A wedding and a travel adventure in one.

What’s not to love about a destination wedding? But planning for a celebration that’s far from home adds a few things to your “I do” checklist.

Not to worry, though. Here’s an overview of your long-distance decisions, with some helpful tips as well, so you can keep a close eye on the details that go into organizing your nuptials from afar.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Budget and location should be at the top of your list — along with your vision of what the day should be. Tackle these three elements first, and everything else may start to fall into place:

- **DECIDE ON A WEDDING STYLE**
  You need to decide on the type of wedding you want before you can pick a destination. So sit down with your partner and talk it over. Are you thinking small, casual and beachy? Big and formal at a fancy estate? Nail it down, because your vision may determine so many other elements of your big day.

- **PICK A DESTINATION**
  Shoot for a doable destination if you’re hoping to have more than a few guests in attendance. Consider whether your guests may be able to afford the costs of travel and accommodations. And, remember, weather and peak season/travel times can affect both your event and travel prices.

- **CREATE A BUDGET**
  A destination wedding may be less expensive than a wedding closer to home if there are only a few guests in attendance. If you’re casting a wider net, expect up to 40 percent of invitees to respond with regrets. Even so, make room in the budget for common extras, like welcome bags given to guests when they check into the hotel. “These bags cost between $5 and $10 per person, but they can be more,” says Robyn Bruns, owner of Red Letter Event Planning in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. “Destination guests expect them and they should be part of the budget.” You might also want to leave room in the budget for a wedding planner. “They will be able to be your eyes and ears on the ground while you plan from afar,” says Bruns. (Factor in 10 to 15 percent of your budget if you do go this route, suggests The Knot).

CONSIDER PROTECTING YOUR SPECIAL DAY

Wedding planning (no matter the destination) can be a thrilling time in your life. You may find that carrying out the wedding of your dreams requires some hefty deposits as you book a caterer, photographer and other vendors. You might want to look at safeguarding your investment in your big day from the unexpected with special event insurance.

There are two types of event insurance which may be available to help protect your wedding. Event cancellation insurance may help cover the cost of lost deposits if you unexpectedly need to postpone or cancel your event. Meanwhile, event liability insurance may help cover the cost of medical bills or repairs should a guest damage the venue or you’re found legally responsible for someone else’s injuries.

Event insurance may not be available for all destinations. Check with your insurance agent to find out if your destination wedding qualifies for coverage.
Now, the Details

A typical engagement lasts 14 months, according to The Knot. But whether yours is longer or shorter, you’ll find that many of the tasks are still the same — simply adjust this timeline to your own situation.

12 TO 14 MONTHS OUT

☐ Get a binder (and/or a planning app) to track contacts, dates and to store contracts, receipts and other important documents.

☐ Research marriage requirements in your destination (is there a waiting period for a marriage license, for instance?).

☐ Set a general wedding date.

☐ Consider a wedding planner.

☐ Start compiling a guest list with addresses and emails.

☐ Research a ceremony and reception venue.

☐ Make arrangements for a site visit before you book your venue.

☐ Find out if there are travel requirements for your destination (passports, visas, vaccines, etc.).

☐ Launch a wedding website with your date and location.

☐ Send save-the-date cards or emails with details on your chosen venue (this can allow guests time to budget for and arrange travel).

☐ Ask friends and family to be a part of your bridal party (if you’re having one).

☐ Start shopping for wedding attire:
  • Dress
  • Shoes
  • Tuxedo/Suit
  • Jewelry and accessories

☐ Book caterer (if your venue doesn’t provide one).

9 MONTHS OUT

☐ Research airfare and hotel group discounts for guests. For instance, some airlines will create a discount code for guests flying to your destination (even if they depart from different airports). Be sure to post the information on your wedding website.

☐ If budget allows, plan group activities for guests like a welcome reception and/or a local excursion at your destination.

