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SARAH PEREZ PHOTOGRAPHY
OPPOSITE: GREER GATTUSO
PHOTOGRAPHY

WHETHER YOU'VE GOT THREE MONTHS OR A YEAR TO PULL OFF A PARTY, MARRYING AWAY IS DOABLE. "ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IN ANY TIME SPAN," ASSURES CRYSTAL FOLZ, WEDDING COORDINATOR AT ONE&ONLY OCEAN CLUB IN THE BAHAMAS. HERE'S HOW.

By Brooke Showell

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a gold pocket watch. The watch is round with Roman numerals and a chain. The hand is wearing a dark suit jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

*Plan Your
Destination
Wedding in Any
Time Frame*



ninety days



If spending more than a season planning the big day sounds daunting (or you know you'll change your mind about cake flavors a hundred times), streamlining the process to three months reduces the guesswork. Even better: It can go off without a hitch. "One of the best weddings I've ever planned was completely fast-track and was chock-full of details," says event planner Jung Lee of Fete.

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE: TOP LEFT: LAURA GRIER OF BEAUTIFUL DAY PHOTOGRAPHY; NICK RADFORD; MATT MILLER/DIAMOND EYES (WEAREDIAMONDEYES.COM); LOVEISABIGDEAL.COM; IMAGE SOURCE/ALAMY; AARON HOSKINS PHOTOGRAPHY; KT MERRY; SHUTTERSTOCK



FIND THE DRESS

If going the custom route, ask upfront which designers can create a dress in four weeks or less — you'll want a delivery date two months before the wedding so you'll have time for any adjustments. Focus on lighter fabrics and simpler designs that have a better chance of a quick turnaround, says Terry Hall, fashion director of New York City bridal retailer Kleinfeld.

organize the journey

As attendees focus on getting themselves there, think about how to simplify their travels. "You can't expect guests to be the travel agent and figure all this out — you are more responsible for them than with a hometown wedding," Lee says. Help arrange airport transfers for guests, and send out a reminder checklist of everything they'll need, from passports to sunscreen.



0 DAYS

15 DAYS

30 DAYS

45 DAYS

60 DAYS

75 DAYS

90 DAYS



PICK A LOCATION

A highly organized, responsive and experienced venue will be most equipped to handle your group. Book it within the first week or so, so you can send out invitations quickly, advises planner Lindsay Longacre of LVL Events. The upside is that you'll have a little more buying power among sites with short-notice openings. If the locale you really love is already reserved, be flexible with the timing — consider a Friday or Sunday ceremony as an alternative.

spread the word

Send digital save-the-dates as soon as the date and venue are booked. Formal engraved invites might take too long, so look to printing services like Minted or Wedding Paper Divas that can turn around pre-designed wedding suites within a few days (and also offer services like addressing envelopes to save you time). Ask guests to RSVP one month before the big day.



PRIORITIZE THE DETAILS

While there's some time to personalize decor, keep in mind that in more remote locations, you might have to compromise on a few details. "I always tell couples to remember we're on an island; everything is being flown or shipped in," says Shameka Simmons, wedding planner at Grace Bay Club in Turks and Caicos. Stick to local flowers if possible, and concentrate only on what's most important to you, whether it's food, photography or music — a resort's preferred-vendor list will be invaluable for making fast decisions.



PLAN GROUP ACTIVITIES

Anticipate that about 50 percent of invitees (typically about 40 to 80 people) will attend — and guests could choose to stay from three to five days, so you'll want to keep them entertained. "Plan one activity per day ahead of time for your party — a nice boat trip or island hopping," Simmons suggests.



PLANNING EXPRESS

A destination wedding in just one month? Not a problem — if you leave it to the pros.

- 1 **DETERMINE THE GUEST LIST**
Weddings with a fast turnaround tend to be smaller: no more than about 40 people.
- 2 **PICK A LOCATION**
Focus on resorts you've seen before and loved, or ones that come highly recommended. And stay flexible: If you have your heart set on a certain gazebo, keep in mind it might not be available in such a short time frame.
- 3 **HIRE A PLANNER**
An expert can guide you toward preferred local vendors, determine logistics, get all the necessary paperwork in order, and help you make lightning-quick decisions.
- 4 **GET YOUR GUESTS THERE**
Make guests' journey as accessible and affordable as you can. "Direct flights are always the best whenever possible," says Lee. "If you have an awesome hotel wedding package, but rooms are \$500 per night, no one will be able to come."
- 5 **BUY THE DRESS**
The best bet: an off-the-rack sample wedding dress. Or try a department store, vintage shop or favorite boutique. Even in a time crunch, a good tailor can make any dress look like it was made just for you.
- 6 **SPREAD THE WORD**
Forget an engraved wedding suite, and instead pick up the phone to let guests know your plans ASAP. Set the RSVP deadline two weeks prior.

one hundred eighty days

Six months equals a more traditional wedding time line, though the time does fly, so you'll want to stay on track with nailing down the details. For some, it's the perfect balance. "Six months is ideal to me — you plan it and you get it done," says Amy Abbott of Amy Abbott Events.



