



A *Foreign* Affair

Imagine the train of your dress unfurling on a balmy Polynesian breeze, or the warm Bali sand between your toes as you recite your vows. Destination weddings are all the rage

all photos provided by Marriage Maestros and Bliss Creations

Since Air Pacific launched its first direct flight between Fiji and Hong Kong last December, brides and grooms have had another destination to add to the list of wedding wonderlands to explore. It's a growing trend and one that's no longer strictly the domain of wealthy expatriates. Increasingly, Hong Kong-based couples, especially those that are avid travellers, or have met and lived overseas, are taking their nuptials offshore.

But while marrying abroad may sound exotic and glamorous, they are impossible to plan without a strong

backroom crew, because if planning a one-night banquet in your own city is stressful enough, imagine organising a trip for all your guests in a country where everything – language, customs, martial traditions – is radically different.

“Aside from jetlag, time zones and language barriers, one of the biggest issues with planning overseas weddings is communication,” says Effie Mak, owner of Plus One Weddings. “You must have everything written in black and white and send photos for reference because what you have in mind may be very different





from their interpretation.”

It might sound obvious, but Mak reminds her clients to pay a few visits to the proposed venues instead of just relying on photos. More importantly, couples must be patient with the country’s pace and limitations, such as the type of flowers that are in season.

“Basically, we have to tell clients to slow down. Sometimes it takes a little longer to organise things than it would in Hong Kong,” says Evelyn Mills, founder of Marriage Maestros, which specialises in staging local and Balinese celebrations.

The calibre of overseas venues and vendors has improved significantly of late, says Mills. That’s understandable given the growing popularity of destination weddings and the amount of money foreigners are pumping into their businesses. Many are on a par with what you would find in Hong Kong.

Unlike Hong Kong, however, booking in advance may not always be a good idea because the market of new vendors and service providers shifts rapidly, explains Sonya Yeung, founder of Bliss Creations. “So yes, you can lock in what you want. But three months down the road, a new vendor will start operating, and you might like them more.”

Usually, couples do the legal side of proceedings in their home country and merely conduct a ceremony overseas. This has its benefits: since no legal body or

official celebrant is required for this ceremony, couples can hire actors, or even invite friends to wed them – allowing more freedom to tailor-make the experience.

An average destination wedding is usually a three-day trip, five for the couple, that begins with a meet-and-greet barbecue on the first day, then a free day and a rehearsal dinner on the second, followed by a cocktail and banquet on the third day and a farewell lunch on the last.

Your money will go a lot further in most South Asian destinations. On average, Mills says, 20 tables in Hong Kong are equivalent to hosting 80 to 100 guests over three days.

A final word of warning: be careful when choosing the date as bad weather can scupper the best laid plans. Indonesia, for example, is best enjoyed in the summer months, whereas Thailand mirrors Hong Kong. Cambodian weather, on the other hand, is the most wedding-friendly after October, while Fiji is perfect all year round.

Despite all the paperwork, phone calls and organisation, a destination wedding is worth every bit of your hard work. And the secret to a successful offshore celebration? Start early, says Yeung. She recommends that couples visit a destination wedding planner six to nine months before the big day. **W**