☐ Block a group of hotel rooms for guests. Provide a list of alternate hotels in different price ranges and post the information on your wedding website.

☐ Order wedding cake. Your venue may provide one, but it’s advisable to ask for details, suggests Roy. “Your package may say that a cake is included but this may mean a white, basic vanilla one-tier cake,” she says. If you have more guests than what a small sheet cake might serve or prefer something a bit jazzier, you may want an outside bakery.

☐ Book florist. An “all inclusive” package may include flowers, says Roy, but it may not be the same items (or quality) you would get if you planned a wedding at home. “Many couples end up paying for extra bouquets, boutonnieres or more flower selection,” she says.

☐ Book photographer and videographer. “Most wedding packages do not include a photographer, so this can create an extra expense,” says Roy. Some venues will provide a list of preferred vendors who can be hired and, of course, a wedding planner can also help you make reliable picks.

☐ Research and book reception/ceremony entertainment. Check with your venue for recommendations, or work with a wedding planner to find good local entertainment.

☐ Order wedding dress.

☐ Purchase or reserve groom’s attire. If you’re renting a suit or tuxedo, you might look for a vendor who accommodates destination weddings with longer rental times or the ability to ship the clothing; you can also research a local vendor if you’re planning to arrive early enough at your destination to do an advance fitting.

☐ Create master guest list with addresses.

☐ Order wedding invitations and thank-you cards.

☐ Register for wedding gifts.

☐ Research honeymoon spots (or research and book activities if you’re honeymooning at the wedding location).

☐ Get passports and visas, if needed.

☐ Shop for wedding party attire.
Now, the Details (continued)

6 MONTHS OUT
- Buy wedding rings.
- Arrange wedding day transportation for guests.
- Make honeymoon arrangements, if necessary.
- Order/reserve bridal party attire.
- Buy wedding shoes, jewelry and any other accessories.
- Choose wedding favors, if desired.
- Choose gifts for the bridal party.
- Book primping appointments for the big day, along with a trial hair and/or makeup appointment if you’re arriving at your destination a day or two in advance.

3 MONTHS OUT
- Finalize menu and other vendor details (song list for the ceremony and reception, shot list for the photography and videography and other details).
- Review service with officiant, including the wedding vows and any readings.
- Schedule rehearsal time and rehearsal dinner (or fold the dinner into a welcome party for all your guests).
- Make final updates to wedding website.
- Mail wedding invitations.
- Order marriage license, if you haven’t obtained it during a site visit.
- Finalize ceremony/reception décor.
- Review service with officiant, including the wedding vows and any readings.

1 MONTH OUT
- Extend rehearsal dinner invites.
- Follow up with guests who haven’t returned their RSVPs.
- Plan welcome notes or gift bags for arriving guests.
- Confirm arrival times with vendors.

1 TO 2 WEEKS OUT
- Confirm travel reservations and any group activities.
- Attend final dress fitting.
- Review wedding details with planner, if you have one, or with each vendor.
- Finalize seating plan.
- Give venue final meal count.
- Develop day-of timeline and delegate tasks.
- Begin packing for the wedding.
- Consider packing an emergency kit for illness or wardrobe mishaps. Potential items might include aspirin, stain wipes, a lint roller, a small sewing kit, tiny scissors (for stray threads) and super glue.
- Make a plan with your wedding planner or hotel on how to distribute welcome notes/gift bags for arriving guests.

ONCE YOU ARRIVE AT YOUR DESTINATION
- Do a walk-through of your ceremony and reception sites. Have final meetings with vendors.
- Confirm guest shuttle arrangements.
- Steam or press wedding dress and formal wear, if needed.
- Attend trial hair/makeup appointment.
- Enjoy a manicure/pedicure, other primping.
- Prepare tip and payment envelopes for officiants/vendors.
- Assemble welcome bags/notes, and confirm arrangements to have them distributed.
- Rehearse ceremony and hold rehearsal dinner/welcome party.
- Enjoy the big day!