PLAN PREWEDDING AND POSTWEDDING PARTIES

The best part of a destination wedding is you have multiple days to celebrate. Once you've squared away the main event, think about what type of gathering to throw in the days leading up to the I do's — a barbecue on the beach, an all-white cocktail party or a sunset cruise.

find the dress

"You have a lot of options if you're six months out," Hall says. Even so, once you know the destination, climate and wedding date, get moving on a decision. Most designers can turn around an order within four months; then the dress is typically scheduled to come in two months prior to the event to make sure it's exactly what the bride wants.



0 DAYS

30 DAYS

60 DAYS

90 DAYS

120 DAYS

150 DAYS

180 DAYS



EXPLORE VENUE OPTIONS

With half a year to plan, there's a bit more time to mull over the options. Make sure the locale is a good fit for your group. "First, figure out who will be at the wedding," Lee advises. For example, grandma may have a hard time walking around a hilltop village. And with an in-demand locale during peak season — think the U.S. Virgin Islands in January or Capri in July — there's a greater sense of urgency. Also, a nontraditional venue, like a villa where everything needs to be custom-planned, requires more time to arrange the logistics.

schedule a site visit

While you'll rely heavily on phone and email communication, if time and budget allow, plan a trip to tour the property, meet with vendors, schedule tastings and maybe even preview a mock table setup.



TWEAK THE DETAILS

With six months, you have time not only to settle the "needs" but also incorporate a few creative "wants," such as a dramatic lighting scheme. Look into any local cultural traditions to share, whether it's a fire dancer or tequila burro. "A lot of couples this year have done theme weddings," Simmons adds.

spread the word

Send save-the-date cards as soon as possible so guests can begin to book travel — you might want to order invitations at the same time, so they'll be ready to mail about 10 weeks before the wedding date.



GIVE A WARM WELCOME

To make attendees feel even more in the mood, stock their rooms with a welcome basket containing bottled water, a handwritten note, maps, suggestions for local things to do and a reminder of the weekend's events.

Three hundred sixty days

According to data from Wedding Paper Divas, 27 percent of couples take a year to plan. This more leisurely time frame lets you enjoy each step of the process — just don't let the to-do list take over.



RESEARCH LOCATIONS

When the world is your oyster, it can be hard to narrow down the options. Lee suggests starting with the feeling you desire (black-tie ballroom, casual beach), how far away you want to be, and the weather during that time of year; then look for places that fit your aesthetic. Remember that the most popular or remote locations could still be booked one or even two years in advance. Says Longacre, "My experience with Hawaii has been, the sooner you book the venue, the better. With small island locations, there's not as much to choose from."

FIND THE DRESS

With a year, the sky's the limit, as the bride has time to find just the right silhouette, fabric, neckline and color. Aim to make the final decision no more than 10 months out, Hall advises. Keep in mind that something that seems simple (like changing the beading) could take two months, especially if the dress is coming from a country overseas that has a different work or holiday schedule.



PLAN A SITE VISIT (OR TWO)

To eliminate any doubts, Lee suggests two prewedding trips: one to confirm the location and check out local vendors and a second to finalize details. If planning a ceremony on the beach at 5 p.m., go to that exact spot at the designated time to see if the sun is too strong or the ocean is too loud when you say your vows. "You don't want any surprises, especially for the couple planning for a year," Lee says. Talk to locals who might have recommendations for where to get the best coffee for welcome bags, or a favorite restaurant for the rehearsal dinner.



WHERE IN THE WORLD

Follow these tips to choose the best destination to match your timetable.

30 DAYS

A location that does a lot of destination weddings will be accustomed to a quick turnaround — think places with direct flights, plenty of hotel options, easy access to vendors and relaxed marriage requirements like Las Vegas, Hawaii, parts of Mexico like Cancun and Puerto Vallarta, and popular Caribbean spots like Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. "These locations have developed very streamlined processes that allow you to just pick and choose from packages," says event planner Beth Helmstetter.

90 DAYS

Depending on where most of your guests are coming from, Mexico, Hawaii and the Caribbean could be easy options — or explore the many possibilities in the continental United States. Look to wedding-ready cities that have gateway airports, such as Miami, New Orleans and Charleston, South Carolina, in the east, and western hubs like Phoenix and San Diego.

180 DAYS

With six months, "You could go as far as you like and should be able to fully customize each detail of your day," Helmstetter says. Options include harder-to-reach tropical locales like Saint Lucia and Tobago, European hot spots like Greece and Ireland (especially in the off-season when there's more availability) and popular stateside destinations like Maine in summertime or Northern California during harvest season.

360 DAYS

Anything goes! Helmstetter suggests "quaint, off-the-beaten-path locations in Italy, hidden villas in Costa Rica or private islands in Fiji."



spread the word

Design a wedding website to inform guests of travel details, hotels and attractions. Send save-the-dates as soon as you finalize the venue and guest list, and include your website address. Order invites three to five months before the big day.

select vendors

With a little foresight, you're not limited to the talent at your destination. If you're not convinced of the local DJ options, for instance, consider hiring someone who can travel.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NICOLE LENOX (2); ERICA CAMILLE PHOTOGRAPHY; JULIAN MITCHELL; VINE & LIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY (VINEANDLIGHT.COM); TIANA DOUGHERTY PHOTOGRAPHY (TIANADOUGHERTY.COM)