

Planning your Destination Wedding

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Don't lose your mind or money while planning your destination wedding. If you are the do-it-yourself type who's ready to take on the challenge of coordinating your destination wedding, here are some tips that will preserve your sanity and conserve money through this planning process.

1. Be assertive.

If you want to keep your sanity, you need to find your confidence, trust your gut, and assert your desires without apology. Believe in your vision and your organizing abilities. Some of us are so afraid of confrontation that we compromise and apologize even when we are right. Your wedding is not the time to relinquish authority. Note: this is not saying you can't be flexible, I'm saying you have to feel confident and approve every decision.

2. Have fewer chefs in the kitchen.

For elaborate events, we advise hiring a wedding planner. A growing trend is to hire a "day-of" wedding planner. This person will play bad cop, and you can spend your day smiling and waving with all five fingers. Even if this isn't your first rodeo, raging hormones and constant critics can easily wear you down.

Reveal details on a need-to-know basis. No, you don't need anyone's approval but your partner's before making decisions. Even at million-dollar weddings, people still find things to lament about. Save your sanity, don't hang with Negative Nancy or waste time defending choices to non-factors.

3. Email marriage announcements before wedding invitations.

While 30% invitees won't attend, with 800 collective contacts, you could easily have a 500+ person ceremony. People want to be invited and advised so that they can say "they in things dem." Don't go broke for these people. Weddings are great occasions to reunite with friends and family. However, it's not required to invite everyone you ever knew.

Emailed wedding announcements are great for letting loved ones know they're "in things dem" without actually inviting them and saving mad money. Note: Do not send out invitations assuming people won't travel. The last thing you need is to be forced to share your day with an irritating relative or acquaintance.

4. Choose a destination that is affordable and unattainable.

These are not mutually exclusive. Once you make announcements, everybody and their momma will want to attend. Worse, some will have you make concessions for them and still not show. Prioritize your guest list.

Settle on a location and date that will fit your 10 "must-attend" people and announce your group travel ideas to them roughly one year in advance. Presenting a concrete proposal with a modest budget will encourage them to be serious about saving. At most, send monthly reminders. This plan is genius because you don't have to reveal the true reason for the trip.

5. Be local.

The "local discount" is a Caribbean public secret. Tourist attractions are often discounted for those part of the "I born here" club. If you're going abroad, you want someone local to give you the real deal. Don't believe everything on the fancy tourist websites.

Online expat communities such as The Black Expat (www.blackexpat.com) and Nomadness Travel Tribe (www.nomadnesstv.com) are great for finding real insights on your destination city. Expats are foreigners

turned locals who are passionate about travel and live to share great tips. Note: As a customer, you have the right to REQUEST special treatment. Business owners are not required to grant it.

6. Create a balanced schedule.

Traveling is a luxury. Ticket prices and limited paid vacation days mean guests will want to get as much bang for their buck. Be a hero and create a schedule that celebrates your love while giving space for your guests to do their thing.

Upon receiving RSVPs, ask your must-attend guests what two activities are on their wish list. Then decide on activities that will please multiple people. Remember, the group schedule does not have to accommodate everyone. These are simply activities you are willing to do with them. Guests can opt to extend their stay so they can do their thing. Even if you are still in the same city, you are not obligated to spend those extra days with them.

6. Pack smart.

We already know how island people get when you mention traveling. Stop the madness before it starts and give strong packing recommendations. Advise your family to pack light and dress weather appropriate. They can buy and share family-sized toiletries at the destination. They should provide cash versus a physical gift or mail gift to your address.

Lastly, everyone should pack a capsule wardrobe. A capsule wardrobe is a collection of a few essential items of clothing that don't go out of fashion and are easy to mix and match. Let them know when wardrobe changes will happen and have them wear an item more than once.

7. Be an airfare whisperer.

If you're saving money elsewhere, this may not be the place to skimp. Always search tickets in incognito mode (in private browsing) and clear your cookies regularly. Better prices may be found late night to early morning (9:00pm-5:00am). Have a friend in a different country search and buy tickets. Read the booking fine print. Note: Use proper discretion when disclosing banking information and loaning your friends money.

8. Consider alternative accommodations.

Resist the natural inclination to book hotels. The rooms are relatively small, check-in time doesn't always fit the schedule, and you must be mindful of how loud your party becomes. Renting a home or luxury villa offers the opportunity for everyone to have more face time, be loud, and you can cook versus go out to restaurants.

You can find these using websites like Airbnb or tapping into the expat community. Booking a guesthouse is also great. Depending on the size, you may get a discount for booking the entire house, and you'll receive some amenities like complimentary breakfast and laundry.

9. Negotiate.

Sometimes, informing the hotel or airline that you are getting married will result in complimentary upgrades but most times, vendors up their price for a wedding. Yes, people should be paid for their work, but you're also a simple person with modest requests.

Things to be honest about: your budget, event size and your vision. Things not to disclose: that you're having a wedding. Reserving seating for a 20-person birthday celebration may be cheaper than reserving a 10-person wedding. Note: cake-cutting fees may be unavoidable. Also, be generous when tipping. No, 15% is not generous.

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