



The first step to finding your ideal wedding venue? Decide on the type of environment, style and level of intimacy and luxury you desire for your event.

# bridal q&a

Considering tying the knot away from home? Here, magazine founder and international wedding expert Beverly Clark answers the most common questions about destination “I dos.”

## Is a destination wedding for us?

It depends on what you dream of for your special day. Exchanging vows at a distant locale can add adventure for you and your guests and, in many ways, simplifies the process of getting married, reducing stress, potential family drama and even expenses. How can it be less costly? For one, your guest list is typically pared down to your close family and friends. And with a “weddingmoon,” you avoid footing the bill for a grand reception and honeymoon. Plus, these days, wedding and honeymoon packages are surprisingly affordable. Another draw: your honeymoon begins the moment you reach your destination.

On the other hand, if you seek a traditional nuptial experience, you intend to invite hundreds of guests or you know you’ll want to manage all the details of the event yourself, it may be wise to keep the wedding closer to home.

## How do we find the perfect destination?

First off, ask yourselves what type of wedding you want. Do you picture yourself saying “I do” on a remote sandy beach and spending your honeymoon soaking up the sun, cocktail in hand? Would you prefer exchanging vows on a ski slope? Or do you dream of getting hitched in a city steeped in culture and nightlife? Next, decide whether you want a laidback, intimate affair, a grand, formal event or something in between. Once you’ve settled on the desired environment, style and level of privacy and luxury for your event, comb through magazines, guidebooks and travel-related blogs and websites to find the perfect location.

## Why should I hire a wedding planner?

Having someone at the wedding location to handle all the bridal basics can spare you a lot of time and energy. Your planner not only coordinates with the wedding professionals you have selected to ensure all the details are taken care of, but he or she can help deal with any last-minute mishaps. The planner is also likely

to be familiar with the destination you’ve picked and can give you valuable insider’s tips and travel advice.

## How do I find the best wedding coordinator?

If you plan to marry at a well-known resort or hotel, chances are the property has its own coordinator on staff. If not, ask the concierge to recommend a local wedding planner along with a list of professional vendors in the area. Also, contact the local tourist bureau for information or search online for who’s available at your destination.



### Are we obligated to invite all of our friends and family to the event?

No. A destination wedding allows you more flexibility with the guest list, which means it's ok to exclude distant uncles, aunts, cousins and work acquaintances. Just keep in mind that between cost of airfare and lodging and getting time off work, some people may not be able to join you. Typically, roughly 70 percent of the people invited to a faraway event show up. Still, people do want to come to your wedding, and if you select a particularly fantastic spot, don't be surprised if a majority of friends and family make the trip.

### What about those who can't attend?

Throw a party once back home. This kind of "reception" can be large or small, formal or informal, and gives you two a chance to celebrate with all of your nearest and dearest. Plan the decor around your destination, and be sure to have wedding photos or even the DVD on hand to share with those who couldn't make it.

### Do we pay for our guests' airfare, hotel and meals?

Destination wedding guests generally pay their own airfare and lodging as well as food, beverages and activities—unless you or your family are hosting a particular event, like the wedding reception, rehearsal dinner or a sunset catamaran tour. Even so, you

should still price tickets, car-rentals and rooms for your invitees. Call a few airlines and negotiate a group fare and contact the hotel you're staying at to find out about group discounts—be sure to book early since group rates are typically based on availability. Or consider marrying at an all-inclusive resort, where food, beverages and many activities are included under one fee.

### Is it rude to invite people to the bridal shower but not the wedding?

With a traditional affair, yes. But since so many couples today elope or opt for a private wedding at a small venue, modern etiquette suggests destination events can be an exception. To avoid offending anybody, make sure your maid of honor or a family member informs bridal shower guests that your wedding is an intimate event and—if you plan to throw a party once back home—that you and your spouse will see everyone at the reception.

### Should we bring our own private photographer or use the person recommended by the resort?

These days, most major hotels and resorts staff their own photographer, or even a team of professional shooters. Before you make your decision, review the person's portfolio and ask both the photographer and resort for references. Interview the person to

## THINGS BRIDES WISH THEY'D KNOWN BEFORE THEIR DESTINATION WEDDING

**1** "We should have asked our wedding coordinator for references. She was an independent planner recommended to us by our travel agency, and she was not qualified to handle an event of our size. We ended up organizing a lot of the important details ourselves, which made things so much more stressful."

