



Stewart Pinsky

Love on Location

With an eclectic collection of wedding destinations at hand, why wait until your honeymoon to begin the journey of a lifetime. *By Isabelle Gullö*

Imagine exchanging vows on a silky soft beach, on the hillside of a wine country resort or in the grand ballroom of your favorite city hotel surrounded by a circle of family and friends. An increasing number of bridal couples trade the traditional church affair for a getaway wedding. And it makes sense. Besides the thrill of celebrating this milestone at an exciting locale, arranging a destination wedding can save time and money, whether it's just the two of you saying "I do" on secluded Caribbean sands or a gathering of 100 friends and family members at a cozy country resort. Better yet, with professional coordinators on location to handle tiresome details, couples can relax and focus on each other as their "weddingmoon" approaches. So go ahead, fantasize about a tropical island escape, luxurious mountain retreat or cosmopolitan hideaway. We'll give you plenty of reasons to wed away, along with tips on how best to plan your own dream event.

Stress Less

The idea of spending the days before the wedding unwinding on a deserted beach or gliding down powdery ski slopes rather than fretting over last-minute preparations inspires many brides and grooms to opt for an alternative to homegrown vows. And while it may seem difficult to plan this kind of event from afar, getaway weddings usually require less work than conventional affairs. Many properties have on-staff wedding coordinators or catering teams that take care of most—if not all—of the arrangements, from the decor and dinner menu to activities and guest accommodations.

Having someone at the wedding location to handle the essentials can spare you a lot of stress. If a property does not have its own coordinator, ask the concierge to recommend a local wedding planner along with a list of professional vendors in the area. Once you've found the ideal person, be sure to discuss your specific wedding style,

your goals and desires for the big event as well as your budget.

For a completely worry-free experience, look for a hotel or resort that provides full wedding packages, including an expert planner, marriage license, officiant, flower designs, photography, champagne, dinner and wedding cake.

Ultimately, you decide what's important on your special day. For example, a destination ceremony and reception can be simple or extravagant; your guest list can be trimmed to include just your immediate family; formal suits may be traded for tropical shirts and sarongs. With a getaway wedding, it's easy to do things your way.

Quality Time

The average wedding lasts about four hours, which doesn't leave couples much time to spend with their guests, many of whom may have flown in from across the country to help celebrate the big bash. Since many attendees have to travel anyway, a fabulous locale allows the event to become a vacation or family reunion, where you and your nearest and dearest can enjoy each other's company, snorkeling, horseback riding, shopping or exploring local attractions together. Need time alone with your sweetie? Arrive a few days ahead of your wedding party or plan fun daylong activities to occupy your loved ones while you sneak away to hike waterfalls or dine at a gourmet restaurant.

What Cost Love

It may come as a surprise, but even after you add up the airfare, reception and accommodations, a luxurious wedding weekend at a fabulous destination often costs less than a formal to-do at the hometown country club. For starters, your guest list is typically whittled down—traditional nuptials average 164 attendees compared to 53 guests for destination “I do's.”

Many resorts and hotels offer all-inclusive bridal deals, comprehensive packages that generally cover all means, drinks and activities under one flat rate. Some places even promise a free honeymoon as well as kickbacks on guest accommodations if the couple brings in a certain number of people for their event.

Having a destination wedding not only means your romantic getaway begins even before the actual ceremony, but you avoid footing the bill for a grand reception and honeymoon. As a bonus, many honeymoon packages are surprisingly affordable and may include such special touches as accommodation upgrades, complimentary champagne, en-suite massage and private dinners.

Another idea is to follow an elopement or small wedding away with a formal celebration back home. With the help of wedding webcams provided by some resorts, family and friends get to enjoy





the ceremony live from afar. Keep in mind, you decide the level of intimacy for your special occasion and invite accordingly.

Bridal Etiquette

Proper protocol of a getaway wedding calls on invitees to pay their own airfare and lodging, while you'll pick up the tab for food and beverages. Nonetheless, you should still price tickets and rooms for your guests. If money is 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. Perhaps you can get them a discount on accommodations or help them pair up on rooms.

Wedding Favors

There are many ways to welcome your 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. 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. With an intimate wedding party, greet guests at the airport, especially if you're familiar with the location and they are not. If you've got your hands full, ask your maid of honor or best man to help, or consult the concierge about airport transfers.

Save the Date

Give friends and family fair warning, preferably six months to a year in advance, so they can work the trip into their budget and work schedule. As the big day approaches, create a simple website to keep guests informed of travel and accommodation options and price ranges, transportation details, activities, restaurant suggestions and any other information that may simplify the process.

With so many resources available at today's upscale resorts and hotels, including expert wedding coordinators, dedicated concierge teams and informative websites, arranging your getaway event should be a breeze. The toughest part may well be to select your favorite out of the nearly 100 outstanding locations presented in our Elite Wedding Collection. Enjoy the planning process and remember the famous quote from Walt Disney, the man who knows how to bring fantasies to life, "If you can dream it, you can do it."