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INTRODUCTION

Why Should You Sell Destination Weddings?

Weddings: America's Recession-Proof Business

In today's rough-and-tumble economy - with gas and energy prices going through the roof, tens of millions of Americans out of work, and predictions that even the U.S. government may run out of money soon! - guess what many Americans say they'll still spend plenty of money on? Their weddings!

Weddings may be one of the most recession-proof business sectors ever. According to TheKnot.com, "brides remain committed to planning a luxurious, memorable event and are willing to spend despite the state of the economy ... In fact, approximately one in five brides are spending more than $30,000 on their wedding, and 12 percent of brides are spending more than $40,000."

Surveys show the average wedding - NOT including the engagement ring or the honeymoon! - cost $26,984 in 2010. (Brides spent an average of $1,099 apiece on their dresses alone.) Here's a quick snapshot of the typical wedding for a U.S. couple:

- The bride's age, on average: 29
- The groom's age, on average: 31
- The average number of guests: 141 (down from 149 in 2009)
- The average wedding spend per guest: $194 (about the same as 2009)
- The average number of attendants: 4 bridesmaids, 4 groomsmen
- The average engagement length: 14 months
- The most popular engagement month: December (16 percent)
- The most popular wedding month: June (15 percent)

Destination Weddings Continue to Explode in Popularity

Every year, more and more U.S. couples choose a destination wedding. Some surveys say one in four weddings in 2010 (24 percent) were destination weddings - that's a 20 percent increase over 2008 figures!

The average destination wedding budget rang in at $20,600 in 2009 (the latest stats available), with an average of 48 guests. So, the average spend per destination wedding guest (not including their travel) is around $400 each - almost TRIPLE the amount spent per guest at a traditional wedding.
(Destination wedding couples also spend more on their honeymoons, with an average budget of $8,200 - or, 34 percent more than the honeymoon budgets of couples holding traditional ceremonies.)

And, destination weddings remain "top of mind" with all types of couples - 86 percent said in a recent survey that they considered destination wedding options, even if many of them ultimately chose a traditional ceremony.

Here's a roundup of other facts about destination wedding trends:

- About a third of all U.S. couples getting married have been married before - and, couples getting remarried (to each other, or to new spouses) are more likely to pick a destination wedding.

- Wedding vow renewal ceremonies are a growing trend - and, these couples renewing their vows also choose destination weddings more often than first-time wedding couples.

- Brides and grooms are waiting longer these days to get married (their average ages creep up year after year in surveys) - and, that fits the trend that destination wedding couples tend to be older than traditional-ceremony couples. For example, the average age of a destination bride these days is 33 (compared to 29 in the earlier survey), 70 percent have graduated college, and their average household income exceeds $110,000 (2009 figures - the latest available).

Why do more and more couples prefer destination weddings?

They want to do something different. Their family members and friends have gone the traditional church-wedding, church-basement-reception route, but they'd like to shake things up and stand out by taking their wedding on the road.

They want to keep the wedding small, intimate, relaxed, and informal. Many engaged couples will readily admit that the biggest cause of the pre-wedding stress they're feeling is the fact that the plans have gotten out of control! What was once a close-friends-and-immediate-family gathering has mushroomed into inviting (and paying food and drink costs for) distant cousins they've never met and co-workers they can't stand. Instead, destination weddings give them the perfect excuse to keep things contained and low key - with more control over who's actually coming, and more options to wear what they want and do what they want on their happy day. (For this reason, destination weddings really appeal to couples renewing their vows or getting married for the second or third time.)

They want to save money (especially if they're paying for the wedding themselves!). It's much more common for destination wedding couples to pick up the costs of their nuptials themselves.
And, though it sounds counter-intuitive (since travel is involved), many destination weddings actually cost less than their traditional counterparts. (Why? Fewer guests attend, in most cases.) So, the couples spend less money - but, they end up turning their weddings into mini-vacations with the guests they really want by their sides.

