkersantabarbarahotel.com).

CITY: Explore the city for different venues for your event. "You may be able to get a great deal on your welcome or rehearsal dinner at an off-site restaurant," says Correale. **COUNTRY:** If you're hiring a caterer for your big day, book them for your entire event. "Using the same caterer for the various functions, such as your welcome barbecue, rehearsal dinner, and post-wedding brunch can get you better rates," says Karen Bussen, celebrity event planner (karenbussen.com).

The Modern Honolulu



tion, and a helpful list of attractions, restaurants, and hair and nail salons, adds Andrea Correale of Elegant Affairs (elegantaffairs caterers.com). **COUNTRY:** A wedding held off the beaten path makes for a



planning

MAKE IT LEGAL Getting legally married abroad takes preparation. Be sure you have all of your documents (including your birth certificate and passport) in order. Some countries require that you submit a notice of your intention to marry months ahead of your wedding date, assume residency a few days prior to the ceremony, or have a notarized single status affidavit. Your wedding planner can assist you with all of the legalities, and you can learn the laws of the land on your own by looking up the marriage requirements on the country's official website. **BEACH:** You may have to travel to another location to make it all legal. For example, couples getting married in Mustique have to travel to its neighboring main island of St. Vincent to obtain their license before the ceremony. To be legally married in Bora Bora a civil ceremony must be performed at the Bora Bora Town Hall, which you can easily get to by boat from most resorts. Also, be sure to find out beforehand if you need a permit to get married on a beach. **CITY:** A wedding at a park, museum, or monument can be magical, however you may need to obtain a permit or make arrangements to work around any rules and regulations for hours, setting up décor, music, or number of guests, says Kim Petyt of Parisian Events (parisian-events.com). **COUNTRY:** Understand the restrictions. Many historical sites in France, for

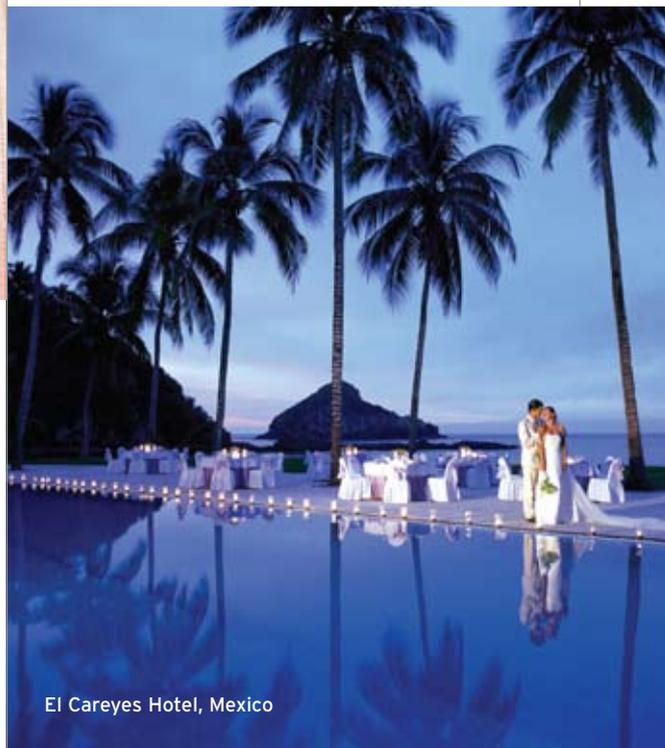
example, are owned by the government and can be rented for a fee, which includes extra liability coverage, and require that you hire their suggested vendors who are used to working on the premises.

'TIS THE SEASON

Your wedding date is a prime factor in your choice of destination, with travel seasons and weather as major elements. For example, while you may want a wedding in the Caribbean in September (the new popular wedding month, along with May and June) when airfares can be lower, hurricane season can still be brewing. However, it's not always about travel dates and Mother Nature. The season in which you wed can also inspire or add to your event's atmosphere. **BEACH:** Be sure you have a backup plan

in case of bad weather. Work with your venue or wedding planner to come up with an equally fabulous alternate space or setup. **CITY:** Wedding insurance, such as WedSafe.com, not only protects your event from inclement weather; it'll also cover cancellations, postponements, and lost deposits. **COUNTRY:** If you envision a snow-covered celebration, check snowfalls and weather reports from past years to get an idea of their heavy snowfall pattern, advises Bussen.

GO LOCAL Your locale will be a theme in itself for your big event. Use your destination's rich culture, flavorful foods, and traditional music to design your bash. "The ideas are endless," says Ramos, "from invitations in the shape of the island or printed with the city's silhouette to local wines or craft beers served at the reception." **BEACH:** Instead of serving Champagne at your Hawaiian



El Careyes Hotel, Mexico

or Caribbean wedding, toast with tropical cocktails. Shots of tequila and mariachis for your Mexican celebration would be traditional, yet chic. "For effortless but stunning décor, islands are abundant with beautiful flowers and other natural elements you can easily incorporate," says Karpechenko. **CITY:** Set up a tour of the area to educate your guests on the city's history, neighborhoods, and landmarks. Have them experience some of the local culture by making stops at the best hotspots. **COUNTRY:** Use your natural surroundings for amazing photo ops. Lakes, cliffs, mountains, meadows, etc. offer dramatic backdrops for photographs you'll cherish forever. ♦