



just the facts

Busting the myths about destination weddings so you can plan with confidence

BY BROOKE SHOWELL • ILLUSTRATIONS BY MOIRA MILLMAN

Overwhelmed by the idea of planning an out-of-town affair? Don't be. Marrying away means exchanging vows in a locale that's extra-special to you both, with your closest pals in tow for the celebration — and it's easier to pull off than you think. Here, we clear up some misconceptions about destination weddings, from budgets to guest lists.

tricks of the trade

MYTH Destination weddings are usually elopements.

FACT The average guest list for a destination wedding has 40 people.

Sure, a destination wedding could be just the two of you stealing away to a secret spot, but in most cases, couples invite their nearest and dearest to share in the party. And while the average guest list for a wedding on the road has 40 people, some couples — especially those marrying in domestic locales — bring along 150 or more. Bonus: Throwing an out-of-town soiree is a perfect excuse to cross the distant cousins and former co-workers off your list — and plan a mini getaway for the people who matter most. “Destination couples want their guests to enjoy a vacation, with their wedding being a part of the adventure,” says planner Karine France-Matsumoto of Seasons of Life, on Oahu, Hawaii. To make the most of the group festivities, arrange one prewedding and postwedding activity where friends and family can spend time together enjoying your chosen locale.

MYTH Destination weddings are only for second marriages.

FACT 80 percent of *DWH* readers are planning their first wedding.

While the concept of marrying away may have originally been most popular among couples planning encore weddings, couples saying I do for the first time have now embraced the trend in a major way — enticed by the idea of reducing stress and holding their event somewhere completely original. “Our clients typically aren’t keen on having a very formal event,” says planner Clara Boatto of Chic Weddings in Italy. “They request an unconventional celebration that reflects their personality, without having to worry about other people’s expectations.” For couples who love to travel, “it’s a no-brainer,” says Quentin Carmichael, president of destinationweddings.com. Plus, if you’re dealing with demanding families, moving the nuptials to more relaxed “neutral” territory may eliminate possible conflicts.

MYTH Destination weddings cost more than hometown weddings.

FACT Destination weddings often cost less because of smaller guest lists, packages, favorable exchange rates and so on.

Current figures put the average cost of a traditional wedding at \$24,066, while the average cost of a destination wedding is \$21,800 — a significant \$2,266 less. The reality is, it’s possible to throw a wedding away on any budget, depending on the destination, venue and size. “Destination weddings can be extremely affordable,” says planner Lisa Vorce



of Oh, How Charming! in Santa Ana, California. “The key is setting solid financial parameters, understanding all potential costs and keeping your guest count proportional.” Destination do’s are usually smaller in size, and “smaller guest counts mean fewer tables, chairs and centerpieces, which brings down the cost,” says planner Annie Lee of Daughter of Design, in New York. While it might cost a pretty penny to host a weekend in say, the Seychelles or Sydney, “in destinations like Mexico and the Caribbean, the cost of catering is much less than what it is at your local wedding hall,” Lee notes. With friends and family now spread across the globe, keep in mind that many guests who travel to your chosen beach or villa would have to travel to a hometown wedding regardless. “Very rarely does the guy marry the girl next door anymore,” Carmichael adds. “A traditional

wedding involves significant travel for one family or the other anyway.”

MYTH Destination weddings are always on the beach.

FACT Destination weddings can take place in any setting imaginable.

Getting married with their feet in the sand is the ultimate in romance for some couples, but saying I do at the shore isn’t your only option. Destination weddings can take place anywhere, from a historic mansion to a snowy mountaintop. Vorce says some of her favorite settings include an Old World chateau in the south of France, a majestic villa in Italy and a romantic hacienda deep in the heart of Mexico. “Most of my clients will choose a non-beach venue over the beach,” she notes. You can also have the best of both worlds at a seaside locale with a rehearsal dinner on the sand and the main event on a lawn, in a garden or at a local restaurant.

MYTH Destination weddings always take place in far-off international locations like the Caribbean and Mexico.

FACT A destination wedding is defined as marrying just 100 or more miles from where the bride currently lives.

