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YOUR BIG DAY SIMPLIFIED

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DESTINATION WEDDINGS
AList
Q&A
@ HONEYMOONS

POP THE QUESTION

From save-the-date timing (how far out?) to sunset vows (yay or nay?), our A-List experts answer your FAQs.

Weddings away pose distinct challenges, and no one knows that better than couples in the midst of planning. We asked *DW*'s wedding aces what quandaries they hear most from their clients — and how to navigate them. Read on for their on-the-ground insight, and rest assured that despite any obstacles that arise, destination I do's are still the way to go.

by ERIKA HUENEKE

JOSE VILLA



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the plan



QUESTION → *What's the best strategy for sending save-the-dates and invitations for a destination wedding?*

— *Buying Stamps in Boise*

THE PRO: Tracy French is owner of The French Connection Events, based in San Antonio, Texas. She and her team specialize in planning destination weddings, from travel arrangements and site selections to decor and design.

“Unlike traditional weddings where save-the-dates can go out as late as six months before, for a wedding away they should be sent nine to 12 months out. Guests may have to request time off, and resorts can book up quickly. Include your personal website address with details and info about the destination. Invitations should go out three to four months prior. Another great idea: Send a pre-departure letter with packing tips to your attending guests two weeks ahead of time. I had one client who wanted an all-white welcome dinner — fun to do but definitely something you'd want to remind your guests about.”

QUESTION → *Does the photographer need to research our wedding location in advance?*

— *Striking a Pose in Savannah*

THE PRO: Jason Grubb is one-half of the husband-and-wife team Jason+Gina Wedding Photographers, located in Denver, Colorado. They bring two different perspectives to their contemporary, photojournalistic-style work.

“We prefer discovering new places on location. For example, we

recently shot a cliffside wedding in Big Sur, California. During cocktail hour, Gina took a walk and found a vantage point that allowed the ocean, cliff and sunset to come into perfect harmony, and we got some absolutely remarkable photos (above). If we arrive a day early, we'll drive and walk around searching for spots that will have fantastic light and lines for pictures. But even if we don't have time to scout, we're not worried at all. Choose a beautiful destination and a photographer with a flexible, adventurous style, and it will allow very spontaneous photo ops.”

QUESTION → *My dream is to have a ceremony on the beach at sunset. Is this a good idea?*

— *Facing West in Washington*

THE PRO: Barbara Fancsik de Pérez has been planning weddings in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, for more than nine years. In 2011 she launched her own company, *Weddings Vallarta by Barbara*.

“Sunset ceremonies are possible, but not something I'd recommend. If your ceremony is right at sunset, then by the time it's over, it will be dark, which means every remaining photo will be taken at night. I had one client who insisted their wedding start at the forecasted sunset time. I did my best to make it work, but the ceremony ended up in the dark. Everybody stayed positive, but the couple decided to book an extra photo session — in the daylight. I advise timing your ceremony so that when it ends, you'll have an hour of decent sunlight left for all the portraits and shots with loved ones.”



"UN AMOR," GIPSY KINGS
"This is Latin music at its best, with passionate guitar strumming and lyrics like 'I cannot live without your kisses.'"

Looking for a song inspired by your wedding location? You're in luck! We created this chart with the help of Michael Taylor, CEO of Star Talent, a New York City-based band and DJ agency for weddings. Find your locale and personality type, and cue the music.

by NATHAN JESTER



"ANGEL," SHAGGY
"An upbeat song with an island-inspired groove that will leave no one sitting still."

"OVER THE RAINBOW," IZ
"This may be the dreamiest tune ever written. Iz's beautiful voice and simple ukulele accompaniment make it even more so."



OPPOSITE FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF AMSTERDAM MANOR BEACH RESORT; COREY WEINER; THE RITZ-CARLTON, ARUBA

Wedding Three Ways Aruba

Beachgoers, thrill seekers and brides of all budgets favor perennially sunny Aruba. We've rounded up three wedding-worthy resorts in a range of costs. — Deborah Geiger



UNDER \$10K

AMSTERDAM MANOR BEACH RESORT

This canary-yellow Dutch-colonial boutique offers 72 comfy suites, a laid-back pool deck, an elevated ocean-facing bar and two onsite restaurants available for events — one of them directly on Eagle Beach. Host your ceremony on the sand, framed by the island's divi-divi trees, famously twisted from the constant trade breezes that average between 7 and 25 mph. Rooms from \$205; weddings from \$495.



\$10K TO \$20K

MARRIOTT RESORT & STELLARIS CASINO

Venues abound at this Palm Beach mainstay — just what you'd expect at a 411-room resort with all the trappings, from a spa and eight restaurants to the island's largest casino. Swap beach vows beneath a native *kunuku* gazebo; at a reception on the new adults-only H2Oasis pool deck, Caribbean flair informs the menu, from pineapple-coconut-crusted shrimp to Aruba Ariba rum punch. Rooms from \$289; weddings from \$1,950.