**They want a carefree event, with someone else responsible for the details.** Yes, it's true: Even the simplest destination wedding plans can still bring out the "bridezilla" (or "groomzilla") with some clients. But, once the initial decisions have been made - where they're going, how much they want to spend, and who's invited - many brides and grooms tire quickly of dealing with their guests' travel plans, finding photographers and DJs, and handling the million little issues that crop up with their weddings. Destination weddings (especially pre-packaged events with cruise lines or all-inclusive resorts) nip many of these problems in the bud.

**They want "neutral territory" for their families.** With two different sets of parents and relatives involved, many weddings devolve into shouting matches over which family is paying for what, where certain wedding events will take place, why Grandma Tilly's Bible isn't being used during the ceremony, and other disagreements. But, since everyone must travel to take part in a destination wedding, they're on common ground from the beginning on most of these questions (a huge benefit if couples come from different geographic areas or heritages or if the parents are divorced or separated.)

**They want a wedding that feels like a vacation.** Many items in the budget for a traditional wedding fall into areas that are one-time, nonrefundable, non-recurring expenses - from flowers and limousine rentals to the reception menu and the doves released at the end of the service. Why not invest that money instead into a destination wedding, where some of those funds can go instead to fun pre- and post-ceremony activities for the happy couple and their guests? Many destination weddings turn into long-weekend (or even week-long) vacations!

**They're in love with the destination.** Many couples pick their destination wedding locales based on their past travel - favorite vacation spots, or dream destinations they fell in love with years ago. So, they want to spend the most special day of their lives in that place.

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**Virgin Territory for America’s Travel Agents**

The numbers don't lie: **Destination weddings are a huge trend that really took hold in the 1990s and continue growing stronger, year after year, despite America's roller-coaster economy.** And, given the typical budgets involved, they represent a potential gold mine in revenues for travel agents eager to tap into this niche.
But, the truth is that **very few agents focus on selling destination weddings** - and, overall, four in five engaged U.S. couples never work with their local travel agent on their wedding plans!

A 2009 Brides.com study found that only 17 percent of couples chose to work with a travel agent on their wedding trips. Instead, 82 percent handled the destination wedding arrangements (including, in many cases, their guests' travel plans) on their own. Of those 82 percent, almost a third booked their trips in person at their chosen venue - meaning, they did site inspections on their own and booked directly with the venue or the supplier. (On average, they visited almost 2.8 different locations before picking their spots. And, not surprisingly, the brides were the decision makers - 96 percent said they took part in location research for their weddings, compared to about 50 percent of the grooms.)

So, why don't more travel agents go after this lucrative business?

- It's a big marketing challenge, because most consumers have absolutely no idea that travel agents do this kind of work. Many couples (especially younger consumers) have grown accustomed to doing their own travel planning - and, even if they already use a local travel agent for other trips, they don't have any reason to assume that the agent might be interested in (or capable of) planning their destination wedding, too.

- Until now, there's been almost no organized effort within the travel industry, cutting across all types of suppliers and trips, to train agents in selling destination weddings. Sure, individual cruise lines, all-inclusive resort companies, and even destinations like Las Vegas have offered their own separate classes and fam trips to encourage agents to send wedding couples their way. But, there's no group dedicated to offering general sales training for destination weddings, or continuing education to keep skills sharp, or opportunities to network with other agents who want to specialize in this profitable niche. Think the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) for cruises, or Outdoor Traveler Destinations (OTD) for outdoor travel - but, there's nothing like them for destination weddings. (Note: We're working right now to fix that!)

**Why Should You Focus on Destination Weddings?**

Travel agents who are eager to make more money and boost their bookings - and, who aren't afraid to learn new skills, work hard to find new prospects, and operate a very organized business - destination weddings make bottom-line sense. Most agents - even those with little travel experience - can learn quickly how to sell these types of trips.

