

In this age of technology - with so much information literally at your finger tips--it's no surprise that more and more brides and grooms like you are going online to start their wedding planning process. This is great--especially if you live far from where you're getting married. But no matter how thoroughly you investigate details or options online, there's still no substitute for real-world footwork.



Photoshop and a fancy website can make anything look and sound amazing--but after seeing a venue in person, you'll know for sure whether it's the right choice. You'll also have a better understanding of any logistical challenges--or fun opportunities--your chosen site might present. Talking with the caterers is great--but why not have them cook for you, too? From florists to cake makers to photographers--the best way to ensure that you're working with true professionals that "get you" is to sit down and meet with them the old-fashioned way--face-to-face. And let's not forget to mention that it's actually fun to get away with your fiancé for a weekend--enjoying great food, exploring great places, and reconnecting. Here, some tips from the wedding pros on planning a productive wedding field trip:

Plan it out

Besides meeting with wedding professionals, leave yourself time to shop, eat, and check out the places and activities that might appeal to your guests. If you don't have the luxury of a long weekend, streamline your schedule by setting up meetings at your hotel or bed-and-breakfast and have the professionals come to you.

Network

The best wedding professionals will know one another. If you've found a top-notch caterer, ask them about floral designers or cake bakers that they would recommend. Don't rely on a single opinion, though; seek a variety of input to avoid getting caught up in the "insider trading" of people who work with only one or two other pros. If four or five people tell you that a florist is

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great, by all means give them a call!

Check it twice

Always make a list when meeting with professionals--of the colors you like when looking at flowers, the foods you enjoy at your menu-planning, or the number of steps it will take to get from the chuppah to the reception area across the hayfield.

Taste the Cake

While a baker may exhibit breath-taking artistry in what she puts on the cake's outside, what's underneath may turn out to be less than mouth-watering. Even if there is a charge for a cake tasting, it's well worth it. "With a wedding cake, there's much more than meets the eye," says Irene Maston of Irene's Cakes by Design. Or at least there should be.

Meet your photographer

Even if you've fallen in love with a photographer's style, make sure you also like the actual photographer. You'll be spending a lot of time together on your wedding day, after all! Also, go over the list of shots you definitely want--your grandparents together, your dog--to help your photographer work efficiently on your big day.

Cater to your guests

Remember that a wedding is also a family reunion. Tell your caterer if they need to accommodate any special diets--do you have a vegetarian sister, a kosher aunt, or a cousin with nut allergies? Also make sure to discuss any special equipment rentals your caterer may need to prepare food at your site, suggests Elizabeth Harris Warner of Elizabethan Fare.

Smell the roses

Before your visit, ask florists to create a "menu" showing what flowers are in season (in your chosen colors) and which aren't. This will help you plan your floral budget. For your meeting, ask them to mock up a couple of designs using the flowers and palette you've suggested. "Some flowers are prettier on paper than they are in person," says Alison Ellis, of Floral Artistry. "Also, you want to make sure that their scent is what you want for the tables and your bouquet." Walk the line. Prior to visiting your reception location, let your host know what's most important to you--"the food is what matters to me--I want my guests to have an exceptional meal," or "the entertainment has to be great--our family loves to dance." This will help your host to personalize the site tour.

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