

DESTINATION BRIDES

GO GREEN

Help preserve the planet without surrendering flavor or flair. BY TAMARA COLLINS





Getty Images

Opt for local, organically grown blooms to avoid use of harmful pesticides and to reduce impact and cost of transportation.

Eco-conscious brides and grooms need not set aside their convictions to have the destination wedding of their dreams. With a little planning and creativity, a far-flung event with a small gathering of family and friends can be nearly as green as a ceremony in their own backyard.

With any wedding—local or destination—travel, energy consumption and waste have an environmental impact that lasts far longer than the event itself. “The typical U.S. wedding and honeymoon generate 9 to 16 tons of carbon dioxide emissions,” says Jennifer Hattam, the green lifestyle editor for *Sierra* magazine, “almost as much as the average American generates in an entire year.” Tying the knot far from home creates even more obstacles when striving to go green, adds Tara Soloway, cofounder and head coordinator for LUXE Destination Weddings, a consulting firm and travel agency. “Destination weddings require excess travel, so there is definitely a concern about how we are placing our footprints in the sand.”

Soloway and other event coordinators suggest compensating for those flights through the purchase of carbon offsets—a donation to companies that invest in renewable energy. You can calculate the greenhouse gas emissions of your wedding event at sites like NativeEnergy.com/Portovert and TerraPass.com and then purchase the offsets that will ensure a carbon neutral experience.

These calculators also add up the impact of your hotel stay, which puts out about 30 pounds of greenhouse gases per night. You and your guests can pay for these offsets, or let Leading Hotels of the World make a donation for you. When travelers book a reservation through their website, lhwgreen.com, the company makes the visit carbon neutral by purchasing offsets on their guests’ behalf.

Which resort you chose makes a statement as well. Properties that practice green initiatives like recycling, composting and water conservation are doing their part to lighten the impact. Some resorts even have solar panels that minimize energy consumption, use reclaimed water for irrigation and include eco-sensitive materials in their buildings and decor. Visit the Green Hotels Association website (greenhotels.com) for a list of conscientious resorts and hotels.

NATURE’S OWN

A flower-filled garden or romantic beach at the chosen destination is the picture-perfect, eco-friendly setting for an alfresco wedding to remember. When San Franciscans Lindsay Imai and Cliff Hong chose a park for their nuptials, they didn’t know how “green” they were. “We weren’t conscious of the energy savings of picking a park,” says Imai, “but we love nature so it was the ideal place for



A daytime ceremony and reception in a natural setting can reduce the carbon dioxide output of your event with up to 2,000 pounds.

ECO ELEMENTS

But there's no need to sacrifice elegance and sophistication for environmental sensitivity. "Green weddings push designers to think outside of the box," says Eden Roderiguez, whose event planning company, End Design, produced Alicia Silverstone's uber-green ceremony in 2001. "It challenges us to get more creative, and in the end, clients get a uniquely beautiful experience that reflects their own sensibilities." During a recent destination wedding in Sweden, Roderiguez shopped at local vintage stores for vases and collected cuttings from neighborhood gardens (after asking permission, of course) to give the wedding a sense of place. "There's so much beauty in simple things," she notes. "Just look around you. What's local, what's free? Pinecones, shells and stones are all natural elements that you can incorporate into the event." And what's more elegant than candlelight? Soy-based candles are a clean-burning, energy-saving light source that can be reused at different functions throughout the celebration.

Long before the ceremony, brides can make eco-conscious choices when buying their dress, invitations and rings. Gowns made

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us." Daytime ceremonies and receptions in a natural setting versus an energy-consuming reception hall can eliminate up to 2,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from your event's total output. And relying on the charm of the surroundings cuts down on waste produced by extravagant decorations.

No wedding would be complete without flowers, but their impact on the environment can be extensive. "Flower production is chemically intensive," notes Marc Kessler, owner of California Organic Flowers. "Just about every aspect of conventional flower growing is detrimental to the environment and to the workers who grow them." Kessler suggests that you source out local, organically grown blooms to be assured that no residual chemicals linger on the petals and that the fuel consumed to bring them to your wedding was minimal. You can also repurpose the bouquets for the ceremony, reception and dinner parties to minimize the waste.

The food served should be considered just as carefully. Local, organic fare is fresher and better for you and the environment. "Produce picked that morning is more delicious because it has a higher sugar content," says Jenn Louis, owner and chef of Culinary Artistry, a sustainable catering company in Oregon. Ask your caterer if leftover food will be donated to local shelters and whether tablecloths, dishes and flatware are reusable, suggests Louis. "Composting and recycling are other important steps to minimize waste."

from natural fibers at fair trade factories are a good option, as is buying from a shop that gives part of the proceeds to charity. Green alternatives for invitations include recycled paper or cotton, while using a website to announce day-of details eliminates paper waste entirely. For the rings, conflict-free diamonds and recycled metals show your commitment to each other and social responsibility. Lindsay Imai's fiancé bought his ring from Green Karat, an online jeweler that recycles metals, and her rings were handed down. "They both belonged to my paternal grandmother," she says.

Even your registry presents an opportunity to invest in a healthy planet. "Say you register for organic sheets or energy efficient appliances—you're giving back to yourself and the environment," notes Meghan Meyers of Portovert, an online magazine promoting green weddings. And charitable giving is just a click away when you register at sites like WeddingChannel.com and IDoFoundation.org, which donate a portion of their sales to your charity of choice. "With 2.5 million people marrying each year, that's a significant amount of money going to charity," Meyers adds.

While your wedding is a special day that celebrates your love for one another, it also offers an opportunity to embrace the world around you. In the process, it may raise the eco-awareness of your guests, the caterer, florist and even the resort to the simple beauty and elegance of living green.