

4 Big Decisions for Your Destination Wedding Ceremony Planner Business

(2025 Certification)

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Build your business by design!

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The 4 big decisions

Decision # 1: **What will you charge?**

Decision # 2: **Will you offer to travel with your DW groups?**

Decision # 3: **Will you handle off-site ceremonies?**

Decision # 4: **What should be in your DW client agreements?**

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Decision # 1: What will you charge?

Given the enormous amount of "extra" work involved in serving as your couples' DW ceremony planner, **you should strongly consider charging a "planning" fee** above and beyond your standard travel-related service fees.

You might start small by **charging a basic ceremony planning fee** that involves being the "BFF" giving your couples feedback and advice on the discussions with the on-site coordinator. Help them go through the supplier's ceremony packages, sit in on calls with the coordinator - but don't go beyond that by offering any custom planning support.

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Decision # 1: What will you charge?

Once you feel confident offering that level of feedback, you can move over time into **offering three basic levels of ceremony planning help**:

- **Level 1:** Feedback and opinions only
- **Level 2:** Being much more hands on planning the ceremony elements and customizing things
- **Level 3:** Level 2 plus accompanying the couple on the trip

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Decision # 1: What will you charge?

How can you decide the amounts to charge?

Sit down and think about the hours you guess might be involved in each level - from sitting in on Zoom calls to traveling with couples and helping them on site.

Then, **calculate what you'd need to charge to make those total hours worth your while**. (Expenses such as traveling to the destination would always be charged above and beyond your fees.)

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Decision # 2: Will you travel with your DW groups?

Many members who offer ceremony planning services report they're getting more requests to **go along with couples on their DW trips and provide support on site** - for the ceremony day only ("day of" coordination) or for the entire stay.

As the first step, you should decide a few things:

- **How much on-site support are you comfortable providing** - just "day of" coordination support (working with the on-site coordinator) or helping with other events and tasks too (e.g., welcoming guests on the main arrival day, managing the rehearsal dinner)?

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Decision # 2: Will you travel with your DW groups?

- **Do you want to be available to the couple only - or to all guests?**
- **What service hours will you set with everyone** (after which you'll be "off duty")?
- **How will you communicate with the couple and (if applicable) the guests** - e.g., "office hours" in the lobby, giving out your cell number?

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Decision # 2: Will you travel with your DW groups?

Once you've made those decisions, **you should have a written agreement with your couples** - as part of your standard DW client agreement or as an addendum - that spells out:

- **Your precise fees for accompanying the group** (figure how much you need to charge for the days you'll be gone and the hours you may work each day on the trip)
- **Your expenses** (airfare, transfers, lodging, parking at the airport at home, etc.) - many times, your room can be one of the "comps" the couple has earned from the room block
- **Bullet-point lists detailing what you WILL do on site - and what you WILL NOT do** (be as specific as possible) - include the events you'll be working and the ones you won't help with

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Decision # 2: Will you travel with your DW groups?

- **Clear language that spells out** (a) **whether you'll be there for just the couple or everyone** (including guests), (b) **the days and hours you'll be available**, and (c) **the preferred ways to communicate with you**

(In the resources page, we've included the audio recording of Jeni Chaffer's webinar on this topic.)

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Decision # 3: Will you handle off-site ceremonies?

More DW couples are exploring the options to book rooms for their guests at an all-inclusive property or on a ship - but then **plan the ceremony "off site" elsewhere** (e.g., a nearby restaurant, a villa or house, a local attraction).

Don't shy away from these opportunities! It's basically planning the ceremony as an extended excursion.

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Decision # 3: Will you handle off-site ceremonies?

There are many advantages to planning off-site ceremonies:

- **Your couples won't be bound by resort restrictions** (e.g., bans/fees with off-site vendors, early cut-off times for receptions).
- **They may find greater privacy off site** (e.g., if the resort does more than one wedding a day or if its reception venues are too "open" to other guests).
- The guests can still enjoy the resort rates and amenities but feel **they're taking part in a more special wedding atmosphere**.
- Also, guests will feel they're doing something **exciting and authentic to local culture**.

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Decision # 3: Will you handle off-site ceremonies?

Here are the basic off-site ceremony planning steps:

- **Help your couple search for off-site DW venues in the destination.** Check with the resort coordinator, the tourism office, and fellow DWHSA members for recommendations.
- Once your couple has made a choice, **check date/time availability and booking details for the off-site venue.** (Also, make sure it holds any locally required permits to host wedding ceremonies - and that its on-site staff has true experience hosting wedding groups.) Once you're ready, confirm the venue and the chosen date/time - and provide as accurate a guess for the guest count as you can. (Note: For sunset ceremonies, the group should really arrive at the off-site venue at least two hours before the ceremony time. Check online calendars to confirm the predicted sunset time for that date.)

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Decision # 3: Will you handle off-site ceremonies?

