



your
guide
to getting
married
away

BY CHRISTA VAGNOZZI

The destination wedding trend is definitely not cooling off. With nearly one in ten weddings being held away from home, the industry is taking notice. Resorts are creating exclusive wedding packages and dress designers are thinking in terms of short and packable. We've put together a helpful primer to navigate the destination wedding planning process. We also talked to three amazing couples that went above and beyond to make their destination weddings a smashing success—from the welcome party to the postwedding brunch. So before you book those plane tickets, read on for some insider advice.

WHERE TO WED? } Where are couples getting married if they are not staying close to home? The most popular destinations are Hawaii, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Europe. And more and more guests are coming along for the ride.

Destination weddings can include as few as 10 or more than 100 guests. So it pays to start researching and scouting out locations early if you want to reserve the best accommodations available.

Maybe you already have your destination in mind—Heidi Messer and Tad Martin decided to have their wedding in France (see page 423) because, believe it or not, their first date was there. Erica Pratt and Charles (“Chazzie”) Stone chose to wed in The Bahamas (see page 421) because it was where they went on their first vacation together. If you don't have the faintest idea where to begin, start by thinking about your budget and what style of wedding you want to have: If an intimate countryside celebration suits your taste and your budget can handle the cost, consider a villa on the Amalfi Coast. Always dreamed of saying “I do” at sunset with the sand beneath your toes? Think about an island or beach location.

WHO CAN HELP? }

Working with an event planner that specializes in destination weddings either stateside or in your locale of choice is the easiest way to make sure you get what you want. What's more, if your wedding takes place in a foreign country, a destination-specific wedding planner can bridge any language gaps between you and your vendors. You can either hire an independent planner, or ask your resort if they have an on-site consultant. If they have other in-house vendors, take advantage of them. Many resorts have on-staff pastry chefs, floral designers, and executive chefs—Azul Blue Hotel + Spa in the Riviera Maya even has an in-house justice of the peace. But if you want to truly personalize your day, feel free to BYOV (bring your own vendors). Erica and Chazzie flew in their officiant to perform their ceremony in The Bahamas; Amy Morrison and Mark Rabe brought along their favorite band from Santa Barbara for their prewedding barbecue in Los Cabos (see page 422); and while Heidi and Tad flew out their own photographer.

WHAT ABOUT GUESTS? }

This may be your wedding day, but you need to give your guests the five-star treatment. Welcome baskets are a great way to show your appreciation right from the get-go. They don't have to be superdeluxe—a simple white bag stashed with a few snacks and a couple bottles of water will do the trick. Or, you can do canvas beach bags for an island wedding packed with sunscreen, flip-flops, bottled water, a good book, and something indigenous to the region, like juicy oranges for a Florida wedding. Most important, you'll want to make sure your guests have all the pertinent information, so don't forget to include wedding weekend

before you set a date

1

Research the legalities of getting married at your destination. Do you need to establish residency first? Make sure you find out what it takes to get a marriage license.

2

Check with hotels and airlines for group rates. This will help make the trip easier on your guests' wallets. Once you have group rates, let guests know immediately.

3

Research the town or city for annual festivals and conventions that may coincide with your date. These may create a lack of hotel space and hike up airfare.

4

Find out if your resort has an age minimum if you plan to have children at your wedding. Some resorts require that all guests be age 13 or older.

5

Seek out local activities in your destination. You'll want to give your guests plenty of options for exploring and sightseeing during any downtime.

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itineraries, a map of the area, and even a list of local restaurants, shops, and watering holes so they can get around with ease.

More helpful guest tips: Send out save-the-dates and follow up with information packets that include hotel and airfare rates, suggested activities, and wardrobe guidelines. Set up a wedding website so that guests have access to up-to-the-minute wedding information. Arrange for transportation to take guests from the hotel to ceremony and reception, and to local attractions and shopping centers as well. And take care of all dinners and—if it's within your budget—lunch. Because they are traveling a long distance, it's a gracious gesture to take care of the majority of meals (think welcome parties and postwedding brunches).

DON'T FORGET
Arrange a courier to transport wedding gifts home.

