

Factors to Consider Before Saying 'I Do'

to a Destination Wedding

written by Christine Giordano



Sweeping beaches, wild, galloping horses, and an open-air, white stone chapel were all part of Yemi and Danielle's dream destination wedding in Jamaica, but the perfect day took some planning.

The Roses were born on the island, and knew to plan their wedding at least six months in advance. Setting the date in January provided a cooler climate, and brightly-colored bird of paradise flowers presented the theme for their festive day. They found their pastor and chapel through recommendations from a nondenominational church. They had their food catered through the San Souci resort, and rented its beach for their reception.

Picking Prospect Plantation Chapel as the place to say "I do" was never a hard choice. "It was the most beautiful church I've ever been in," said Yemi, now a 32-year old New York financier.

When scouting the fantasy location, he drove up a narrow, dirt road and passed wild horses and the only camels on the island. The parking lot clearing gave way to a massive stone chapel with rounded, open-air archways, whose setting afforded a romantic view of the island's cool, lush green, multi-canopied rainforests. Built with stone and hardwoods, exclusively from the Prospect estate, its interior was lit by hanging lanterns that created a magical ambience.

Because the chapel remains open to the environment, the couple decorated it the night and morning before the ceremony. They brought their own organ, sound system and musician, and kept the ceremony short since the chapel's chairs sat 90 guests and their guest list was 125. Because ancient Jamaican laws forbid marriages after sunset, they set their ceremony for 3 p.m. -- also an ideal time for photographs.

Before the ceremony, a husband and wife team of photographers from Sungold, took intimate, pre-wedding dressing room shots of both bride and groom. Thirty-minutes after the elegant ceremony, the beach reception offered cool breezes, island foods, and music to dance the evening away.

Planning Your Dream

Romantic destination weddings can be dreams come true, but take the Roses' advice and give yourself a year to six months lead time.

"You're not going to be able to book a good chapel if you don't do it in advance. Resorts offer package deals. But if you want something truly unique and want to get involved in the culture, find it ahead of time," advised Yemi. Although some resorts have arrangements with churches, travel experts suggest to visit the island, get to know your wedding planner, and investigate details, such as what documents you'll need, and how to get marriage licenses.

Also keep in mind that the Caribbean's hurricane season runs from July through November, which also tends to coincide with much of "wedding season", advises Maya Northen, a travel planner and president of Chimera Travel, LLC. Have an inside venue ready. For weddings during hot seasons, provide drinking water at the entrance of the chapel or venue.

It's a good idea to check out passport entry requirements for guests, direct flights, and find out if the island's tourism association offers package deals and information for couples seeking to get married, said Northen. (The local tourism department can also help with local florists, jewelers, and wedding vendors.) Determine if your location offers an on site wedding planner.

When Mark Hubman married his wife earlier this year at a resort, he arrived on Monday and had the ceremony on Wednesday. "As far as Jamaica goes, you have to be there a certain number of days before the wedding is legal,"

said Hubman, who had a small, intimate ceremony. (There is a 24-hour waiting period for a Jamaican marriage license, provided that applications have been made in advance.) He said the wedding was “99 percent perfect,” but advised to get arrangements in writing, especially if you need an administrator to help you during your wedding. In a different culture, it’s always a good idea to cement all of the details.

Choosing the right music is important to set the mood. Hiring Mento bands to play island music while guests saunter in is becoming increasingly popular. Some resorts offer the opportunity to listen to bands in advance.

Also sample different island foods from caterers before your big day. Decide whether you’d like a buffet or eating stations. Classic Jamaican Island foods are jerk chicken and pork, ackee & saltfish (codfish), rice and beans, curried goat, yams, plantains and bananas, fresh juice and sour sop, a fruit delicacy.

“Come down for a weekend planning session,” said Marcia McLaughlin of Half Moon’s Allure Resort. “Meet photographers, florists, your chef, and hear your band.”

For beach receptions, keep guests from sinking heels and dress shoes in the sand by offering a tastefully decorated basket of flip-flops of different sizes.

Determine how guests will get from the church to the reception. Consider transporting them with a bus, helicopter, and, of course, providing a map. Give guests about 30 minutes to get there.

Above all, imagine what your dream ceremony would be, decide how much you will spend, and try to match it with a location. Jamaica can create unforgettable dreams to last a lifetime. All it takes is good planning for your dream to come true.