Though this manual will cover the nitty-gritty details of planning every aspect of a destination wedding, remember that the 80/20 rule applies here:
Eighty percent of your destination wedding clients will probably end up booking the same few types of trips: pre-packaged weddings offered by cruise lines and all-inclusive resort operators.

So, travel agents who are just starting out can easily get up to speed on representing and selling these types of destination wedding trips to their clients.

Beyond these options, of course, you can quickly jump into fully customized wedding trips that you organize from scratch, with the help of wedding coordinators in other countries (or with your own vendor contacts). But, in the beginning, you don't face a huge barrier to entry in order to start selling destination weddings.

Also, this niche is constantly growing, despite the shaky economy. While your clients may be cutting back or downsizing other travel plans, the ones getting married continue to spend big bucks on their weddings. National surveys show more and more engaged couples eager to travel for their nuptials. Just read any travel trade publication to see the latest articles on big hotel chains, destinations, and cruise lines eager to tap into this market with new programs and services!

These types of bookings allow you to work - truly and honestly - as a travel counselor, not an order taker. Despite the talk about travel agents being professional travel counselors, the truth is that too many agents spend their working days taking orders: Clients call in or email the agency after they've already done their homework on the Internet, they place the order with us, and that's it. What sets destination wedding bookings apart is that - due to their customized, complex nature (especially if the trips involve more than just the happy couple) - they force agents to act as counselors! These trips make us put our thinking caps on, solving issues that arise, planning the trips to avoid pitfalls that consumers may not know about, dealing with different suppliers, and making everything run smoothly. They're much more fun to handle than the typical $299 three-day Bahamas cruise sale!

You can quickly expand your client base after you've booked a few successful weddings. Like any niche, getting those first few clients can be a big challenge as you enter this specialty. You don't have a track record or testimonials to point to, so your initial clients are trusting you on faith that you can take care of their wedding trips. Once you have a few destination weddings under your belt, though, it becomes much easier to get referrals from those clients (happy couples talk to lots of other engaged couples!). Word will spread more quickly through your marketing area that you do this type of work. And, if you specialize in specific types of destination weddings (e.g., Napa Valley wine country weddings, destination weddings with pets, hot-air balloon ceremonies), you can use your web site and social media tools to find clients around the world, well beyond your hometown. Plus, all of
those couples - and their wedding parties, and their guests - may think of you first the next time they book their vacations and other travel plans.

Almost every destination wedding turns into a group booking - increasing your sales and profits tremendously without adding a lot of extra work in the process. Here's the big secret that makes destination weddings one of the most profitable (but most overlooked) niches for travel agents:

Unless the couple is eloping, most of these trips turn almost automatically into group bookings - but, they don't require a huge amount of extra effort once the initial trip is planned.

Even the most stripped-down destination weddings (the happy couple, two sets of parents, a maid of honor, and a best man) involve eight passengers - just enough, or slightly below, the minimums for many suppliers' group rates to kick in. And, it only takes a few more guests for your wedding booking to turn into a solid group - triggering everything from higher commission levels to group amenity points!

The nice surprise? Those extra people don't usually cause you a lot of extra time to handle. Once the initial itinerary is set and wedding plans are made, many of these guests going to the wedding will follow the same basic travel steps, because of course they must arrive in time for the ceremony and they're likely to depart soon after. Because you're not customizing the travel plans for most guests, then, every extra individual or couple or family attending the wedding can be booked efficiently while also earning you substantial commissions in the process.

For example, let's say you book Couple A on a four-night Caribbean resort getaway. The rate is $799 ppdo (air/land). You're at 12 percent commission with the resort operator, so you've just made $191.76. However, Couple B books the same package with you as a destination wedding. They bring both sets of parents and two friends apiece. Also, they add on the resort's $499 wedding ceremony package (officiant, photos, and a wedding cake) that's fully commissionable. This booking involves 10 guests (for not much more work than Couple A's two guests) at $799 each, plus the extra $499, or $8,489 total - with commissions totaling $1,018.78. Again, this extra profit comes without a ton of extra work, since the basic trip is the same for everybody.

