



Coupling her therapy degree and extensive experience in the wedding industry, Mary Dann-McNamee offers advice and guidance to wedding planners throughout the country through career counseling and a 3-day mentorship program (a chance to shadow Mary as she produces a fabulous celebration). In January 2008 Mary launched gifts and stationery on her website which includes The Mary Dann Collection. These items can be purchased on her website along with her inspirational DVD's: "The Path of the Wedding Planner" and the "The Balanced Planner". Mary published her first book "Wedding Wisdom" in Spring 2009, filled with tips, insights, forms and photographs for planning a perfect wedding for yourself or clients. www.info@marydann.com

TOP 10

DESTINATION WEDDING TIPS

I love Destination Weddings because they can be a wedding and honeymoon all in one! It screams unique and memorable right out of the gate. It allows the couple to create more memories with their family and friends over several days, rather than just one. I have listed some of my favorite tips:

BY MARY DANN-McNAMEE

GET A PROFESSIONAL

1 If you've signed up for a wedding package, the services of a planner are probably included. If not, try to earmark part of your budget (about 10 percent of the total) for a professional wedding planner. A professional wedding planner can shoulder the burden of researching, auditioning, and securing local vendors – especially if local vendors speak English only as a second language. Your planner is your "go-to person", behind-the-scenes, creating gift bags for guests, greeting everyone at the airport, keeping people busy with fun activities once there, handling special requests (babysitters, dry cleaners, and so on), and getting everyone where they need to be on time.

SCHEDULE A TEST DRIVE

2 Remember, unlike a wedding in your hometown, guests are dependent on you once they reach the destination. Make sure you provide transportation to and from the airport, as well as to all the events of the weekend. Insist that bus drivers do a dry run of the route so they don't get lost between the ceremony and reception.

TAKE A VISIT

3 You'll need to scout and secure your key venues – church, reception, hotels for guests, various party locations – and local suppliers such as caterers, florists, and photographers. Next – or during a second trip – you'll need to schedule "tastings" with your caterer, see sample bouquets from the florist, plan a hair and makeup session with a salon, and preferably, organize activities (golf, tennis, walking tours, museums) for everyone.

VENDOR CHECKUPS

4 If you must hire your vendors sight unseen, ask the venue for preferred referrals or if our venue doesn't have a catering manager or point person, search out the catering manager from the most luxurious local resort. Vendors on the luxury resort list are a proven professional and have a vested interest in making sure they go beyond the "call of duty". Ask for 2 or 3 references and be sure the references are people for whom the vendor did an event similar to yours. For example, a recommendation from a couple who had 20 guests doesn't help if you're inviting 100. Also ask for the names of other vendors who worked those events and use them as further references regarding the company in question.

BE CONSCIOUS OF GRATITUDE

5 A good way to make nice with the local vendors is to send handwritten thank-you notes and even little gifts when you book their services. (Remember that they can literally make or break your wedding, and a little goes a long way toward getting them on your side.) During the event itself, it's wise to have plenty of small bills on hand for palm-greasing, especially in foreign countries and resorts.

B.Y.O.P

6 Bring your own pros. Don't hesitate to fly in talent you trust from home for critical aspects such as photography, videography, stylists and decor design (lighting, flowers). These vendors can work with local vendors in a supervisory capacity to avoid any communication mishaps.

CHAT WITH YOUR FRIENDS

7 Tell your bridal party about the destination before you ask them to stand by your side so that they can gracefully decline if finances are tight.

RELAX AND REJOICE

8 Don't keep a constant eye on the time. Remember that many tropical islands run on "island time" – things happen when they happen -- and keep an open mind. Minor mishaps can sometimes make for the best memories.

PRE-WEDDING PAPERWORK

9 I suggest you get your certified marriage license paperwork signed and sealed before you travel to your destination. There may even be a local vendor that comes to your home and completes a confidential marriage license for a small fee. All public marriage license have to be done at the courthouse and an official (minister or judge) needs to sign and send in the paperwork.

WELCOME YOUR GUESTS

10 Be sure to place a gift basket in each room full of essentials for the trip (suntan lotion, chap sick mints, tissue paper for the tears,) and goodies that will remind them of the setting – calypso cd's, cookbooks, samples of native food, or crafts from local artisans are all good options.