



Picture Perfect

Top wedding photographers focus in on destination nuptials.

BY KIM CARMEL

You've chosen one of the most beautiful places on earth to begin your new life together. Whether sand and surf, breathtaking mountain views or a sophisticated cityscape, your wedding backdrop will surely be nothing short of spectacular. As the two of you savor each moment, you count on your photographer to capture the natural splendor and emotion of your big day. How do you ensure a successful shoot? We asked top wedding destination photographers to share their tried and true formulas.

First of all, while it may be tempting to opt for one of the great "deals" offered by many photographers—some more qualified than others—good images are worth the investment, ensures Santa Barbara, California-based shooter Debbie Adams. "Photography has become the number one hobby in the world, and with user-friendly digital technology, anyone can buy a camera, create a website and 'be' a photographer," she notes. Nonetheless, she says, "Experience in photographing weddings and integrity in business are two qualities

that should not be overlooked when selecting the person responsible for documenting your wedding day."

True, photography is typically one of the most expensive items on the wedding checklist—today's couples spend an average of \$2,570 on photography and videography, a recent Fairchild Bridal Group survey reports. For destination weddings, think even higher. "But what's the point of receiving a lot of inexpensive photos if none of them are good?" asks Adams. "A wedding day is a day like no other, and an experienced professional can handle all of the emotion, excitement and surprises without missing a moment." In the end, you won't regret (or even remember) the money you spent, but you will enjoy reliving the experience as you flip through the pages of your wedding album.

Once you've settled on a photography budget, start searching for the right person by asking family and friends for recommendations, especially if you know someone who recently had a destination event. Wedding expos offer a chance to meet

several photographers and review portfolios at the same time, while advertisements in reputable wedding magazines can also help guide your search. Your resort may endorse its own photographer—be sure to review his or her portfolio before making your decision, and don't be shy about bringing your own photographer with you.

The best destination photographers have traveled the world and are quite familiar with the visas, permits and other details needed to work abroad. As longtime bridal photographer Glen Johnson of Portland, Oregon, advises, "The travel is actually the most difficult part of the whole job, and someone new to it can easily get stuck somewhere and miss the whole event." The pros typically include travel and lodging costs in their fees, although some will pay their own airfare if enticed with the opportunity to visit a remote or uncommon destination.

Personality also counts when choosing a photographer, says veteran cameraman Gary Oakley of Boulder, Colorado. "Wedding photography is an art. It takes a special person to be good at this job; someone who not only knows photography, but who is spontaneous, creative, calm in the face of a storm and good with people." While you expect your photographer to blend into the background, he or she (and any assistants) will be there during your most stressful and intimate moments. Your reaction to them will show in your photos, so pick someone who makes you feel

comfortable and unreserved. And because the photographer and team will also interact with your extended family and friends, you want someone who will be polite with your grandmother and forceful enough to rally the troops for a group shot. Your interviews with photographers should give you an idea of their people skills. Are they friendly? Responsive to phone calls and e-mails? Do they seem organized? Ask for references and speak with previous clients to round out your overall impression, suggests Oakley.

Once you have a few leads, take time looking at portfolios and arranging interviews. Most photographers post their photos online, although it's good to see prints and albums as well. Look at three or more complete weddings for each applicant, recommends Adams, and particularly those shot at your wedding site, if possible. During the interview, ask the photographer how he or she typically approaches a new event. Discuss your vision for the photos and develop an ideal timeline for the wedding day. (See the sidebar below for a list of important questions to ask.)

