

Breaking Down Your Role as the Destination Wedding Ceremony Planner – Part 2

(2025 Certification)

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Change your mind yet?

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The flowers

Most suppliers will offer preselected floral options as part of their standard ceremony packages, starting with the bridal bouquet and groom boutonniere. Your couple may accept those "as is," customize the options, or even choose an off-site florist if they prefer.

Typically, **these are the flowers you may need for the DW:**

- Ceremony decor (aisle flowers, altar centerpiece, arch piece)
- Additional wedding party flowers (bouquets/corsages and boutonnieres for the bridesmaids, groomsmen, and parents)
- Centerpieces for the reception as well as other events (optional)

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The flowers

Here's the catch for your clients: Many DWHSA members have found that **florals can be one of the most expensive DW budget items** - and the one couples regret later that they spent so much money on! Ask your clients to decide the florals that are absolutely critical for their ceremonies and to be flexible about the rest to keep budgets in check. Encourage them to select flowers based on seasonality and local availability (in many destinations, even common flower types must be flown in for local florists/resort staff to assemble).

Another popular option is **using artificial florals** which can look just as natural as live flowers. These can be found in many local destinations, but sometimes your couples will insist on shipping them from home (or even trying to carry them in an extra suitcase!). Remind them about customs issues and duties they may face (and figure out what to do with them after the ceremony).

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The flowers

Ask suppliers to provide current photos of the chosen DW venue so your couple can picture how florals will look in that space. They should also **provide images of past floral arrangements** (e.g., bridal bouquets) to help your couple make decisions.

You can "repurpose" florals (e.g., move the altar centerpiece to the "sweetheart" table at the reception instead of paying for two arrangements).

If desired, ask suppliers how they can help you preserve the bridal bouquet and boutonniere for the couple.

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The flowers

Just for reference, **here are the most common types of flowers** we found in a survey of resorts' wedding packages: peonies, roses, anemones, anthurium, dahlias, lilacs, ranunculus, sweet peas, hydrangeas, tulips, orchids, lily of the valley, calla lilies, hellebore, protea, carnations, and gardenia.

And, here's a great BRIDES article that sorts wedding flowers by colors:

<https://www.brides.com/gallery/types-of-wedding-flowers-by-color-glossary>

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The music

Here's the typical list of music you'll need to consider for the DW ceremony:

- Prelude music (while guests are being seated)
- Processional music
- Entrance music (for the bride or the couple)
- Recessional music

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The music

Then, many couples will also want to **pick the reception playlist:**

- Pre-entrance music (as guests arrive)
- Wedding party entrance
- Couple's entrance
- First dance
- Father/daughter dance
- Mother/son dance
- Music for general dancing
- Final/closing song

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The music

Your couple will have several music options for their DWs:

- Prerecorded music (arranged by the venue or provided by the couple on a phone or player)
- DJs (arranged by the venue, booked locally off site, or even flown in by the couple)
- Live musicians/bands (arranged by the venue, booked locally off site, or flown in)

Ask your couple to start a list of desired songs they want played (including "must be played" and "never ever play" songs).

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The music

With DJs and musicians, **check reviews and references as well as their contracts and technical riders** to make sure you know their requirements and the couples understand their legal obligations).

Confirm the venue's rules for music (e.g., time limits for playing, noise levels).

As long as the wedding ceremony and reception are "private" events (e.g., your clients aren't opening them to the public and they're not charging admission), then generally they will not need to secure any type of music license for the music.

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The photos

What's the most critical element for a DW ceremony (besides the vows)? **The photography (and videography)**. Couples say consistently it's the most important budget item they wished they'd spent more money on - and, it's a disaster if it doesn't go well!

You'll have several options to offer your clients:

- Use the venue's photographer.
- Hire a locally based photographer.
- Fly in a DW photographer.

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The photos

Start by asking your couple to **think about their desired photo style** (e.g., traditional/classic, black/white, fine art).

Then, ask the supplier to **provide sample photos from its on-site photographer** to see if they match the couple's wishes. If not, they may begin searching for outside options.

Help your couples **create a "shot list" for the photographer** to follow that lists every desired DW image the couple will want. You might also include their desired wedding-day photo timeline.

Here's a handy DW shot list you can use:

<https://dwhsamisc.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/Must+Have+Shot+List+for+DW+Photography.pdf>

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The photos

Tell your clients that DW photos are not the place to skimp on the budget! They may be disappointed later if they do, and there's no way to go back and fix that.

If you're using an off-site photographer or flying in a photographer, **check their prices carefully** (including travel expenses and billable hours while they are traveling). Also, **check local laws and permits in the destination** for issues such as required work permits.

With any photographer (off- or on-site), **check the fine print in their contracts thoroughly**. Confirm the fees and expenses they're asking for. And, confirm what's being promised (the number of photographers and how long they'll be at the ceremony, whether they'll offer proofs, the final deliverables [how many photos, in what formats], and the delivery time).