You'll face almost no immediate, in-person local competition for these bookings - and, your presence in your local community will actually be a HUGE selling point! If you decided to enter the bridal gown business in your city or town, you'd compete right off the bat with existing bridal retail shops, plus the "big box" stores that have wedding dresses in stock, and other local dress shops and boutiques that can make gowns from scratch or order them quickly (plus, of course, web sites that sell bridal gowns and bridal gown manufacturers that sell directly over the Internet).
What if you wanted instead to sell wedding cakes? You're competing with every independent bakery within a decent drive of your immediate neighborhood, plus the "big box" stores that have bakeries, plus the grocery stores that have bakeries, plus home-based bakers who're known in the community for earning a little extra money selling wedding cakes they bake themselves (and, again, the web sites and online bakeries that sell via the Internet).

But, if you specialize in destination weddings, think about it: How many retailers in your city or town will truly compete with you locally? Few travel agencies (storefront or home-based) focus on these types of trips. Bridal retail shops may distribute brochures or make referrals to a handful of direct-selling travel suppliers in this area, but they won't sell the travel directly in most cases. In fact, your only serious competition may be the wedding couples themselves, who're booking with suppliers directly because they don't know someone like you exists locally to work with them!

Plus, you have one HUGE competitive advantage as a locally based destination wedding specialist that the big online travel agencies and direct-selling suppliers will NEVER match: You're based locally. You're physically there in your community, so that you can meet in person with many of your clients. You'll be much easier for them to reach if they have questions. You're there on the spot if needed to meet with relatives and friends about the trip. And, you're right there if something goes wrong with the trip. (Imagine the happy couple trying to reach customer service overseas if problems occur on their wedding trip, but they've booked instead with an online travel site!)

Too many travel agents fail to capitalize on their local presence as an enormous selling advantage. With a complex specialty like destination weddings, don't forget this big advantage you have!

Now, of course, not everything will be completely rosy if you decide to specialize in destination weddings:

- **Planning and managing these bookings will require agents to be extremely organized, to pay attention to every detail, and to remain tactful with clients always.** If you make an error booking the typical cruise or tour or hotel stay, you can usually fix the problem easily or you can "make the client good" by paying for your mistake, upgrading the clients into a better cabin or room, etc. But, if you make a mistake with a destination wedding trip - or, even if something happens that's totally out of your control (an unexpected hurricane warning, or red algae in the waters off the beach), all bets are off! Why? These trips aren't just typical getaways - they're planned as "once in a lifetime" events that usually involve your clients' family members and best friends, too. So, tensions are magnified, and small errors or mishaps can turn into disasters quickly. So, if you want to plunge into this specialty, ask yourself first if you can run your travel business in a truly organized fashion. If you're not currently keeping updated files on
short-weekend cruises and simple tours, are you really ready to handle more detailed, more complex bookings for wedding parties? And, can you keep your emotions in check and remain tactful with clients (e.g., brides, grooms, and their families and friends) yelling at you, over the phone or in person, even if you didn't do anything wrong? If so, you may be ready for this challenging niche!

- **You're forced to rely on the quality and dependability of your supplier, vendors, and coordinators** (since you won't attend many of these weddings in person yourself). Many agents booking large groups on a cruise ship or an international tour sometimes escort these groups themselves. But, as your destination wedding business grows, you simply won't have the time to do so - and, every time you do, your travel expenses eat into your profits from the trip. So, you'll find yourself depending on your suppliers to be your eyes, ears, and hands "on the ground" with most wedding trips. As your specialty business grows, you'll make contacts along the way with top-notch wedding coordinators and vendors in key destinations to whom you'll turn again and again, building solid relationships that will come in handy when, inevitably, something goes wrong one day with the plans for a destination wedding.

