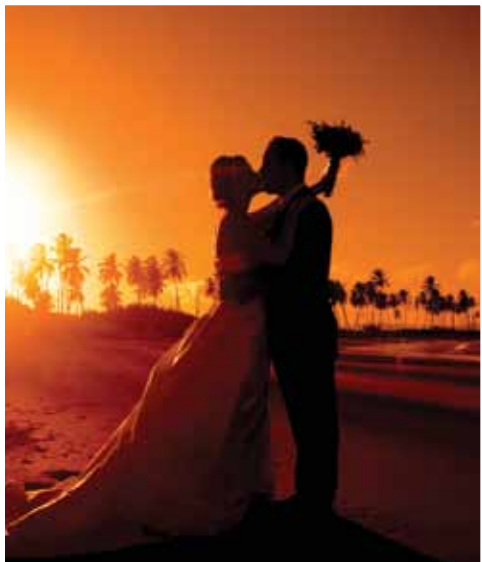


planning your *Destination*



I was initially contacted by my clients to help in the planning of their honeymoon. The newly engaged couple was in the early stages of planning their wedding and they were soon overwhelmed by the magnitude of the process. They were discouraged by the advance preparation needed to execute the wedding of their dreams, not to mention their guest list was growing while their budget was dwindling. They kept thinking of their honeymoon and how nice it would be to get married on a beach with just family and close friends. Thus evolved a destination wedding.

Wedding

A SPECIAL TIME FOR EVERYONE



THE RIGHT LOCATION

Knowing that their first choice was to be married on a beach, we focused on the Caribbean, where most of the year the weather is warm and tropical. Avoiding hurricane season, we zeroed in on a suitable timeframe. The process included looking at destinations that had decent airfare, reasonable accommodations, and offered the services of a wedding coordinator. We narrowed our search by looking at the requirements imposed for a U.S. citizen to be legally married on each island. Through a process of elimination, we chose Dreams Punta Cana Resort, an all-inclusive resort in the Dominican Republic where the guests could enjoy

Family and friends jump for joy at Sasha and Chris's wedding.



all their meals, drinks, and activities for one set cost.

Although Dreams has several resorts in the D.R., we chose this particular resort based on the availability of the judge who would legalize their marriage. The couple wanted to be married in the late afternoon or early evening with a dinner reception to follow. Apparently there is one judge in Punta Cana who officiates weddings for Dreams, and he works his way up the coast from 9 am until 7 pm on a daily basis. We chose Dream's most northern resort to guarantee that the judge would be there later in the day.

The paperwork needed was minimal: copies of passports,





Above: Chris and Sasha exchange vows. Center: Father and bride. Right: A beautiful cake for a beautiful setting.

Comments from the Guests

Bride and Groom

"It was a great experience working with you throughout the process, from choosing the location to you going above and beyond with all aspects of the planning. It was truly our dream wedding and honeymoon and included all of the most important elements a big wedding would have."

Mother of the Bride

"It was a wonderful experience! Instead of the wedding being just a one-day event, all of us were able to share five days together for this very special event."

Father of the Bride

"The wedding was beautiful, and Sasha was the most lovely bride ever. Excursions were fantastic as were the beach, spa, and pool at the resort."

Family of Groom

"This was the most relaxing way to celebrate a wedding. The wedding was beautiful, and the small intimate group that went made it extra special. I would highly recommend a destination wedding to anyone."

original birth certificates, and notarized single status. These were sent to a firm in the U.S. that translated everything into Spanish and provided the documentation needed by law to be married in the D.R. All of this was about \$250 and only took a few weeks to process. Once we had scheduled the judge, we arranged accommodations and flights to arrive in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, three days prior to the wedding date to fulfill the residency requirements.

ALL-INCLUSIVE PACKAGE

We contacted the wedding coordinator at Dreams, whom we would work with throughout the entire process. She provided us with four different wedding packages to choose from. We chose Dreams Ultimate Wedding Package. For a cost of less than \$3,000 (over and above the cost of flights and accommodations), we were provided with the following:

- Services of a justice of the peace or minister
- Wedding organization and personalization of a wedding coordinator
- Preparation and ironing of the wedding dress and groom's tuxedo or suit
- Personal dressing assistant
- Use of the wedding gazebo or beachfront arbor
- Bride's bouquet plus two boutonnieres and two corsages for parents or witnesses
- Special dinner party for up to 20 guests staying at the hotel
- One natural floral centerpiece for the bride and groom dinner table and one natural floral centerpiece for the ceremonial table
- Wedding cake and sparkling wine for 20 guests
- One hour cocktail party with hors d'oeuvres for up to 20 guests staying at the hotel
- Special turn-down service
- Bride's hairstyling and makeup application for ceremony
- Spa treatments
- 50 full-color photos and wedding album and a video of the ceremony
- Live Caribbean music trio (1 set).



At this point, we were basically done with our planning. There would be no weekends spent tasting cakes, visiting florists, or choosing place cards or musicians. This had already been done for us.

The wedding group arrived on Sunday. The soon-to-be bride and groom met with the wedding coordinator to finalize details such as choice of meals, floral arrangements, and location of the wedding and reception. She assisted in making their spa reservations and set up excursions and activities for the guests. She reconfirmed the site for the rehearsal dinner at no additional cost.

AN AMAZING WEDDING DAY

On Wednesday evening they were married on the beach, just as they had dreamed, with a beautiful reception to follow. For those who didn't want the evening to end, the disco and casino were available. On Friday, the guests went home and the bride and groom stayed on for a few days to enjoy their honeymoon and a romantic private candlelight dinner for two on the beach.

While destination weddings are not for everyone (especially not the control freak), they offer a wonderful value and a relaxing time for all, turning a one-day event into a family and friend reunion as well as a vacation for everyone. 🍷

Debbie Johnson has been in the travel business for 25 years. She works as a travel consultant and provides personalized service and expertise in vacation planning.



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