



7 *Get Out of Town* **SUGGESTIONS** for Successfully Planning Your Destination Wedding

So you want the perfect wedding of your dreams, but you're not so sure about all of the do's, don'ts, etiquette, etiquette, etiquette? Maybe a traditional wedding isn't for you. Let's take a vacation, go somewhere beautiful, bring our closest friends and family, and get married in style. Here you will find some simple suggestions for planning your dream destination wedding on the beautiful gulf coast. By implementing some of these simple yet effective tips, your wedding is sure to be a big hit for you and your guests, whether you choose Destin, the beautiful beaches of 30A, Panama City Beach, Pensacola Beach, or Orange Beach.

Always Save the Date

Destination weddings require planning by more than the lucky couple. Ideally, destination brides should send out “Save the Date” cards about six months prior to the scheduled date so that guests can make their vacation and travel preparations as well as make arrangements for time off work. Since most of your guests will be unfamiliar with the area, it is a good idea for the “Save the Date” cards to include room blocking information and rates so that they will know where to make reservations in order to get the best rates and be closest to the wedding venue.

Create a Wedding Website

So, your guest list includes your aunt in Cincinnati, your college roommate in Phoenix and, of course, your 4th grade swim coach who you still see at the grocery store when you visit your mom and dad. Because you’ll be bringing in family and friends from a variety of locations, wedding websites are an easy way to display pertinent information for your guests. A website is especially useful for destination weddings because you can include area information such as nearby hotels and condos along with recommending what booking agencies your guests should use when making travel plans. You can also include links to maps of the area, local restaurants, and itineraries for the wedding weekend. This way, guests will know when they need to arrive in order to begin partaking in the fabulous festivities you have arranged. But, don’t forget to suggest some nightlife for your friends – your college roommate flew in from Phoenix and girls just want to have fun!

Trim the List

It’s a destination wedding! Hence, it’s an excuse to travel to a faraway locale for no other reason than a good party. Who doesn’t want to take off work and lay around on the beach for 3 to 5 days? Many destination brides are surprised with how many people do check the “Yes, I will be attending” box on their response card. Yes, your swim coach from fourth grade just might show up at your event if you extend her an invitation, so keep your guest list simple. It usually isn’t a good idea to send the Courtesy Invite. That being said, keep in mind that you can expect about 70% of those invited to actually attend. For example, if you would like for 60 to 70 people to witness your nuptials then you need to plan on a total invite list of 100, not 350, of your closest family and friends.

Travel at Their Own Expense

Okay, your 4th grade swim coach made the invite list but she still has to pay her way. Typically, wedding guests are expected to pay for their own travel and accommodations at a destination event. But, it is important that you are sensitive



to cost when booking venues and suggesting travel arrangements. If you are having your event at an upscale five star resort, it is a good idea to research and present some more affordable lodging options. You can display all of this information on your wedding website so that guests may defer to it when they are making their plans. It is also wise to make sure transportation to your wedding site won’t pose a problem for those not staying on property. Remember, girls just want to have fun, but no-one wants to drive home.

Show the Love

You’re not the only one paying for your wedding. Your guests are taking vacation from work, travelling long distances, and paying a lot of money to attend your Big Day so be sure to show them you appreciate their commitment by giving them a memorable experience. Many destination brides present gift bags for their guests upon their arrival that contain area

Get Out of Town



information, local snacks or beverages, an itinerary for wedding weekend events, and other gifts that flow with the wedding theme. You might also present themed favors at the reception such as monogrammed beach towels, specially labeled wines, or even seashell Christmas ornaments. Because you've only invited your closest friends and family, and they have traveled long distances, you might even extend the gesture and invite everyone to the rehearsal dinner as well as the wedding ceremony and reception (swim coach optional).

Consult the Locals

From choosing the right wedding invitation wording to how to handle tipping vendors at the end of the event, wedding books, magazines (such as the one you are reading), websites (visit www.gcbride.com for even more great planning information), and other resources guide most brides through many of their wedding planning stages. However, few can address all of the questions and concerns that destination brides face when they are in the throes of planning their weddings from afar. Probably one of the biggest and most important considerations for a destination couple is whether or not to hire a local wedding coordinator. Coordinators know more about their area than any website can tell you. They will guide you through the planning process from afar and will

basically be YOU locally. Since you are far away, you won't be able to attend a last minute meeting with the florist and the caterer but your local coordinator will. She will also know the best places and people to recommend for you based on your wedding style and budget. In the long run most brides who take advantage of the services of a professional wedding planner find that it actually saves them money...and a lot of headache and stress.

Have Fun

Your wedding is a celebration of your commitment to each other. Make sure you have the time of your life. When you arrive in town for your big event, relax and enjoy yourself. Relish in the fact that your closest family and friends are here to share in the festivities. And, maybe, just maybe, that 4th grade swim coach will even volunteer to watch your guests' kids at the pool!

Stephanie Tate is a regular contributor to Gulf Coast Bride magazine. She is an avid writer in the wedding and event industry, holding advanced degrees in English and Literature, as well as being the owner of Savoir Faire Weddings. She can be reached at 850-499-6336.