



Is Your Heart Set on a Destination Wedding? Start Planning By Considering These 5 Things

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general

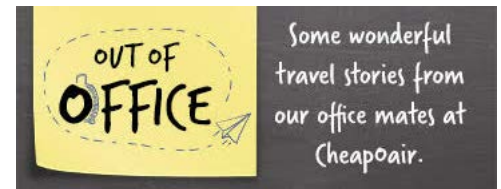
So you just got engaged. Congrats!

But now the clock is ticking and the sooner you start planning the big event, the better. Planning for any type of nuptials comes with overflowing questions, but if you want to do a destination wedding...it's a deluge of decisions.

Will the location be a convenient place for you and your guests or will it require extensive travel plans for everyone involved? Have you explored all of the venue options at the destination? Can whoever is hosting your wedding handle everything involved with such an event? Are there any slight changes to make the whole thing more affordable?

To help you answer these and the MANY other questions you have to tackle while putting together your destination wedding plans, here are some considerations you need to start with.

The Total Cost of the Wedding



Your first priority is to calculate what you're willing to spend for the entire event. This includes a breakdown of all of the primary and ancillary costs. If you're planning it yourself, we highly suggest that you begin by filling out an online spreadsheet. A good option is [The Knot's](#) Destination Wedding Budget worksheet. By itemizing these anticipated wedding costs, you'll know if your dream wedding is feasible. But be warned, generic worksheets may not be able to identify hidden costs at all destinations. And if budget is your main concern, you'll likely discover that a destination wedding may tip the scale too far.

What About a Wedding Planner?



Since every destination is unique and may include unknown costs and its own laws and regulations, a lot of couples or their families hire a professional to help organize and plan their big day. A local wedding planner or coordinator working for a hotel or resort can provide invaluable assistance in organizing the event, finding reputable vendors, and avoiding any unpredictable mishaps that can come up right before they walk down the aisle.

So if you're planning a destination wedding in Colorado, you might want to hire someone like Kathy Vaughan from [A Beautiful Memory](#), a wedding planning service in Boulder. Vaughan knows the ins and outs of that region,

which is why she lets all of her potential clients know that “Mountain venues and lodgings are more expensive and that prices fluctuate with the season.”

If you do choose to go with a wedding planner, don't forget to add their fee into your budget. Some stipulate a set fee, others have a sliding scale that is dependent on the total budget. It's also possible to find wedding planners that charge by the hour.

According to Tami Forero, the CEO of international event planning firm [Forté Events](#), a wedding planner will often have to charge more for a destination wedding that's not in their local area. “It just takes more time, expertise, and knowledge to plan abroad or even out-of-state,” she explains. “Expect additional costs for the planner to travel to the destination and possibly another charge for extra on-site management staff.”

All the Different Destination Options



The possibilities for where you choose to say “I do!” are abundant. Weddings can take place in the mountains, along a coastline, or in a city. Popular places for destination weddings are usually just a few hours away by plane — Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico, or Central America. More adventuresome souls, typically with more to spend, seek out locations in Europe, Asia, or elsewhere. No matter what location you decide on, remember that the prices for both the scouting trip and wedding trip itself need to be added to the overall cost.

Picking a wedding date during a destination's off-season can help reduce costs but make sure that you take into account the location's climate and weather patterns. Your hometown may have delightful weather for an outdoor ceremony in the fall, whereas a Caribbean-based wedding probably won't be advisable around the same time...since that's also hurricane season.

You can pick up additional savings by choosing an international location where the exchange rate is more favorable for the dollar or somewhere stateside that doesn't have sales tax.

Budget conscious couples can consider all-inclusive resorts like in the Florida Keys or Cancun. Some hotels and resorts offer wedding packages that may

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appear too good to be true. So always read the fine print, especially when the deal appears way below market value. More than likely, the options you think are included may be add-on costs.

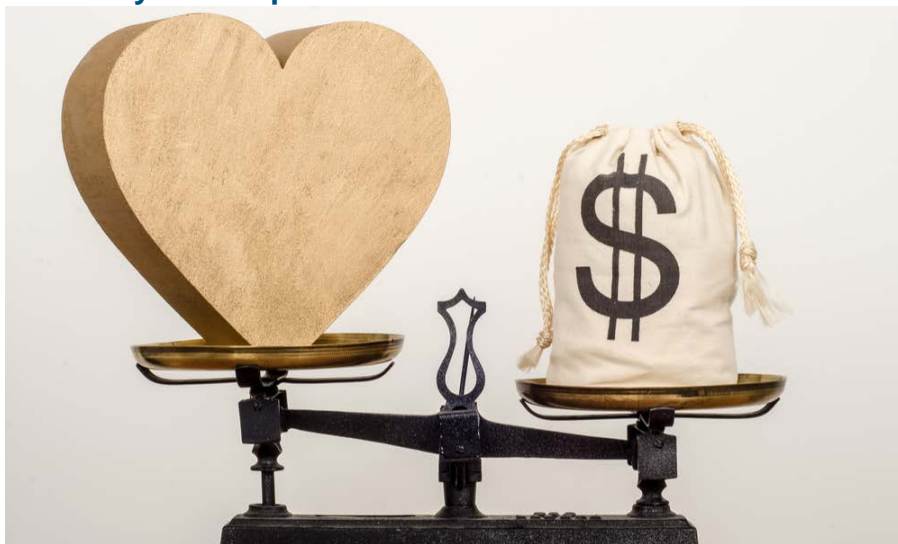
Your Guest List



It's common sense to realize that fewer guests will be able to travel to a destination wedding than to a traditional wedding. The cost of the travel and the potential time off from work may prevent a significant number of your invited guests from attending. Additionally, some locations might be too arduous for some guests' health (a higher altitude mountain venue, for example, could be too much for people who have respiratory or heart conditions).

