

aisle file



# mixed bag

10 simple steps to the perfect welcome gift

BY ERIKA HUENEKE  
COSTA RICA BAG STYLED BY KRISTY RICE  
OF MOMENTAL DESIGNS

Your guests are going the distance to your destination wedding; what better way to show your appreciation — and show off your locale — than with fun welcome bags awaiting them at check-in? We turned to the country's top planners for step-by-step help creating useful, thoughtful bags — and got some great ideas for cool items to include too.



JILLIAN MCGRATH PHOTOGRAPHY



Wine-country bag styled by Alison Events

### Step 1

#### FIGURE OUT HOW MANY WELCOME BAGS YOU'LL NEED.

“The number of bags varies depending on who’s staying in the room. For example, if a couple is staying in the room, we give one bag with two beverages and enough snacks for two people. If two roommates are staying together, we give one bag per guest. If a family is staying in a room, we usually do one bag for mom and dad, and another for the children. Bags can be different — one that appeals to guys, one that appeals to girls and one that appeals to kids. Just make sure all of the guests get something; after all, they paid to get to the wedding!” — *Susan Southerland of Just Marry!, in Orlando, Florida*

“One per couple is perfect. If children are coming, a special welcome bag with gifts reflecting their ages and interests makes them feel immediately included. We’re seeing a trend where the members of the bridal party each receive a very tailored welcome bag complete with a special gift, such as the wedding tie or cuff links for the groomsmen and a piece of jewelry, personalized makeup bag or pashmina for the bridesmaids. At the very least, include a schedule and a small gift for everyone coming to your destination wedding.” — *Nikki Begg of Bermuda Bride*

### Step 2

#### SET A BUDGET TO DETERMINE WHETHER THE BAGS WILL BE ELABORATE, SIMPLE OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN.

“To spend a little less, contact your destination’s department of tourism for free

items that offer insight into the destination — think maps and coupons to local attractions. A most appreciated gift is a stainless-steel water bottle for each guest — the perfect way to carry water and be eco-friendly.” — *Begg*

“Our standard concept for welcome bags is to have something salty, something sweet and something refreshing. So water with a bag of salted almonds and an apple is a perfect mix. If you want to add a little splurge item, go with something local like a bottle of wine from an area vineyard.” — *Alison Hotchkiss of Alison Events, in San Francisco*

### Step 3

#### PICK THE PERFECT CONTAINER.

“Containers that collapse easily are a must, especially if your guests are hopping on a plane back home.” — *Kristy Rice of Momental Designs*



Hawaii bag styled by Evonne Wong of Events by Evonne

“If you’re on a budget, you can use a kraft bag and perhaps have a sticker made for the front of it with your names or logo. If you’re able to splurge, buy nice jute bags or have bags screen-printed with a great design. When we do weddings in Mexico, we buy local bags at the market for about \$5 each. In wine country, we’ve had cotton bags screen-printed with a map of the wineries in the area.” — *Hotchkiss*

### Step 4

#### USE COMMON SENSE WHEN DECIDING WHAT ITEMS TO INCLUDE.

“Choose snacks without peanuts to avoid common food allergies. And avoid items

that are personalized with your names — guests are more likely to keep an item they feel is theirs.” — *Rice*

“Whenever adding perishable items, consider if they’ll get damaged during transport, start to give off an odor if it gets hot outside or spoil if not refrigerated. Also think about taste: White wine, beer and soda are better when cold.” — *Hotchkiss*

“If you’re going to a hot and humid location, avoid things that melt, such as chocolate. And unless you’re going to wash all the fruit you use, stick to things that peel easily.” — *Southerland*

### Step 5

#### COVER THE BASICS.

“I recommend including water; a survival kit with aspirin, bandages and aloe; some nibbles, such as crackers or cookies; and literature about the destination featuring a map, what to do, nearby restaurants and shopping.” — *Begg*

“Give water, guidebooks, hand sanitizer and easy snacks, as well as things that are useful for your location, such as sunscreen and lip balm with SPF for a warm-weather locale.” — *Southerland*

