

Exotic nuptials a dream or a reality?

By Kristen Castillo Creators.com | Posted: Thursday, January 12, 2012 3:17 pm

Getting married on location can be a dream, but can a destination wedding be a reality?

Wedding experts say destination "I do's" happen a lot and emphasize they're not that tough to organize.

"This year, I've had 21 destination weddings," says Mindy Weiss of Mindy Weiss Party Consultants and author of "The Wedding Planner & Organizer." "I've never done so many in one year. This was the year they all wanted to go away."

According to The Wedding Report, a group that tracks wedding statistics and does market research for the wedding industry, its most recent figures on the trend show there were 259,000 destination weddings in 2008 with a value of \$2.49 billion.

Why, Where and When

Most brides and grooms who want a destination wedding know their choice from the start.

"It's like the gown," explains Tiffany Cook of Dream Design Weddings & Events. "When they find 'that' property, they know it."

The appeal of a destination wedding can range from the need for privacy to an urge for a romantic getaway.

Weiss says couples are always passionate about the destination. For example, when Weiss' clients singer Katy Perry and actor Russell Brand wanted to tie the knot in India, they did so "because it meant something to them."

The Wedding Report says top destination wedding locations include the Bahamas and places in the Caribbean, especially Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.

"The Caribbean is still hot and hip," says Cook, whose clients often choose destination locales such as St. Croix, St. John, St. Barts, the Antilles and St. Maarten.

Many West Coast couples choose to marry on location in Mexico or Hawaii. New York, Atlanta and Los Angeles are popular destination wedding cities in the continental U.S.

Typically, destination weddings happen on weekends from Thursday to Sunday or Monday. Some destinations, including Hawaii, are year-round choices, but others can be too hot, such as Mexico in July, or prone to stormy weather, like the Bahamas during hurricane season.

Guest List

Guests often love a getaway wedding because it's a built-in vacation.

One of Weiss' recent weddings had a large guest list — 175 New Yorkers who traveled to Lanai, Hawaii, for the wedding.

While most destination weddings are smaller, with a range from 40 to 60 guests, taking care of these guests is a major priority.

"You're not only planning a wedding, but you're planning a trip and planning for all your guests," says Weiss. "Everyone becomes an out-of-town guest."

Entertaining

Keep those guests happy with lots of activities.

"It's a lot of entertaining," says Weiss, noting how many destination weddings include a Thursday welcome party, a Friday rehearsal dinner, the wedding on Saturday and a brunch on Sunday.

Give guests welcome bags, as well as a very detailed itinerary that explains what's happening and when and whom to contact if a guest has questions.

And remember that just because the wedding is a getaway doesn't mean it's a casual affair. Most destination weddings have a dress code of at least cocktail attire, while some destination nuptials are formal black-tie events.

The cost of a destination wedding can vary, depending on whether or not you cover some or all of your guests' expenses. For example, some brides pay for their bridesmaids' rooms, and others cover the bill for all of their guests' accommodations. Still, brides and grooms are not required to pay their guests' tabs.

Destination Details

Planning a destination wedding generally doesn't take much more time than planning a local wedding.

"It's nice to have a year out," says Weiss. "Do a save-the-date, and be kind to guests."

Be kind to yourself, too, by taking Cook's advice and hiring a planner. "Planning can be nerve-racking," she says. "A seasoned wedding planner can make your life so much easier and better if you're having a destination wedding."

Cook says she typically scouts a property online and figures out whether the venue's style and price points are a match for the couple. Before a hiring decision is made, she and the couple travel to the destination to do a walk-through and firm up the plans.

Another important consideration is handling the legal details of a marriage ceremony and the license.

"I work with the property and work with local officials," says Cook. "There has to be an officiant from the local area who presides over the ceremony, and the license is handled at that location."

When it comes to hiring wedding vendors, some couples choose vendors near the destination spot, whereas others hire vendors from home and fly them to the wedding site.