



▲ A destination wedding in Rome

WE LOVE TO TRAVEL TOGETHER ...

But Is a Destination Wedding Worth the Trip?

Three local planners share tips to make your literal journey to “I do” seamless.

Whether you’re dreaming of downsizing the guest list or exchanging vows in a romantic locale, destination weddings can be the perfect choice for couples who want to celebrate their day their way. But the journey to a far-flung altar—which often includes passports, plane rides and time-zone changes—can be filled with challenges. That’s why it’s essential to choose the right venue first.

Donielle Warren of **Elegant Events Planning + Design**, which has offices in Northeast Philly and Newark, Delaware and specializes in destination weddings, encourages all her soon-to-be-weds to spend time at the proposed location before making a decision: “I recommend a midweek trip before booking your ideal destination, even if it’s just for two or three days. This is the best way to experience the resort, food and culture.” Warren, who has planned weddings as far off as Hawaii, adds that couples should avoid weekend stays, because venues are likely to be hosting other unions and may not be able to offer a high level of attention to prospective pairs.

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Once you've chosen the venue and set the date—Warren advises her clients to book as early as 18 months in advance—it's time to dig into the details, and this is when wedding planners can be invaluable.

“Hosting a destination wedding definitely adds a layer of complexity,” says **Elizabeth Barrella**, an Old City event designer who has seen an uptick in European weddings (particularly in Italy) in recent years. “It also depends on where you are planning,” Barrella always recommends hiring a planner, “but especially for a destination. It can be hard to foresee the challenges that may or may not arise, and a planner helps buffer that learning curve.” Barrella says her firm often hires interpreters and collaborates with local vendors to streamline the planning process.

For those who want to have the best of both worlds, Susan Norcross of **The Styled Bride**, also in Old City, advises

that you focus on your wedding and pause on plans for your party back on home turf. She's brought numerous hometown receptions to life in Philly, including a Grecian-inspired gathering at the Barnes Foundation that echoed a wedding abroad, and has seen firsthand how couples can get overwhelmed planning a destination wedding, honeymoon and secondary celebration at the same time—not to mention bachelor and bachelorette parties, the shower, and the rehearsal dinner.

Norcross encourages couples to consider what their secondary celebration means to them, whether that's recreating moments like cutting the cake or eschewing all tradition and hosting a full-blown dance party. And don't stress about setting a date—there are no rules for when to host party number two. Do it on your timeline, even if that's a few years later. —*Kristin Detterline*

5

Destination-ish Wedding Spots

For those who want their Big Days to be just a car ride away. —K.S.

NEW YORK CITY

The St. Regis ▶ Sure, it's over-the-top, but you're in New York City, so say “I do” in the Gilded Age Versailles ballroom, then party the night away in the Rooftop ballroom—the ceiling features a breathtaking cloud mural. *Drive time from Center City: two hours.*

BALTIMORE

The Ivy Hotel ▶ Buy out this Relais & Châteaux hotel, and you and your guests will have access to all 17 rooms and suites for two nights. Complete your event with a rehearsal dinner in on-site restaurant Magdalena's wine cellar. *Drive time from Center City: one hour and 40 minutes.*

ST. MICHAELS, MARYLAND

The Inn at Perry Cabin ▶ Channel yacht-style vibes at this Eastern Shore locale. Hold your ceremony outdoors, overlooking the Miles River, then celebrate under a beautiful sailcloth tent on the lawn. *Drive time from Center City: two hours and 15 minutes.*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Pendry ▶ The luxurious new property at the Wharf—D.C.'s tony waterfront shopping and dining district—features a grand ballroom with a modern-meets-Art Deco design and an adjacent outdoor pool terrace for your cocktail reception. A tip: Snap your first-look photos aboard the *Aviara*, the hotel's just-added private yacht, as it cruises the Potomac River. *Drive time from Center City: three hours.*

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

Pippin Hill Farm & Vineyards ▶ The well-manicured lawn is ideal for saying “I do” in warmer weather—it overlooks the lush vineyards and Blue Ridge Mountains beyond—though the stone veranda feels straight out of the French countryside. Either way, you'll sip award-winning wines (like the juicy cabernet franc or cheers-worthy blanc de blancs) teamed with cuisine crafted from ingredients grown on-site. *Drive time from Center City: five hours.*



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