While you *could* go as far afield as you choose, there’s no need to get out the passports if you’d rather stay closer to home. If you’ve already attended dozens of weddings in your hometown or your area lacks a suitable option, consider moving the party just a couple of hours’ drive away — the quick change in scenery may feel like another world. City couples can head to the country, while suburbanites may relocate the festivities to the nearest metropolis. You and your guests will still get the relaxed vibe of an affair away, minus the hassle of flight connections, currency exchanges and language barriers.

MYTH Destination weddings are only for a small number of couples, such as celebrities and the affluent.

FACT Nearly a quarter of all engaged American couples are marrying away.

Celebs — from Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes renting a castle in Italy to Katy Perry and Russell Brand hosting a blowout

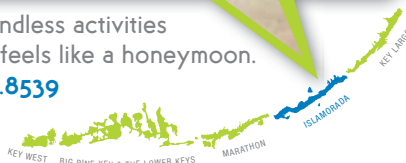


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bash in India — may have put destination weddings on the map, but it's equally possible for average couples to pull off exotic events. Carmichael reports that one out of every six engaged couples is now having a faraway fete — and other experts put that number even higher: at one in four. "Destination weddings can be totally manageable and enjoyed by any client," says Vorce, who notes that 70 percent of her couples, from marketing managers and phone technicians to caterers and school counselors, choose a destination do over a hometown affair.

MYTH You have to honeymoon in your wedding destination.

FACT Many couples choose to honeymoon in a completely different spot from their ceremony.

Honeymooning in your wedding locale is a great way to explore the area even more — and can help you save on travel expenses. But the world is your oyster after you say I do. "Couples typically take off from their destination-wedding venue directly to their honeymoon at another location — so you get two trips!" Lee enthuses. Plus, you'll still save on travel to your honeymoon if you select a place close to your wedding. "If you have a wedding in, say, Puerto Rico and take a short flight to the Dominican Republic for the honeymoon, it's much cheaper than a flight from back home," Lee says.

MYTH Guests will be against the idea of a destination wedding and refuse to come.

FACT Most destination couples are surprised by the high turnout.

In most cases, friends and family will be thrilled to make a mini vacay out of your wedding. Planners Sarai Flores and Martha Huerta of Signature Event Consulting & Design, in Mexico, say they typically see 70 to 80 percent of guests RSVP yes to a destination invitation. Give plenty of advance notice so guests can save up and make travel plans, and be gracious to loved ones who get upset anyway; they're not obligated to attend. Also be straightforward about what group expenses you're covering, and pass along info about discounts — a preferred room rate at your chosen hotel is extra incentive for guests to make the trip. "Weddings away

are typically held in beautiful spots like Hawaii and Greece — places people will want to travel to,” Lee adds. “Most likely, you’ll host a welcome party or a rehearsal dinner, a morning-after brunch and maybe a group activity; plus, you’ve picked out the hotel and suggested local attractions — it’s an easy ready-made vacation package!”

MYTH The wedding couple is obligated to pay for all their guests’ travel expenses.