- **See which ceremony vendors the site offers - and then fill in the gaps with reputable off-site vendors** (e.g., caterers, photographers, an officiant). This includes the roundtrip transfers between the resort and the off-site venue.
- Thirty days before the ceremony date, **reconfirm arrangements with the venue and with all vendors!** Give them an updated guest count at that time.
- If you're accompanying the group, **make arrangements to visit the off-site venue in person within 24 hours of your arrival** to check things in person. And, consider whether you should set up a ceremony rehearsal time the day before with the couple and the wedding party at the venue.
- Email and text guests the day before (and maybe again the morning of the ceremony) with reminders about the departure time and location for taking the group to the venue.

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Decision # 3: Will you handle off-site ceremonies?

If you prefer, you can always encourage the couple to engage a locally based wedding planner in the destination to handle these tasks.

For more ideas, check out **Jenn Borgh's March 9, 2023 webinar on off-site weddings** (in the library under "Training" inside DWHSAMembers.com). Here's her handout:

<https://dwhsawebinarfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/Off-Site+DW+Ceremonies+March+9+2023.pdf>

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

To protect yourself (and your couples) and to manage their service expectations, it's critical that **you review your existing client agreements to confirm they have the necessary language that's specific to DWs.**

First, make sure your DW client contracts include the following:

- **Complete contact information for your agency and your couples** (legal names, mailing addresses, phone numbers/email addresses - you need this info for both members of the couple)
- **A bullet-point list or detailed paragraph showing the services you WILL provide the DW couple** - and a second list/paragraph showing what you WILL NOT do for them (in both lists, be as specific and detailed as you can!)
- **A description of the expectations you have for the couple** (e.g., honoring deadlines, paying on time)

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

- **Your (and your couple's) preferred means of communicating with each other** (e.g., phone calls, emails, texts)
- **Your travel service and DW planning fee amounts, due dates, and methods of payment**
- **Your policies governing any rebooking's or cancellations**
- **Signatures from you and from both members of the couple**

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

In addition, you should consider these clauses too:

- **You'll gather information for the couple if they insist on a lawfully binding or religiously compliant ceremony** - but, in the end, it's their responsibility (not yours) to see that the requirements are met in full.
- **You as the advisor have no special knowledge about the suppliers' financial condition**, and you take no responsibility for any defaults or failure to provide services.
- **You also have no special knowledge of health hazards in the destination** (and you might include a link to the U.S. or Canadian government health agencies such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

- **You strongly recommend they consider travel insurance** (including "cancel for any reason" coverage if available) for themselves and their guests (and, if applicable, wedding insurance).
- **If any wedding guest requests a "chargeback"** on their DW trip payments, the couple will be held responsible for making your agency whole if you sustain financial damages from the chargeback. And, if the couple files a chargeback for any of your service/planning fees, you reserve the right to file a legal claim against them to recover those losses.

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

Also, **you should use the strictest "force majeure" clause you can find** that covers you against liability for any "acts of God" - from epidemics to hurricanes. Here's a good example:

"Force majeure" means we shall not be deemed to be in breach of any terms and conditions or otherwise be liable to you, and shall not provide any refund due to delay in performance or non-performance of any of our obligations hereunder due to any circumstances beyond our reasonable control (including, but without limitation, to acts of God, explosion, flood, forceful wind, fire, accident, war or threat of war [declared or undeclared], acts of terrorism, sabotage, insurrection, riots, strikes, civil disturbance, sickness, epidemics, pandemics, quarantines, government intervention, weather conditions, defects in machinery and vehicles, delays, or other unforeseeable events). If our agency and/or any of our travel suppliers are affected by force majeure, we shall be entitled to, and may in our sole and absolute discretion, vary or cancel any itinerary or arrangement in relation to your trip.

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

Here's sample language you might include to cover your services when you accompany your DW couples:

You have asked us to accompany you on the destination wedding trip and manage the ceremony and other trip components (e.g., rehearsal dinner, excursions) in person. To provide those services, we will charge a USD/CDN\$_____ fee that must be paid in _____ installments of \$_____. Please understand that we operate under a fixed schedule that is set months and years in advance. Upon signing with you, we forego other business opportunities and we invest a significant amount of time and effort in your travel and wedding arrangements well before your event date. Your cancellation of the wedding at any time shall cause damages that are difficult to assess..

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

Therefore, installments are considered earned on receipt and are nonrefundable. You agree that forfeiture of any paid installments if you cancel the wedding is a reasonable measure of our damages

In addition, you agree to pay all related travel expenses (including roundtrip air, lodging, ground transfers and transportation, and meals not provided by the resort/ship) for our staffer(s) who will accompany you. Those expenses must be [options: prepaid OR reimbursed within _____ days after we have given you an expense report with copies of receipts].

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

Please remember that we only recommend the selection and supervise the performance of vendors at the wedding. While we may facilitate agreements between you and vendors, we do not render legal advice and we cannot guarantee any vendor's performance.

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Decision # 4: What should be in your DW contracts?

Finally, **here's a DW-specific sample client agreement you can use** as a starting point if you don't have one yet!

<https://dwhsamisc.s3.amazonaws.com/Updated+Sample+Contract+for+Destination+Wedding+Couples.doc>

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Questions?

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