*Ann Shiflett, Springfield, MA; married in Turks & Caicos*

**2** "If we could do it all over again, I'd make sure my husband and I had more time together alone after the wedding. Both our families and all of our friends stayed through the entire honeymoon, and even though we really enjoyed their company, it would have been nice to spend at least a few days on our own."

*Michelle Huang, San Clemente, CA; married in Puerto Vallarta*

**3** "I would have liked to have some sort of transportation set up between the ceremony and the restaurant where we held our reception, like a trolley. When we checked Mapquest, the two locations seemed within walking distance, but were not. I should also have communicated better with my photographer to get more of the kind of family pictures I hoped to have."

*Jarre Weinstein, Baltimore, MD; married in Key West*

**4** "My husband and I wish we would have signed contracts with all the local wedding vendors we hired to establish the exact cost of things, like the floral arrangements and our cocktail hour at a local bar. We ended up spending nearly \$5,000 more than planned because we didn't set the budget in stone beforehand."

*Leah Baudry, Houston, TX; married in New York City*

**5** "We made the mistake of not researching our destination at all before arriving and ended up spending most of our time on the resort grounds. I recommend getting familiar with the area and how to get around, so you can explore the place as much as possible."

*Stephanie Alvarez, Grand Rapids, MI; married in Indonesia*



get familiar with his or her personality, style and work ethic (*find list of important questions to ask on page 34, along with tips from pro wedding photographers on how to ensure stunning photos*). If you hire someone from outside the resort, make sure he or she has extensive travel experience and knows about any visas or permits needed for working abroad. Most pros include travel and lodging costs in their fees, although some may pay their own airfare.

### **My fiancé and I prefer that guests don't bring gifts to the destination. How do we tell them?**

As with any nuptial event, you should avoid the mention of gifts on the wedding invitation. A family member or member of the wedding party will inform guests where you are registered and to either send the presents to your home or to bring only gifts of money or gift certificates to the destination. Some resorts and hotels allow couples to register their honeymoon online, a process that works just like a gift registry. Your friends and family can purchase parts of your honeymoon experience as a wedding present, be it a couples spa treatment, a night in a honeymoon suite or a dinner cruise (*turn to page 18 for more creative gift-registry ideas*).

### **Who should we invite to the rehearsal dinner?**

Generally, the rehearsal dinner is for the bridal party, immediate family and out-of-town guests. But since everyone has traveled to be a part of your destination wedding, you should include the whole gang. The celebration can be as formal as a sit-down soiree or as laidback as a beach barbecue. If you're watching your budget, one idea is to invite your close family and the wedding party to the dinner party and then ask everyone else to join you for toasts and desserts—this is a great way to include everyone you love without spending a fortune.

### **I want to do something special to welcome my guests when they arrive. What do you suggest?**

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. One popular option is a welcome basket or tote bag filled with local maps, native snacks and an itinerary of events. 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 guests entertained. For instance, if you're marrying in wine country, provide a bottle of local wine along with a map for guests to orchestrate their own winery tour.

### **Is it ok to tell guests you wish to honeymoon alone?**

Yes! Just because your loved ones came all the way to your



**Need time alone? Steal romantic moments away from friends and family by signing up for a couples massage or a private island outing.**

wedding doesn't mean you have to spend every minute with them, particularly not after the big day. Nonetheless, since many guests may stay at the destination for some time, offer tips on activities they can enjoy in the area and introduce them to other guests who're sticking around. Perhaps send out a questionnaire beforehand to determine any special interests and create an itinerary based on resort activities. If you still feel guilty keeping to yourselves after the wedding, arrive a few days ahead of the bridal party.

### **How do we keep invitees updated until the wedding day?**

Create a simple website to keep everyone informed of travel and accommodation options along with price ranges, transportation details, activities and any other information that may simplify the travel and booking process. Keep the information current, and e-mail guests each time you make important changes.