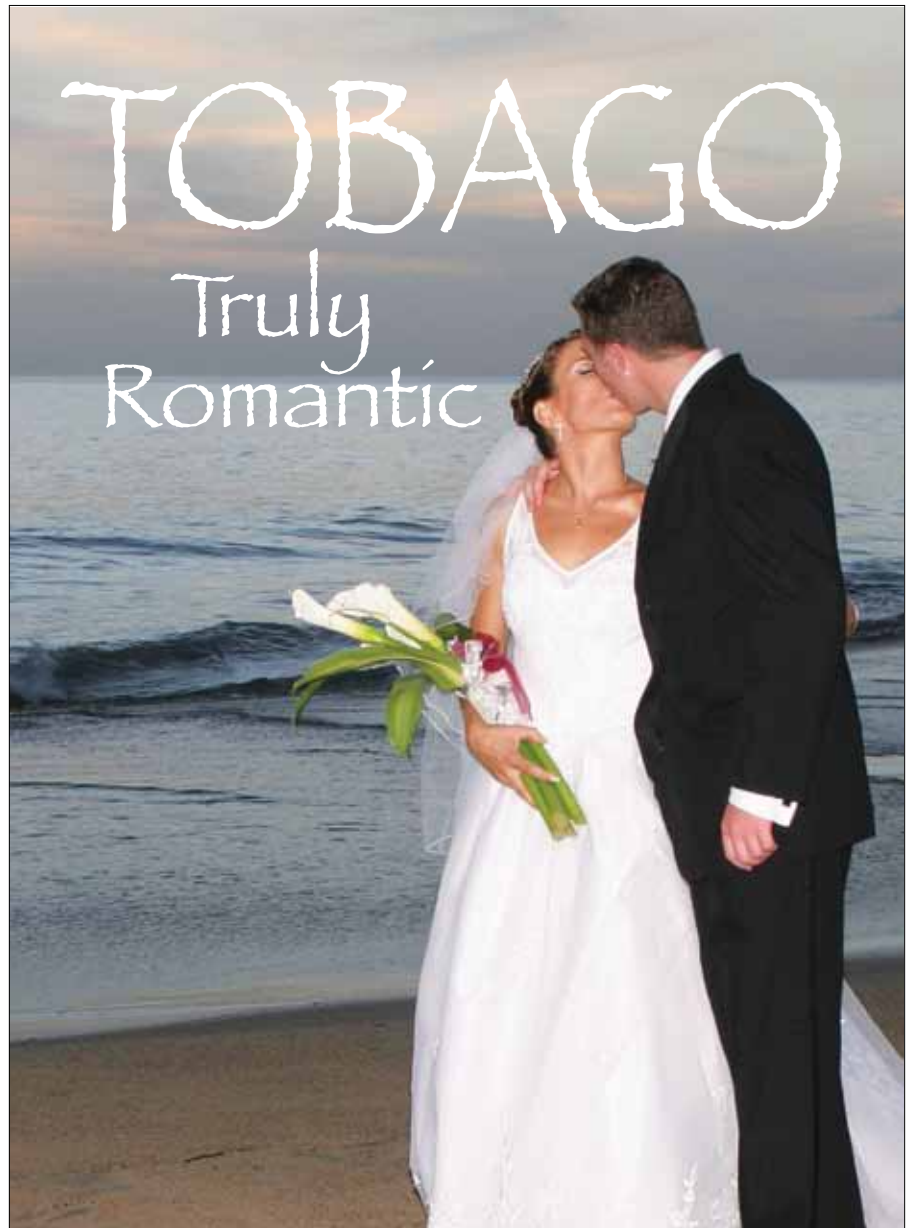
FACT Etiquette holds that guests are responsible for their own travel costs.

While it would be a dream to charter a private jet or rent out an entire resort for all your guests, you’re by no means required to do so. “In general, it’s expected that your guests will pay for their lodgings, airfare and any activities or meals that aren’t related to the official wedding festivities,” says planner Heather Snively of Weddings Unique, in Orlando, Florida. To get your guests the best deal, reserve blocks of rooms (either at your chosen venue or a nearby hotel) and negotiate a lower rate. Also consider connecting your guests with a travel agency you know and trust for booking assistance, Snively suggests — it will help guests save time and take advantage of better rates, targeted activities and special upgrades.

MYTH Marrying away is too complicated from a legal standpoint.

FACT Planners are available to help guide couples through the process.

Tying the knot in another state or country isn’t as complicated as you may think. “From a legal standpoint, choosing to have a destination wedding may require a few extra steps,” Snively admits. “However, obtaining a marriage license still follows the same basic process.” If you’re getting married stateside, start by checking with the local county clerk’s office. For a wedding overseas, contact the U.S. embassy or office of tourism in that country. For the ultimate in convenience, enlist the help of a wedding planner who knows the ins and outs of your location. “Wedding planners can help prepare the paperwork and make sure all the documents are legalized afterward,” Boatto says. Another option: Host a civil ceremony at home, then plan a symbolic service abroad. ■



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