HOW LONG SHOULD IT LAST? For the ultimate in guest hospitality, pre- and postwedding parties will add to the excitement of your stay and serve as a way to break the ice. In addition to the postwedding day brunch, brides and grooms often throw welcome parties. These usually take place on the first night (say a Thursday for a Saturday wedding), and can be as casual as a “Margaritas and Mariachis” party as seen in Amy and Mark’s wedding, or as elaborate as Erica and Chazzie’s New Orleans-inspired fete, where all the guests wore white and a Junkanoo band led a traditional second line. And rehearsal dinners are not just for the bridal party and family anymore—couples are inviting their entire guest list to the event (save the actual rehearsal), while bridesmaid luncheons and groomsmen golf outings round out the list of activities.



Destination U.S.A.

Just because you want to have a destination wedding does not mean you have to leave the country. Of course there’s **Hawaii**, which offers gorgeous scenery and exotic flavor. But there’s no shortage of wedding-worthy destinations on the mainland. Consider New England: **Cape Cod**, **Martha’s Vineyard**, **Block Island**, **Bar Harbor**, and the **Berkshires** beckon couples with charming white clapboard churches, colorful foliage, and nautical attractions. Still on the East Coast yet farther south, there is always **Florida**. Whether it’s **Sanibel Island**, **St. Petersburg Beach**, or the **Keys**, you get the look and feel of the islands minus the need for a passport. Out west, both **Aspen** and **Vail** in Colorado boast picture-perfect backdrops wonderful for outdoorsy couples who love to ski or hike, or relish the idea of a cozy wedding at the foot of snow-capped mountains. While in California, you can take your pick from **Napa** and **Sonoma Valleys** in wine country, **Big Sur**, or **Coronado** right next to San Diego (touted as one of the country’s most romantic beaches). And let’s not forget **Las Vegas**. Not just for elopements anymore, Vegas’ posh hotels are pulling out all the stops, with stylish in-house chapels and luxurious spas ready to pamper and prepare you for a walk down the aisle.

Etiquette Q&A

As more and more couples decide to marry away from home, the etiquette and expectation tides are turning. Here are answers to the most asked questions.

Q How many people should we invite to our destination wedding?

A Even though it can be a drag to fly the friendly skies these days, it has not stopped many people from traveling. As opposed to a traditional wedding, destination affairs are instant vacations. Even if you set your expectations low, be prepared to see your guest list blossom. Heidi and Tad planned for 60 to 70 people to travel to Nice, France, for their day, and ended up celebrating with 110.

Q Do we have to pay for our guests’ airfare and accommodations?

A While it is certainly a nice gesture, a couple is no longer expected to pay for people to come to their wedding, especially if the guest list is expanding. That said, expect that some close friends and family members may not be able to share in your special day because of their own budgets.

Q Does a destination wedding cost more than a traditional wedding at home?

A The cost of your wedding is determined by a number of factors. Hotel accommodations and airfare, the size of your guest list, the style of gown you’ll wear, and the cost of your welcome party and postwedding brunch are just a few variables. If you’re marrying at a big resort, you may be able to secure a great deal for all the events and accommodations. But naturally, the more extras you add on, the higher the bill.

Q Will the bridal suite be comped if we host our wedding at the same hotel?

A This varies from resort to resort. Some locations might credit the room you stay in when you visit for a site inspection prior to the wedding, while others may have a reduced site-inspection rate. For best results, try to negotiate the bridal suite’s room rate in your wedding contract up front so there are no surprises when it’s time to pay the bill.

ERICA + CHAZZIE } the bahamas



THE LOCATION One & Only Ocean Club, Paradise Island

SAVE-THE-DATES A four-day weekend with a wedding on Saturday, June 25

OF GUESTS 110

THE PLANNING Erica and Chazzie hired wedding planner Mary-Frances Hurt of DFW Events in Dallas to handle all the logistics and planning decisions.

THE VENDORS The couple flew in their officiant and photographer, Stephen Karlisch, and used the resort’s suggestions for the florist and caterer.

THE GOWNS Erica wore two Monique Lhuillier gowns—one for the ceremony, and one for the reception—which she gently packed up and checked before jetting to her wedding site.

THURSDAY NIGHT WELCOME PARTY The couple requested that guests wear all white to the party, which took place in a lounge at the Ocean Club, complete with Junkanoo band.

FRIDAY WEDDING PARTY CELEBRATIONS A “Pretty in Pink” luncheon was thrown by the bride’s aunt, and the bridesmaid enjoyed a trip to the spa, while the guys spent time together on the links.

SATURDAY CEREMONY Erica and Chazzie were married on a deck overlooking the sea at the Ocean Club.

