

Dream Trip or Too Difficult?

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'Destination' weddings ask guests for more commitment.

It wasn't long ago that attending a friend's wedding meant spending a Saturday night eating prime rib and dancing to cover versions of "Louie Louie" and "Brown Eyed Girl."

Now, it might involve three days in Mexico or a long weekend in Maine. There could be scuba diving, cruises, square dancing or a marshmallow roast at a national park.

With a growing number of couples opting to exchange vows far from where they and most of their guests live, saying "yes" to an invite has taken on a whole new meaning.

What's a modern wedding guest to do? A primer:

Do you have to attend?

"People who are having a destination wedding absolutely expect certain people can't attend the wedding for financial or schedule reasons," says Carley Roney, co-founder of the wedding planning Web site TheKnot.com. But she advises against mentioning your finances when you decline. "It's such a guilt-tripping kind of thing," she says. "Come up with a very appropriate reason, even if it has to be a white lie."

"Couples should give their guests at least three or four months to plan by sending out detailed Save-the-Date cards," says Lei Lydle, founder of the Atlanta-based WeddingBasics.com, which publishes bridal Web sites in several U.S. cities.

Must you stay where the bride and groom suggest?

The couple will likely offer information on a range of accommodations, and they may have blocked rooms at several locations.

"In a situation where the bride and groom have not been so thoughtful," says etiquette expert Samantha von Sperling, founder and director of Polished Social Image Consultants in New York, "go online and book your own accommodations and then you can call them and say, 'I'm sorry but I couldn't afford the place you picked, so I've found something else just down the road. But I promise I'll be there and be on time.'"

Do you have to attend every planned event?

Destination weddings often involve a raft of events, including a cocktail party to welcome guests and a brunch the morning after the



ceremony. If you're skipping something, let someone in the bridal party know so that no one waits or searches for you.

What if you've got kids?

If children are invited (with destination weddings, they often are), your hosts may have some childcare planned. Ask whether kids are welcome at all the weekend's events, then ask if babysitting is available during any that are grown-ups only. If nothing has been arranged, you might contact the hotel where the wedding is happening or where you're staying and inquire about babysitting services.

Some guests, like New Yorkers Michele Clarke-Ceres and her husband, Rudy Ceres, see destination weddings as an opportunity for a

private getaway sans kids.

"We take advantage of taking time away to just spend time alone," she says.

Do you have to bring a gift?

"You can definitely scale back," says Roney. "But unless they specifically say, 'The present is your presence,' you should buy a gift, even if it's a \$30 something off their registry. People who are in that age range where they are going to a wedding every weekend can chip in with a group of people and do a group gift."

Amid all the travel plans and scheduling difficulties, remember that "being invited to witness their union is an honor," says von Sperling. "Even if it is an inconvenience."