

Destination Wediquette

Faraway affairs are often less formal than homegrown vows. Still, when it comes to matters like money, bridal gifts and invitations, a few rules apply. Here are some tips to help guide you through the list of dos and don'ts.

Guest List

With an affair far away from home, you needn't feel compelled to invite your third cousins twice removed. Just remember that in between the cost of airfare and accommodations and getting time off from work and school, not everyone on your list will be able to join you.

Typically, about 70 percent of the people invited to a destination event show up, according to Claudia Cantillo, Wedding Coordinator at Dreams Cancun Resort & Spa on Mexico's Riviera Maya. Still, Cantillo notes, "Couples should never count on guests not accepting their invitation." If you select a particularly fantastic locale, don't be surprised if a majority of friends and family make the trip.

What about those who can't go? Throw a party once back home. This kind of "reception" can be large or small, formal or informal, and gives you and your new spouse a chance to celebrate with all of your nearest and dearest. "Plan the decor around your destination," suggests Joann Delgin, Director of Wedding Strategy with Sandals resorts. "And be sure to have wedding photos or even the DVD on hand to share with those who couldn't attend." Generally, gifts are not expected at this type of party, but well-wishers will probably bring something anyway.

Save the Date

Preferably, "save-the-date" cards for a faraway event should go out six months to a year in advance so that friends and family can work the trip into their budget and work schedule. This way you'll also have an idea early on of how many people will be able to attend. While electronic cards such as E-vites are growing in popularity, Delgin recommends sending both the save-the-date cards and wedding invitations formally via airmail. "E-vites are fun and creative for casual occasions, but your wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime event."

As the big day approaches, create a simple



website to keep invitees informed of travel and accommodation options along with price ranges, transportation details, activities and any other information that may simplify the process. "Keep the information current, and email guests each time you make significant changes," recommends Cantillo.

Money Manners

Getaway nuptials generally call on invitees to pay their own airfare and lodging, while you pick up the tab for food and beverages. Nonetheless, you should still price tickets and rooms for your guests. "Call a few airlines and negotiate a group fare," says Kelly McLeskey, Catering Director at

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For your special event, you decide the level of intimacy and invite accordingly.

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California's Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa. She also suggests contacting the hotel you're staying at to find out about group discounts on accommodations.

Be sure to book your reservations early as group rates typically are based on availability. If money is truly a concern for your attendees, let them know their presence is the only wedding gift you need and make yourself available to assist in any way possible. Besides getting them discounted accommodations, perhaps you can also help them pair up on rooms. And, as Delgin suggests, consider tying the knot at an all-inclusive resort, where the rate includes all the food, beverages and most activities.

Wedding Gifts

As with any nuptial, avoid the mention of gifts on the wedding invitation. In fact, you should

appear completely unconcerned with gifts once you've arranged the registry. A family member or member of the wedding party will inform guests where you are registered and let invitees know to either send the presents to your home or to only bring gifts of money or gift certificates to the destination. "No one wants to lug that vintage toaster across the country—twice," says Delgin.

Some resorts and hotels allow couples to register their honeymoon online, a process that works just like a gift registry, says Cantillo. "Your friends and family can purchase parts of your honeymoon experience as a wedding present."

Bridal Shower

With traditional nuptials, inviting guests to the shower and not to the wedding is improper protocol. But since so many bridal couples elope or opt for a private affair at a small venue, modern etiquette suggests destination events can

be an exception to this rule. To avoid offending anybody, make sure your maid of honor or a family member informs shower guests that your wedding is an intimate event and—if you throw a party once back home—that you and your spouse will see everyone at the reception. Wedding gifts are optional and should never be expected. Still, since bridal showers were created to "shower" the bride with gifts, guests attending your gathering will most likely bring a present.

Rehearsal Dinner

"Typically, the rehearsal dinner is for the bridal party, immediate family and out-of-town guests," Delgin says. "But since everyone has traveled to be a part of your destination wedding, it's a good idea to include the whole gang." This type of celebration can

be as formal as a sit-down soiree or as laid-back as a beach barbecue, the expert notes.

If you're watching your budget, one idea is to invite your close family and the wedding party to the dinner, and then ask everyone else to join you for toasts and dessert, says McLeskey. "It's a great way to include everyone without spending a fortune."

Dress Code

The first thing to consider is the environment. Are you tying the knot outdoors in a beachside setting, atop a hillside, or inside an elegant hotel ballroom? If you're heading to an island, go for natural, lightweight fabrics like silk chiffon, silk organza and satin crepes rather than a big ball gown. Look for dresses that drape your body rather than cling to it, especially in a tropical climate. A shorter dress works well in an outdoor environment where you might get a longer outfit dirty. And skip the veil if it's going to be extra breezy.

For the groom, a white dinner jacket or light, breathable fabrics like linen and poplin are great alternatives to a formal tux. Just make sure you two wear outfits that mix well together.

Because your wedding guests may have to travel to a place they have not visited before, it's wise to state the dress code on the invitation. Depending



Mexico's Sea of Cortez provides a dreamy backdrop for wedding celebrations at Casa del Mar Beach Golf & Spa Resort.

Since many invitees may stay at the destination for some time, offer tips on activities they can enjoy in and around the area and introduce them to other guests who're sticking around.

on your preference and the location, this can be anything from “cocktail attire” and “dressy casual” to “resort wear” or “evening resort attire.” Bottom line, says McLeskey, “You don’t want your guests to feel overdressed or under dressed.”

Nuptial Favors

There are many ways to welcome guests and show you appreciate their attendance. If the whole wedding party stays in one place, prepare a small treat and leave it at the front desk so that people receive the gifts when they check in. “This can be a welcome basket or tote bag filled with local maps, native snacks and an itinerary of events,” Delgin says, adding, “A beach or tote

bag makes for a great keepsake and remembrance of this special time.”

An alternative to creating and shipping dozens of packages is to give attendees a gift certificate to the hotel spa or a nearby restaurant. Or put together a mini-guide to the area to keep your invitees entertained. For instance, if you’re marrying in wine country, provide a bottle of locally made wine along with a map for guests to orchestrate their own winery tour.

Quality Time

One of the great things about a destination wedding is that you get to spend quality time with family and friends for a few days. But just

because your loved ones came all the way to a far-flung locale doesn’t mean you have to spend every minute with them, particularly not after the big day. Declining invitations to socialize with your guests following the “I dos” is neither inappropriate or against tradition.

Nonetheless, since many invitees may stay at the destination for some time, offer tips on activities they can enjoy in and around the area and introduce them to other guests who are sticking around. You can even send your invitees a questionnaire beforehand to determine special interests and construct a fun itinerary based on the resort activities, Cantillo suggests. Still, says Delgin, “No one is expecting you to plan 24 hours of activity each day to entertain them.”

If the two of you still feel guilty taking time for yourselves after the wedding, arrive a few days ahead of your wedding party, or simply look at your trip as an opportunity to enjoy the company of your loved ones in a wonderful vacation spot. After all, you and your new spouse have your entire lives to spend in each other’s arms.