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## How to organize your destination wedding

BY ANNA T. HIRSH

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Destination weddings have become a popular choice among modern couples who are looking to make their wedding into a relaxing dream vacation for everyone involved, or who are even just trying to whittle down their guest list.



Planning your wedding from afar can be daunting, but the payoff is memorable.

If the destination is only a few hours away, it is relatively easy to meet with your vendors before you make the big style, serving and entertainment decisions. But if your locale requires a plane ride, planning can get a tad more difficult. How do you even get started?

Don't worry – your mission isn't as impossible as it sounds. The first step is to explore what options you have available to you. Start with a simple Google search for vendors, such as "wedding photographers Oahu," or view resource lists online. However, you do want to be a bit cautious about these lists, warns Brooke Sheldon, a destination-wedding expert with Lilybrooke Events, which operates offices in Chicago, Grand Haven, Mich., and Kennebunkport, Maine.

"Many vendors pay to be on lists so they aren't necessarily the best or most accurate referral sources," says Sheldon. "But it's a good place to start your research and the best names will pop up again and again on the lists and when you call for referrals."

Even better, Sheldon recommends checking out the Web sites for fabulous hotels located in the area in which you would like to get married. They may have a list of preferred vendors. The same can be said for other great locations, such as museums, parks, historical buildings, etc. Yet another good idea is to check with the local chamber of commerce and see if they have suggestions or any thoughts on the vendors you are already looking at.

Once you've selected a few contenders in each category, it's time to start talking.

"Don't think of destination vendors any differently than you would a vendor in your home town," says Sheldon. "Most work is done via e-mail, phone and fax, regardless of location, so don't let that scare you; you can ask them the exact same questions you would with any vendor."

Ideally, you would be able to travel to your location at least once prior to the wedding, have meetings with potential vendors and then, after you've made your decision and returned home, start working with them via phone and e-mail. However, if your location is too far away for even one visit, but you've really done your research, try to trust your vendors and let them do their job.

But a sure-fire way to alleviate quite a bit, if not all, of that stress and hard work, is to hire someone who specializes in planning destination weddings or a wedding coordinator located in the area in which you will be married.

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