SATURDAY NIGHT RECEPTION The sit-down dinner in the Ocean Club’s garden was held beneath a large white tent decorated with lush green and white floral arrangements. The party extended onto the deck where the ceremony had been held. The night concluded with a surprise fireworks display.

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED It rained on the day of the welcome party, so instead of celebrating outside, everyone crowded inside one area of the resort for the festivities. This made for a fast ice-breaker. The very next day, guests who had just met were hitting the beach together!



reception fireworks



antique locket



ceremony



reception



rehearsal dinner

AMY + MARK } *mexico*



welcome party
ceremony



mariachi band



escort cards



reception



bridesmaid brunch



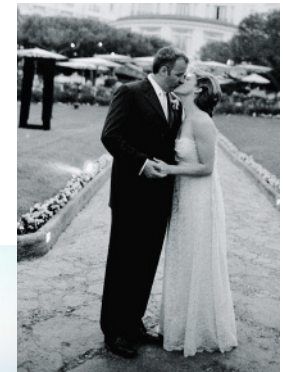
THE LOCATION One & Only Palmilla, Los Cabos
SAVE-THE-DATES A four-day weekend with the wedding on Saturday, June 17
OF GUESTS 115
THE PLANNING Amy planned the entire wedding on her own, and made many a weekend getaway with Mark to scout out vendors.
THE VENDORS The couple used local vendors, recommended by the Palmilla. A family member and Maine photographer, Brian Wedge, captured it on film.

THE GOWN Amy carried on the plane her trumpet-style Monique Lhuillier gown, with a white sash for the ceremony and an orange sash for the reception.
THURSDAY NIGHT WELCOME PARTY The theme was “Margaritas and Mariachis,” which included a full Mexican buffet served on the resort pool deck lit with tiki torches.
FRIDAY WEDDING PARTY CELEBRATIONS A bridesmaid brunch was held in the resort’s yoga garden and a golf and surfing outing was planned for the guys.
FRIDAY NIGHT REHEARSAL DINNER A Mexican barbecue was held on the chapel terrace at the resort, where tables were draped with traditional yellow and white Mexican linens.
SATURDAY CEREMONY The pair exchanged vows on the stairs of the Palmilla’s historic, traditional Mexican-style chapel at dusk.
SATURDAY NIGHT RECEPTION The celebration continued in front of a large outdoor fireplace, with tables dressed in crisp white linens and topped with centerpieces bursting with tulips and roses in the signature wedding color: orange.
SOMETHING UNEXPECTED Gustly winds forced the rehearsal dinner from the scenic beach to the secluded chapel terrace, but in the end, the location proved to be more romantic.

HEIDI + TAD } *france*



the coast of Côte d'Azur



THE LOCATION Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat, Nice
SAVE-THE-DATE A four-day weekend with the wedding on Sunday, May 28
OF GUESTS 110
THE PLANNING Heidi hired corporate planner Anne Hill of Hill Meeting Planning & Travel Services Inc. to help out.
THE VENDORS Aside from flying in photographer Holger Thoss and their officiant, Rabbi David Greenberg, Heidi and Tad used vendors based on their hotel’s recommendations.
THE GOWN Heidi wore a cream-colored gown with an Empire waist by Balenciaga and a veil by Lara Hélène Bridal Atelier in New York, which she carried with her on the plane.
WELCOME PARTIES Since guests were spread out in two hotels, they gathered at a Friday afternoon lunch at the Palais Maeterlinck near Monaco, and a Saturday night tented dinner party at the Hôtel Beau Rivage in Nice.
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY EXCURSIONS Between lunch and dinner, guests could choose from wine tastings, cooking classes, sightseeing tours, and a ropes course challenge and water park (for guests with children).
SUNDAY EXCURSION Guests were invited to view the Grand Prix in Monaco from a private suite hosted by the groom.
SUNDAY CEREMONY Once the race ended, Heidi and Tad exchanged vows in a private garden at the Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat.
SUNDAY NIGHT RECEPTION The hotel’s Club Dauphin, bordered by an infinity-edge pool, was simply decorated with gorgeous off-white and green flowers, which the couple acquired through florist Mariella Aprosio located in nearby San Remo, Italy.



ropes course



welcome party



ceremony



Grand Prix



reception

HOLGER THOSS, JEN YUSON, AND HUBERTUS SCHROEDER/HOLGER THOSS PHOTOGRAPHY, OPPOSITE PAGE: © BRIAN WEDGE PHOTOGRAPHY.

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