

Navigating Nuptials

Written by Story by Nichole Brophy

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If sunsets over endless horizons and salty ocean breezes are integral elements of your dream wedding, you're in good company.

Following the destination wedding trend spurred by the lavish marriages of celebrity couples like Heidi Klum and Seal, nuptial getaways are now a frequent choice of engaged couples around the United States. According to the Bridal Association of America, 12 percent of the more than 2.2 million Americans who wed in 2006 did so off American soil. When the planning of the ideal destination wedding is the only obstacle between you and "I do," use the time-honored advice of a professional. Victoria Canada, owner of Phoenix-based Victoria Canada Weddings and Events, shares her thoughts on specifics to consider.

Call Zurich and Move Some Money Around

Consulting with the bank is the preferable place to begin. "Initially, what I always tell people is to talk about your budget and what you feel comfortable with. That will give you the parameters of where you can have your wedding and what you can do at that location," says Canada, who also co-owns Bright Event Gallery with her friend and business partner Kelly Gill.

Another purpose of a destination wedding is to manage your guest list and to cut down on the costs associated with inviting a hundred guests to your wedding. "People are doing it because they want to get out of town; they want different scenery," Canada says. "Or they might be doing it because if they were having a wedding in town, it could get out of control as far as the guest list. So you want to also see what your motivation is."

"If you want to make sure your closest friends are able to come [to the wedding], instead of doing it in the Caribbean, you might consider maybe doing it in Mexico," Canada says. "Location is obviously the cornerstone of any destination wedding, but then also really being cognizant of your budget."

It's a Plan

Canada recommends working with a planner in your immediate area in addition to a planner at the destination, so support exists in both locales. Complications can arise when the bride only has a planner at the location of the wedding. "Then where does she get her paper products here?" Canada says. "Where does she get her dress? Who's reputable? And who is going to give her the product that she is looking for? [Local wedding planners] have those resources, and we know what direction to point her in."

A local planner is also beneficial because most brides can't schedule in traveling to their wedding destination every other week to ensure details are being carried out. Canada says from a local front, planners at home can help with timelines, while the destination planner can advocate for the bride at the location.

"We are able to pull together a mock centerpiece and set the table with the paper products and everything that [the bride] wants

to do to achieve the look. Then we take a photo of it and email it to the planner there, so that they have an actual blueprint of 'this is exactly how I want the table set.'" The photo documentation process ensures that for both the destination planner and the couple, the wedding is surprise-free.

Scarce Resources

You should also take into account the fact that depending on the destination, many of the popular islands are limited in their on-hand wedding supplies.

"Logistically, as far as where you are going, you want to assess what resources you have there," Canada says. "You really want to be conscious of if there are any linen companies around there. Some of the islands don't even have florists, so you have to bring all your floral in with you. Those can come to be obstacles, and you really have to plan ahead of time in order to acquire the items and bring them with you."

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Careful Courier

While getting yourself to the destination is as easy as buying a first-class ticket, making sure the staples of the event (i.e. floral, décor, formal wear, etc.) arrive there on time and in tip-top shape requires more forethought.

"If you're shipping things, you have to be careful," Canada says. "If you are going to a foreign country, you have to know what ways to ship things. Going to Mexico, there are certain postal services that are really not reliable. You have to know, 'Do I need to FedEx these? Or do I need to UPS them?'"

Canada recommends shipping items via a method that allows

for tracking, so you can anticipate when the packages will arrive and have the power to do more than just keep your

fingers crossed.

Ready, Set, Go...

Preparation is the key motto to live by when planning a destination wedding.

"Anything you take with you, I would always recommend to have as ready as possible," Canada says. "For example, we just did a destination wedding in Lake Tahoe. With the cold weather, the bride and groom gave pashmina wraps to guests. We steamed them, rolled them and shipped them, because it takes several hours to roll a hundred pashminas. Things like that you could do a couple months out."

Canada says enlisting friends to assist with pre-wedding preparations is a nice way to capitalize on any offers to help.

"I, it seems, like everyone else in America, watch these wedding shows, and I'm always surprised when I see a planner who's putting things in the bags or tying things on [gift] bags at the last minute, when things like that could have been way done ahead of time," Canada says.

party favors

"You can get really creative as far as what you give people," Canada says. One of the biggest trends her firm has seen is the inclusion of destination-appropriate gift bags for guests.

"We have a bride who is getting married in Mexico [and is giving] guests little mini margarita kits, so people can make margaritas in their hotel rooms," Canada says.

Providing guests with items they may have forgotten, like sunblock, is not only practical but can also help relay the unique feel of your destination. The point is to make guests feel cared for.

Post-Wedding R 'n' R

If running into grandma at the hotel pool while engaging in some post-wedding canoodling with your new spouse isn't an experience you'd like to have, Canada says that's definitely food for thought. "If you are having a destination wedding and you want to roll your honeymoon into that, you might want to think about changing locations or hotels, because a lot of your guests may also be looking at it as a vacation," Canada says. "So, if you don't want to run into your mom and dad or your aunt or uncle at a resort, that's something to factor in."

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Home-Based Weddings

While Canada says the “it” wedding destinations this season include Mexico and Hawaii, Arizona is also a premier place to get hitched. “When we live here, I don’t know if we necessarily consider it as a destination wedding, but about 50 percent of our clients are destination brides,” Canada says. “We have a ton of people who come here who know the weather is going to be great. And the resources we have, in terms of all the resorts and locations—it’s a great place to have a destination wedding.”