### Step 6

#### ADD FUN OR UNIQUE ITEMS IF THERE'S ROOM IN YOUR BUDGET.

“I like to put together bags that highlight elements for which the location is known. I’m a wedding planner in Mexico, which is famous for its tequila and beer, plus handmade artifacts such as jewelry and cloth, so I always try to include some of these items.” — *Barbara Fancsik of Weddings Vallarta by Barbara, in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico*



Mexico bag styled by Barbara Fancsik of Weddings Vallarta by Barbara



Jamaica bag styled by Wedding Belles Jamaica

“For Caribbean weddings, we recommend beach bags filled with plush towels, a reggae CD and boarding passes for a group catamaran cruise.” — *Jo-Anne Paxton of Wedding Belles Jamaica*

“Items that help your guests explore their creative side, such as a small sketchbook and a set of colored pencils, are fun and memorable — and will last a bit longer than a snack or beverage.” — *Rice*

**Step 7**  
**WRITE A WELCOME LETTER.**

“Welcome letters should be short and sweet. Handwritten is always more personal and will make your guests feel even more special, but if you’re having a large wedding, printing them is easier. You should definitely include your itinerary, as well as information your guests might find useful, like fliers on local tours and attractions.” — *Paxton*

“The welcome letter should be a short little note to welcome your guests to the destination. It’s helpful if you can include the wedding-week itinerary, to keep guests up to date of the wedding festivities, as well as the contact information of those who know the details of the wedding events, such as the wedding planner or the bridal party.” — *Evonne Wong of Events by Evonne, in San Francisco*

**Step 8**  
**GET YOUR BAGS TO THE LOCALE.**

“If you want to bring everything with you in suitcases but have a lot of items, you may need to enlist a few family members or friends to help you out. If you don’t want to bother people or you want to keep the bags a secret, then shipping them is good option. A few things to be aware of when shipping items to another country are duty and taxes (which can apply when you carry things down as well) and shipping time. Ship your items six to eight weeks in advance; that way there’s plenty of time for delays, and if something does go missing, you have time to re-buy or put plan B into action.” — *Fancsik*

“If you’re arriving at your wedding destination a few days prior to the wedding, it’s easier to buy all the items and put them together at your destination than to assemble them at home and ship them out.” — *Wong*

**Step 9**  
**ASSEMBLE EVERYTHING.**

“If you haven’t hired your wedding planner to do this for you, then mothers, sisters and bridesmaids are definitely your go-tos! Make the task fun with snacks, cocktails, music and girl time to show them how much you appreciate their help — because, remember, by helping out, they’re sacrificing time that could be spent exploring the destination, hitting the beach or having some romantic time with their significant other.” — *Fancsik*

“Brides usually don’t realize what it entails to assemble welcome bags. We recommend finding someone local who offers the service, like we do. No bride wants to be stressed about her welcome bags if she doesn’t have to be.” — *Paxton*

**Step 10**  
**DELIVER THE BAGS TO GUESTS.**

“The best way to keep track of where your guests are staying is to have them include their hotel info and check-in date on the RSVP card. You’ll have to bring the bags to each hotel where the guests are staying and ask the front desk to present the bags when the guests check in. There may be a fee, so check with each hotel.” — *Wong*

“If you’ve set up a room block, ask the hotel how they do their deliveries, or ask your wedding planner to help you check. If your guests are staying at different hotels or condos throughout your destination, then delivery is going to be a challenge and may even involve renting a car. If the whole task of driving or taking taxis all over town to deliver the welcome bags is overwhelming, you could consider handing the bags out at a welcome party or the rehearsal dinner. Either way, remember to put a name tag on each bag.” — *Fancsik*

*Editors' Note: What Not to Do*

Avoid heavy, breakable or expensive items. Bulky, fragile gifts don’t work because guests will have to carry them home. With pricier presents, such as jewelry for your ‘maids, do the handoff in person so you can be sure nothing gets lost in the shuffle.

FOR THE FULL LIST OF ITEMS IN THE WELCOME BAGS IN THIS STORY, SEE THE 411 ON PAGE 95.



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