- **Destination wedding clients tend to have a higher "do it yourself" tendency than other clients.** A 2010 survey by TheKnot found that, in the last three months leading up to the wedding day, brides spend an average of 11 hours a week planning their events! Even the clients who trust you the most will end up asking inane questions or second-guessing your recommendations on these bookings - so, you must get used to that. But, one big selling point you can offer your clients is your ability to take a lot of this planning pressure (once the initial groundwork is laid) off their hands, so that they can focus their micro-managing efforts on other aspects of the wedding. That same study showed that almost 50 percent of the surveyed brides said that planning their wedding was more stressful than they'd expected - so, the more you can take these chores off the hands of your brides, the happier they will be in the end!

**The Final Word**

If we haven't scared you off this specialty yet, you've probably concluded that destination weddings pose a significantly profitable niche that - with a little training and preparation on your part - could re-energize your travel business in the next few months.

Our goal is to give you the tools and resources to build your destination wedding travel sales. And, if you start with the right attitude - that you're willing to dig in, learn what you need to learn, and try new steps to expand your travel business - you'll get off to a great start with the following chapters!
SECTION 1
Planning and Managing the Logistics of Destination Weddings

Every single weekend, in thousands of cities and towns across America, the same scenes play out:

Small crowds (men in suits, women in dresses) gather in churches and hotel ballrooms filled with candles, satin ribbons, tulle bows, and flower arrangements to observe a long, drawn-out ceremony involving two people (who may be your dear friends or relatives, or whom you may barely know).

Then, everyone heads to a reception for rubber-chicken hors d'oeuvres, the best wine from Costco, and music by a tired band or a DJ who talks too much between the songs.

The night ends with throwing rice at the happy couple who’re most focused on dashing to the waiting limousine than spending time with their guests.

In America, that’s the typical, traditional wedding!

Nowadays, though, more couples – as many as 40 percent, according to recent national surveys – dream about a different approach: a destination wedding. **What sets destination weddings apart from traditional ceremonies?**

- **They revolve around travel.** The location is never the couple’s home town – it’s a vacation spot, a treasured destination to which the couple, their wedding party, and their friends and family members travel and stay.

- **They last more than one day.** The schedule will include the wedding day, of course, with the actual ceremony – but that day may fall in the middle of time spent in the destination before the ceremony and after the wedding, making it a true adventure for the guests.

**Prequalifying Questions**

As a professional travel agent focusing on destination weddings, your first challenge in working with new clients planning their wedding trips is prequalifying them – gauging their true interest in booking a destination wedding and narrowing down their interests and desires so that you can craft a proposed itinerary for them.
Here’s a short list of helpful questions you should ask:

“Why are you thinking about a destination wedding?”

Give your prospects as much time as they need to answer this one. Their answers will reveal many helpful hints:

- How much they’ve thought about the wedding (are they very definite, with specific property names and dates already in hand, or do they still sound fairly loose and open to your suggestions?)

- Whether they’re in agreement on the plans (it’s a bad sign if one person does the talking, while the other half of the couple sits silently with arms crossed!)

- The destination(s) they have in mind for the wedding (not just specific places, but the types of destinations they want – sun and beach, or ski and snow, or wine country, etc.)

- Other key details such as the time of year and the budget they have in mind

“Do you feel comfortable dealing with the details of your destination wedding?”

Though you’ll be coordinating the travel arrangements, of course, destination weddings still require numerous decisions by the couple – from handling the officiant and the legal details of the wedding ceremony to tracking travel plans to ensure that Cousin Joey in the wedding party has indeed booked his airline ticket. This question will help you gauge how much support you’ll get from the couple along the way (will they prove accessible when you need them, or will you find yourself constantly tracking them down for answers?).

“How involved do you want to be in the planning of the trip?”

This question accomplishes two things: It tells you how closely you will need to consult the couple on the tiniest details (and whether, based on workloads and family obligations, they will make themselves available to answer your questions along the way), and it gives you an indication of how customized the trip may need to be (i.e., whether you can look first at pre-packaged resort or cruise wedding trips or you will need to build the trip from scratch).
“How many people do you want to invite – and, in general, who are they?”