To avoid disappointment, think about how the location of your wedding will affect those invited and their ability to make the journey.

Be Ready to Compare the Costs



It's not possible to simply say whether one destination is more or less expensive than another, or even if destination weddings are more than non-destination weddings. There are just too many variables. The costs from one destination to the next are rarely the same. One locale may need to have

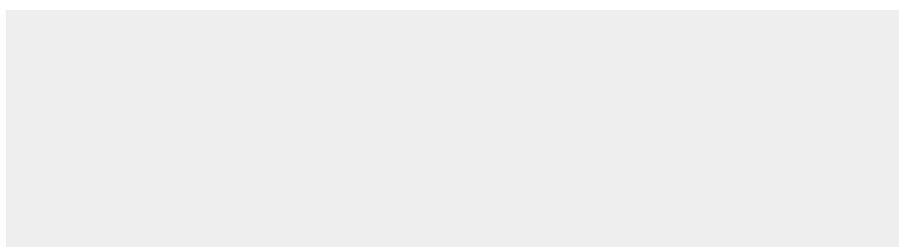
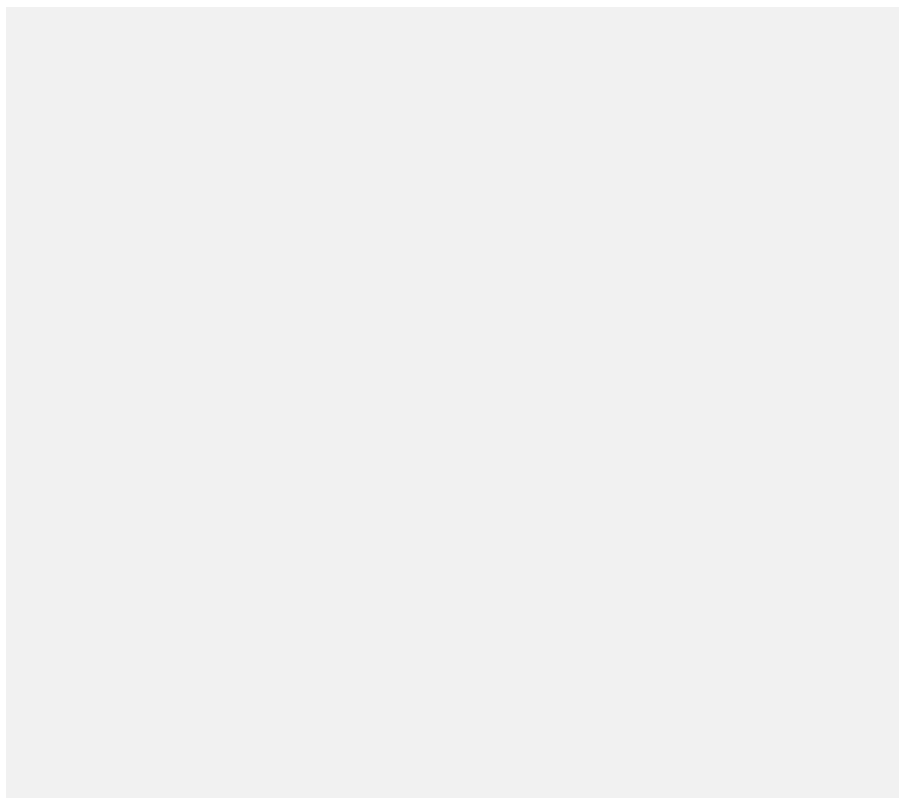
pricey flowers imported, while another could have beautifully affordable flowers that are locally grown.

One couple may select a basic dinner menu, while another bride and groom may opt for an opulent feast. And this doesn't even consider how the rates for musicians and other vendors can vary!

The wide variety of factors is partly why Tami Forero estimates that a destination wedding for up to 50 attendees can cost between \$45,000 and over \$100,000. "The range is huge because we've done a domestic wedding for 130 guests where the family spent \$500,000 and we've done an international wedding for 30 guests where the family spent \$40,000," she says.

Forero advises anyone contemplating a destination wedding to request proposals from planners with all the options they're interested in having. "Then you can pick and choose which are the most important selections. After reviewing all the information, it may be necessary to make changes including locations."

Have you planned a destination wedding? Have some advice for others doing the same? If so, tell us in the comment section below!



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sandy Bornstein

Sandy Bornstein lived as an expat in India. Her award-winning memoir, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, highlights what she learned as the only American teacher at an international Bangalore school. After living abroad, Sandy continues to explore the world and write about her travels. You can follow Sandy's adventures at www.sandrabornstein.com.

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