\$20K PLUS

THE RITZ-CARLTON

This brand-new stunner upped the Palm Beach ante when it debuted November 2013 with four onsite restaurants, a 13-room spa and 320 out-sized rooms. Wed on the beach, or bring the party inside the customizable ballroom. Fresh seafood, specialty cocktails and island-inspired desserts — think crème brûlée with caramelized pineapple — dish up maximum decadence on your big day. Rooms from \$649; weddings from \$2,698.

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➔ The word *groom* dates back nearly a millennium with meanings like “man child” (seriously?) and “male servant who attends to horses” (that’s no way to talk about the bride). Yet somehow, between the Middle Ages and the premiere of *Say Yes to the Dress*, we’ve done little to help the hubs-to-be understand his role in the planning process — besides just showing up — and this is especially true for a big day away. Here are five key responsibilities the man of the house should take on.

1 SITE INSPECTOR ➔ While not everyone can afford to do this, visiting the location beforehand is a worthwhile expense. Just ask Arthur Kerekes, a wedding planner and recent destination groom. “While planning, we couldn’t have been more confident in the resort we’d chosen,” says Kerekes, who wed in Jamaica. “But our scouting visit proved it wasn’t nearly what it was cracked up to be.” The “intimate beach setting” advertised on the website was “crowded by

tourists in Speedos. My bride wouldn’t have appreciated that.” Wayne Gurnick, owner of event-planning firm Moments by Wayne Gurnick, suggests surprising your bride with a “go-see.” “Use the trip as an opportunity to meet the catering and event staff.” And while Skype is convenient, negotiating in person is far more effective.

2 ENTERTAINMENT COORDINATOR ➔ “Your guests are making a big investment to be with you on your special day,” says Kerekes. “It’s their vacation too.” Keep the fun quotient high. Offer a mix of group activities (remember to book transportation) and nearby attractions they can check out on their own.

3 BARTENDER ➔ Take the lead on customizing the wedding’s liquor selection, says Gurnick. From twists on classic cocktails and craft beer to trendy infused liqueurs, there’s no excuse to have a boring bar at your party. “This responsibility has

for the groom

BEST SUPPORTING FIANCÉ

FIVE JOBS THE DESTINATION DUDE SHOULD HANDLE.

by NATHAN JESTER

excellent fringe benefits — you get to sample drinks as part of your research.”

4 PUBLICIST ➔ It’s standard operating procedure for the couple to have a wedding website. This is all you, buddy! Beyond topline details, use it to keep guests informed about the local weather and changes to the schedule. Create a unique email or private Facebook page to field individual inquiries. Keep in mind: You’re getting hitched in a locale that will be new to most — be open and responsive to their questions.

5 STYLIST ➔ You’re on deck to find locale-appropriate threads for the gents. Here’s your chance to get creative. Wear a tie that reflects your personality, and add funky socks, suspenders, a hat or cuff links. Kerekes also suggests giving your groomsmen a few extra white T’s. “If you pick a hot locale, you won’t be inside an air-conditioned banquet hall. On my wedding day, I sweated through three shirts!”

BE PREPARED Don’t let a busted button, scuffed shoe or nervous stomach dampen your big day. Be ready for any mishap with the *Pinch Minimergency Kit for Grooms*. The MacGyver-style, pocketsize tin comes with 15 tiny troubleshooters, including breath freshener, stain remover, a mending kit, shoe shine, antacid and even extra wedding bands in case you forgot the real things in the hotel-room safe. — EH

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE TOP: KIM KUHN; SAMM BLAKE; KIM KUHN (2); ILLUSTRATION: CLARE OWEN

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

The secret to planning a wedding away? Organization. Chronicle your big-day prep in the *Passions Wedding Journal* (\$19.95), the first-ever planner from Moleskine. With a 12-month timeline, eight tabbed sections and adhesive labels, the hardcover is only 5 by 8¼ inches — small enough to tuck in a travel bag. — Kaitlyn Alkass



Beyond the Buffet

Think outside the bar and stock your food station with locale-inspired eats. — Holly V. Kapherr

If you’ve already planned every detail and the last thing left is the menu, consider letting your guests play master chef for the night. “Food bars allow your guests to experience the flavors of your destination,” says A-List planner Ali Phillips of Engaging Events by Ali, based in Chicago. “Work with your catering manager to showcase local favorites.” Here, we lay out the keys to putting together a successful dinner bar that speaks to your destination — and gets your guests talking.

DECIDE ON A THEME ➔ Let your setting be your guide. For a beach bash, make the most of the ocean with a raw bar of oysters and sauces — or clambake faves like steaming shellfish, red potatoes and corn on the cob. Planning a Mexican fiesta? A nacho, taco or quesadilla bar lets guests get creative with cheeses, meats and seasoned veggies, plus salsas to boot. A buttermilk-biscuit bar with honeys, jams and sausages suits brunch receptions south of the Mason-Dixon line.

PRESENTATION IS EVERYTHING ➔ Vary the sizes, shapes and colors of your serving vessels to match your decor. Cake stands add dimension, apothecary glasses can hold chips and toppings, and mason jars work for layered dips and salads. Love kitsch? Use cute wooden sporks, like these biodegradable ones from Bambu (\$72 for 250; party atlewis.com).



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