Destination weddings come in all sizes – from the happy couple eloping together to weeklong affairs with more than 100 guests taking over an entire resort complex. Now’s the time to get a rough estimate of the number of guests who may attend the destination wedding – you don’t need a firm count, but just a rough estimate at this stage. That number will prove critical as you begin winnowing down the list of possible destinations, resorts, ships, and suppliers you’ll need to consider for the proposed itinerary.

“Can your family and friends carve out the time to attend your destination wedding – and, can they afford it?”

These answers will force your prospects to think about the guests they’re planning to invite – not just the immediate wedding party, but rank-and-file guests who may need to bring “plus ones” and children whose travel expenses could add up fast. This question will sharpen the rough count you’re dealing with (e.g., couples may rein in their guest lists once they really think about the travel expenses for individual attendees). And, don’t focus just on costs – think about issues such as fear of flying (e.g., is there any “must invite” guest such as an aging relative who’s scared of getting on an airplane?).

Feel free to add your own questions to this list, as you gain more experience in dealing with these types of bookings. However, it definitely pays to assemble a short list of prequalifying questions that you always ask prospects to insure that they’re good candidates for a destination wedding (before you spend a lot of time and effort planning their trip, only to discover later that they should have gone with a traditional ceremony instead).

**The Three Big Questions You Must Always Ask New Clients**

Once you feel comfortable that your prospects are indeed ready to start the destination wedding planning, you should dive right into three critical questions that will affect every aspect of the trip:

**Question # 1: “Who’s paying for the destination wedding – and, what’s the budget?”**

After raising children and buying or building a house, weddings are generally the biggest financial investment a couple will make. Unexpected costs can arise with little warning, and budget line items can get out of hand fast. Plus, unlike that 30-year house mortgage, the couple (and their parents or other parties helping with the bills) will have only a year or less to pay for everything!

The more important part of this question is the beginning – who’s paying for the wedding costs? Though experts say the bride’s family
typically shoulders most of the burden for paying traditional wedding costs, there’s no firm etiquette these days with destination wedding expenses. It’s not unusual for the couple to pay some of the costs, while parents pick up the rest, or for the couple to pay all of the bills, or for family members and friends to chip in (especially by paying their own travel expenses, of course). At this stage, you just need a short list of the individuals who will pay some or all of the costs—and, a general estimate of what they’re prepared to spend.

Here’s one big tip offered by many destination wedding agents: Urge your clients not to start with their wedding dreams and then figure out how to pay for that trip—instead, **start with an idea of the available budget, and design the dream destination wedding that fits that budget.** If you let clients go off on tangents describing their visions of renting a private island for their nuptials, only to find their budget will barely accommodate a quick weekend getaway for the two of them, you may end up wasting a lot of your valuable selling time as an agent.

The forms packet included with this manual includes a Destination Wedding Budget Planning Worksheet. You can use this form (“as is,” or customized to fit your preferences) with clients as you begin discussing the budget components. You don’t need to fill in every blank field in this form at the first client meeting, but it will give you a framework for talking with your clients about the different types of expenses that crop up with destination weddings.

Generally, you’ll find **six different categories of expenses** in the typical destination wedding:

- **The site visit:** It’s not uncommon for couples (or the primary party paying the bills!) to request an on-site visit to the location being considered for the wedding, so that they will have a firsthand look at the facilities and services offered. The primary expenses involved are the airfare, lodging, and on-site transportation and meals during the site visit.

- **Wedding communications:** This category includes “save the date” cards and wedding invitations, a wedding web site (if desired), on-site signage/programs/schedules, and thank-you notes.

