

Dream Destination: South of the Border

By Monique Atwell, A Signature Wedding

Today, couples are looking for a unique place to celebrate their wedding, and destination weddings are becoming the latest phenomenon. Who would have thought that less than an hour away from San Diego, you could experience your destination wedding of a lifetime. Welcome to Baja California...a place that combines natural beauty with authentic culture, so close to home.

The idea of a destination wedding emerges when couples desire to have something "different" for their wedding day. Escaping to foreign surroundings provides an element of excitement and anticipation for you and your guests. Since most guests will make your destination wedding an excuse to have a "mini-vacation", the wedding celebration inevitably becomes longer than just the standard five hours and couples are able to share more quality time with family and friends. Destination weddings are highly memorable occasions, leaving guests with lasting impressions.

So why should you consider Baja California? Baja California offers an array of distinct venues, from full-service resorts overlooking the glistening Pacific Ocean to rustic vineyards nestled in the beautiful Mexican countryside. Prices are still affordable, not only for wedding locations and services, but also for guest travel and accommodations. For example, a hotel wedding venue with an ocean view can cost over 50% less than a comparable ocean front hotel venue in Southern California. Additionally, your selected venue can dictate the theme, style and creative direction of your wedding. Choosing Baja as your wedding destination automatically brings a touch of natural beauty and Mexican flair into your wedding day.

Planning a destination wedding in Baja requires detailed preparation, a flexible attitude and a couple's commitment to enjoy the ride. Here are some helpful tips to get you on the road to success:

1. Hire a professional wedding planner specializing in Baja California. Get started off on the right foot to wedding planning by enlisting an expert that knows the area, speaks the language, and can provide you with quality locations, resources and vendors to accommodate your vision, stylistic needs and budget. A coordinator will help alleviate stress and save you time, making the planning process a pleasant experience.
2. Reserve your venue as early as possible. Because Baja is growing rapidly in popularity amongst Americans as a prime location for a destination wedding, venues are getting booked up over a year in advance. Many couples are even turning to the weekdays to book their

destination wedding, with the incentive of discounted rates! So if your dream is to wed in Baja, plan ahead and reserve the date early!

3. Provide a favorable guest experience.

Traveling to a destination may be a new experience for many of your guests. Take the time to plan the details that will enable them to have a positive journey. Here are some examples of details to consider:

- Send Save The Date cards far in advance. Save The Date cards spread the word about your event, set the tone of the wedding, and more importantly, allow your guests to make travel accommodations early, leveraging possible savings for booking ahead. Save The Date cards are your first step to engaging your guests and provoking anticipation for your special day.
- Provide a detailed map and driving directions. Driving across the border into Baja takes preparation...Mexican auto insurance, money for the toll roads and cautious driving. Many guests, especially those accustomed to traveling in Mexico, will relish the adventure. Make their trip effortless by providing a detailed map and clear driving directions to your wedding destination.
- Offer chartered transportation. It is true that some of your guests will be hesitant to drive into Mexico. Put their minds at ease by offering roundtrip transportation from San Diego to your Baja destination. Guests can sit back and enjoy the great vistas of the beautiful coast and captivating mountainous landscape. This convenience is sure to kick them into vacation-mode and have them arrive in great moods!
- Deliver themed welcome bags to guests upon their arrival. Your guests have traveled a great distance to share your special day with you. Shower them with a small surprise that gets them into the destination spirit. Fill a bag with fun items and useful information that is relevant to the location and reflects the style of your event.
- Provide some planned activities. Get your guests mingling by planning some organized activities that will bring family and friends together in a social environment. For example, plan a volley ball tournament during the day or a cocktail reception at night. Just the right amount of options will make your guests feel involved but still allow them to enjoy their mini-vacation.

4. Legalize your marriage.

Yes, foreigners can legally get married in Mexico with a civil ceremony. However the process to obtain a marriage license in Mexico is specific, so it is important to gather and complete all required documentation and paperwork in advance in order to obtain your marriage license in a timely manner. To avoid this cumbersome process, many Americans are opting to obtain their marriage

license in the U.S., getting married legally before their Baja celebration. Both options are valid; you need to decide what works best for you.

5. Make it a signature wedding.

Don't let marrying in a foreign country stop you from making your wedding a personalized experience! Keep your wedding vision alive because it can be executed with the right resources in place. Mexico's event industry is sophisticated and trendy, allowing you to tap into local resources before considering outside options. So go ahead, let your dream wedding unfold in the authentic surroundings of your ideal destination.

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