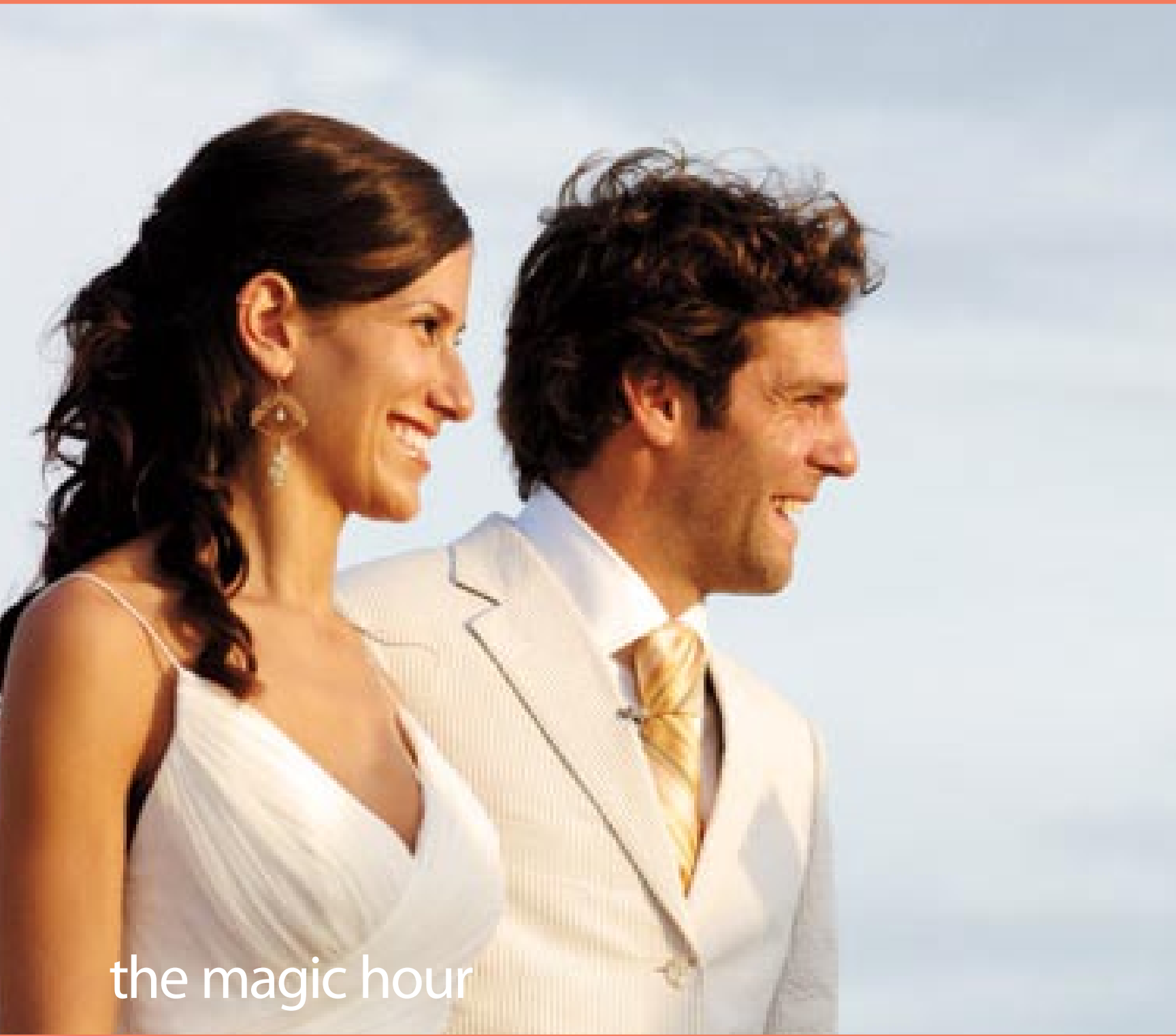
Last but not least, request a detailed price quote from the photographer, including any travel costs. It may seem overly formal, but be sure he or she also gives you a signed, official contract addressing all the points you covered.

Keep reading for more tips from pro photographers on how to take fabulous photos on your big day.



IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK THE PHOTOGRAPHER

- Will you be the photographer actually shooting our event?
- Is ours the only wedding you're shooting that day?
- Do you bring assistants along?
- Have you ever shot a wedding at our particular venue or location?
- Would you describe your style as traditional, photojournalistic or both? Can we choose either or both of these approaches?
- Do you shoot digitally or with film? Will we have the option to print in black and white as well as color?
- Do you charge extra for color correction and touch-up services?
- Will you create an album for us?
- Do you offer unlimited coverage of the entire event or charge by the hour? Can we hire you for additional hours before or after the event if needed?
- Are all of your travel expenses listed in your package price? Will you be able to shoot the bride and groom in their pre-wedding preparation areas?
- What is your typical dress code?
- Will we receive the film or a DVD of digital images following the event?
- Can we make our own prints, or do we have to order through you? Will our photos be available online?
- Are you willing to create a custom package based on our budget and preferences?



