Destination-Wedding Etiquette

Destination weddings conjure images of sandy beaches in exotic locales, though they can happen anywhere from a snowy ski chalet to a distant, foreign metropolis. Passports aren't even always required; the idea is more that the wedding is a getaway for everyone involved. The wedding itself is usually intimate and held in a locale that has personal meaning to the couple. Most traditional wedding etiquette holds sway even across the International Date Line, but a little extra attention will need to be given to guest list composition and size, sharing travel information, and travel budgets.

Guest List

After travel, size is the hallmark of a destination wedding. Smaller guest lists reflect the economic reality of asking loved ones to foot the cost of traveling to far-off points on the map. Start with a list of those you truly can't be married without; second receptions held at home after you return are the perfect way to celebrate with other friends, neighbors, or distant relatives. Even with a small guest list, the inevitable downside is that some guests are likely to decline your invitation due to costs. It's not rude to offer to pay their airfare, but plan ahead: consider who or how many you can offer to help or your offer could snowball quickly.

Some couples skirt the issue altogether by budgeting to take care of accommodations for all guests, and in some cases, all airfare. This isn't an option for most couples, though, so if you find you can't bear the thought of getting married without your 250 nearest and dearest, then a destination wedding, no matter how appealing, might not be the answer.

Invitations

Once you have the core guest list prepared, it's time to get the word out. Save the Dates are a must for destination weddings, and should go out the moment you have your date and venue decided. They provide enough information for guests to begin to plan their travel and arrange time off from work. This doesn't mean you should send invitations a year in advance- send them about eight to twelve weeks before the wedding to help build anticipation.

Communication

Share travel information on your wedding website and by word of mouth as soon as you know key logistical pieces, and then again on a traditional invitation insert. Guests should know about local airports, ground transportation, and accommodation information. Inform them about expected attire and any important local customs, too. Sharing a loose event schedule is a good idea so guests know how to plan their downtime.

Wedding Party

When inviting friends and family to be attendants at a destination wedding, couples need to make it clear at the time what they will cover and what attendants should budget for. "We're getting married in Hawaii! If you can get yourself there, we'll cover the rental for the villas where everyone will stay. We hope you can have a little vacation at the same time." While the bride and groom are traditionally responsible for the wedding-party accommodations but not airfare, footing the travel bill (if possible) should up the chances that a potential attendant will be able to say "Aloha!" to your request.

Additional Events

Once you've touched down, there is no set formula for hosting extra events at a destination wedding. However, it would seem odd to fly your closest friends and family halfway around the world to an intimate ceremony and then see them only for "I dos," a slice of cake, and a song or two. A welcome party should be first on your list. Rehearsal dinners at home can be kept to close family and the wedding party, but the intimacy of a destination wedding lends itself nicely to including all guests. Provide detailed information on what guests can do or explore on their own- there's likely to be an onsite wedding coordinator to assist with this and many other planning aspects. In fact, this is one of the many reasons why destination weddings have become so popular.

Honeymoon

If couples are planning to honeymoon at the same venue, the question of whether they should continue to host remaining guests after the wedding could become awkward. There's no way you can instruct the guests, who may be making a vacation out of the expense of attending, to pack up and head home on the next flight after the ceremony. While you're not expected to entertain wedding guests after the big day, be prepared to bump into them while lounging at the pool or sipping daiquiris as the sun goes down. For the private couple, it's best to plan to slip away to another venue. After all, it can truly be said that you have the world at your feet.

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