- **Wedding travel:** Now’s the time to add in the travel expenses for the happy couple (airfares, lodging, and on-site transportation, meals, and entertainment) and for any other individuals (e.g., parents) whose travel expenses should be covered in the budget rather than paid separately.
• **The destination wedding ceremony:** This category covers any venue rental and preparation costs, the officiant expenses (honorarium plus travel, if needed, and the marriage license and any related legal filing fees), the on-site decor and music during the actual ceremony, photographers and videographers, the rings, and the bride’s and groom’s attire (including overseas shipping costs and on-site pressing and cleaning as needed).

• **The reception:** As with a traditional ceremony, the reception costs may include venue rental and prep, the catering expenses (labor, food, and equipment rentals), on-site music and decor, alcohol, the cake, and transportation.

• **Other wedding trip activities:** These expenses will include (if applicable) a welcome party for arriving guests, the rehearsal dinner, parties or excursions for bridesmaids or groomsmen, a farewell brunch, and other activities that will not be paid for separately by guests.

At this early stage, you may not have hard-and-fast numbers to fill in the budget worksheet. In fact, estimates may depend greatly on the destination and suppliers involved, which means you’ll need quotes from them before you can complete the worksheet. However, this form will be a big help for your clients as the planning progresses, so that they can maintain control and stay informed along the way.

As the budget comes together, **help your clients manage their “sticker shock”** by asking them helpful questions:

“What are your priorities for this destination wedding – the dress you’ll be wearing, a specific type of ceremony you’ve always dreamed about, the idea that your guests should have a good time?” If you must cut corners later, it’s helpful if the couple focus on what’s most important to them for this trip.

“How many ‘must haves’ should we always leave in the budget?” In other words, what items must we leave until the end for adjusting or cutting, while everything else is fair game?

**Question # 2: “Who’s coming to the destination wedding?”**

Don’t worry about following traditional etiquette rules for destination weddings. Couples should not feel pressured to invite everyone on their Facebook list or anyone who’s asked them to be in a wedding party in the past! Given the travel costs involved, many destination weddings are inherently smaller affairs with attendees who have a true connection with the couple.
Start with the wedding party list. Again, there are no hard-and-fast rules here, but your clients may consider having the traditional maid of honor and best man, plus one or more bridesmaids and groomsmen. Other possible wedding party guests might include ushers, readers, and a keeper of the guest book.

Then, it’s time to make an initial guest list. Your clients should start with a list of everyone they would like to invite, and then prioritize that list by putting “A” or “B” or “C” beside each name: A for the guests they must absolutely have with them, B for other family members and friends they’d like to have on hand, and C for everyone else. Once you know the capacity of the chosen venue, your clients can send “save the date” cards or invitations first to the A list, then as many B guests as spaces remain, and so on. Many destination wedding clients also plan a reception for their return home to which they can invite everyone who could not attend the actual wedding trip.

Remind your clients to think long and hard about their final guest list, before they send out any invitations. Is the size manageable, so that they can spend quality time with everyone without feeling rushed or pressured? Can they stand spending a few days “on vacation” with these people? And, are they asking anyone for the sole reason of “reciprocating” or just being nice?

**Question # 3: “Who’s planning the destination wedding?”**

This question doesn’t really mean the decision makers – it really refers to who will serve as the day-to-day contact for trip details. In other words, will your clients entrust you to handle these details and keep them posted – or, will they insist on having you clear every detail with them before things are confirmed? Others in the mix may include the wedding coordinator for the resort or cruise ship or an independent wedding planner or consultant. Ideally, of course, you will be the one in charge of the details!

**Now’s the time to discuss any planning or coordinating fees you may charge** besides the commissions earned from arranging the travel. If your clients pick a pre-packaged wedding trip from a resort operator or cruise line, and the arrangements are trouble-free, you may be perfectly happy with the commissions generated from the trip. However, you may need to charge a fee to cover your time involved in planning the destination wedding – especially if you’re customizing the arrangements or even planning the entire trip and ceremony from scratch. If you charge a fee, you should create a standard agreement, contract, or letter of understanding that spells out the fee amounts, your responsibilities, and the required payment dates.