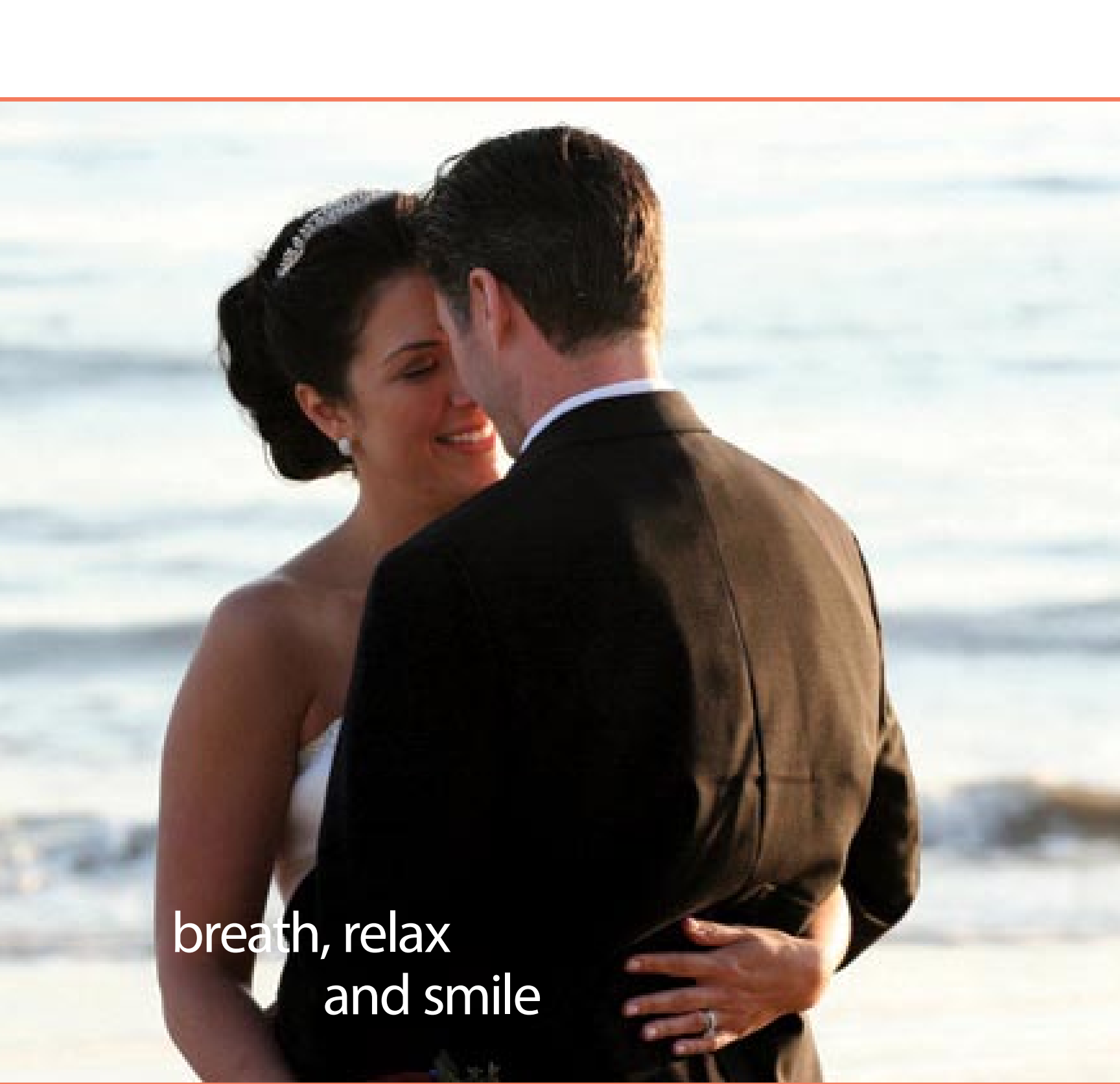
the magic hour

“The light is perfect an hour or two before sunset. Avoid the 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. timeframe if you’re planning an outdoor ceremony—that’s when sunlight is the most harsh and unflattering. Try not to plan your ceremony too close to sunset if you intend to do photos afterwards. If you do have your heart set on a sunset ceremony, consider doing portraits beforehand.” —Karin von Voigtlander, kvphotography.com



get comfortable

"This might sound funny, but the best way to feel more comfortable in front of a camera is to photograph yourself before the big day. Grab a camera and a good friend, and go shoot for an hour. Then come home and review the pictures. When it's time for your wedding day photos, you will know how you look best. Above all, be natural and have fun—it will show." —Stewart Pinsky, mauiweddinggallery.com

A bride and groom are shown in a close embrace on a beach. The bride is on the left, wearing a white strapless wedding dress and a tiara, with her eyes closed and a smile. The groom is on the right, wearing a dark suit, with his back to the camera. The background is a soft-focus view of the ocean and a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text "breath, relax and smile" is overlaid in white on the lower part of the image.

breath, relax
and smile

"Take a deep breath, relax and smile. Try to enjoy the experience of having your picture taken and capturing the day with family and friends. Be sure not to overindulge on alcohol the night before, as day-after results may not be so picture-perfect. And if you hire a hair and makeup artist, allow plenty of time for the process, including getting dressed. It always takes longer than you think." —Debbie Adams, dlaphoto.com