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The photos

If your couples ask for drone photography, talk with the photographer well in advance (this may require having a second photographer). Also, ask the supplier about any restrictions on using drones on site (e.g., some public beaches prohibit drones).

Check the copyright permissions with the photographer (e.g., can the couple scan photos and make copies, can they submit photos to local media).

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The videos

You'll have the same options as photos for confirming a DW videographer:

- Use the venue's videographer.
- Hire a locally based videographer.
- Fly in a DW videographer.

Ask your couple how they want the final DW videos to look (e.g., telling the wedding as a story, shooting it as a documentary, filming as a traditional wedding video).

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The videos

You should also **give the videographer a "shot list"** specifying what clips the couple will want from their ceremony (as well as a wedding-day video timeline). With video, it makes sense also to give the videographer a list of "VIP" guests who must be included on video at some point.

Check the videographer's contract inclusions and pricing (e.g., does he/she use professional sound equipment such as wireless mics instead of just camera mics?).

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The videos

In terms of deliverables, **consider asking for two videos of different lengths**: (a) a longer video that covers the DW in depth (20 minutes plus) and (b) a shorter video that's easier to share with friends and family (3-5 minutes). You might also ask for a 60-second "social media" clip that can be posted easily - as well as the entire raw video footage.

Many suppliers offer the option of **"livestreaming" the ceremony** (using cameras to broadcast the ceremony via the Internet so friends and family who could not make the trip may tune in live).

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The hair and makeup

On the morning of the Big Day (and, sometimes, for pre-ceremony events), the bride and bridesmaids will get ready with the help of **hair stylists and makeup artists**.

Many resorts provide these services through their on-site spas, but some brides opt to use outside vendors or even bring their own with them on the trip.

You may be asked to help set up these appointments. As with other vendors, check the pricing and the inclusions.

Who pays? It's a mix - some brides will pay for everyone, while others will pay just for themselves or chip in partial payments for the bridesmaids.

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Additional issues: Help with other events

If you accompany your DW clients, you may be asked to **set up** (and perhaps coordinate) **other on-site events besides the ceremony** including the following: a welcome party for guests, bachelorette and bachelor parties, group excursions and activities, a rehearsal dinner, the post-ceremony reception, and a farewell brunch the morning after.

If so, make sure you consider reflecting these extra duties in your fees if you wish! (Avoid getting caught in “mission creep” – being pulled into extra duties just because you happen to be on site.)

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Additional issues: Wedding attire

With DWs, **the wedding gown and the attire for the groom and the wedding party members** has to get to the destination somehow!

While many DWs end up with casual dress codes, others do opt for formal wear. Whatever the case, **create a tipsheet you can give couples and guests for transporting their attire**. Encourage them never to put critical attire such as a more formal wedding gown in checked luggage - they should always store it in carry-on bags they carry themselves. (This can also include shoes, undergarments/shapewear, jewelry, hair accessories, etc.) Sometimes, the store will actually pack the bride's dress safely for her in the carry-on bag.

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Additional issues: Wedding attire

With the resort, **ask suppliers if they offer on-site steaming or cleaning services** for wedding attire if needed.

And, remind your DW couples **to be extremely clear and detailed about the requested dress code!** Phrases such as "casual" and "beach wear" don't communicate clearly to guests what they're expected to wear - so ask your couples to give examples and details.

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Additional issues: registries and gifts

Some couples may set up **wedding/honeymoon registries**, but nowadays they usually collect the funds from those registries before the DW trip instead of claiming actual physical gifts. You can use tools such as Honeyfund or Honeymoon Wishes to set up a registry for your clients.

Beyond registries, though, **encourage your couples not to ask** (or expect) **guests to carry gifts with them to the destination**. (The best current etiquette for DW guests is "Your presence is your present," since they're already absorbing the costs of attending the DW in person.)

Some couples want to give guests **a welcome bag or gift** when they arrive on site. You can distribute these in the lobby if you've accompanied the group, or many suppliers will place those items in each guest's room (for a fee).

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Additional issues: ceremony seating

Guest seating during DWs tends to be less formal than "hometown" ceremonies.

Usually, guests connected to the bride may sit on the left and those with the groom on the right (and guests for same-sex couple will mix). Parents and siblings can sit in the first few rows.

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Additional issues: wedding hashtags

Some couples may ask your help selecting a "wedding hashtag" to give guests for use in their social media posts.

These hashtags can be based on the destination (e.g., #SayIDoInJamaica) the couples' names (e.g., #JimLovesJane), or just cute (#TyingtheKnotinHawaii).

If you help your clients brainstorm, encourage them to keep the hashtag short and sweet and easy to spell. Consider adding the year and try to be unique and different from everyone else! (Also, search online for "wedding hashtag generator" sites that can help.)

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Additional issues: social media rules

Your clients may also ask your help **setting social media policies for guests**. A few options:

- Consider going "unplugged" - asking guests not to use their phones at all during the ceremony (or even bring them to the vows).
- Remind them not to post photos of the just-married couple until the two of them have posted first.
- Use the hashtag!
- Find apps to help collect the photos and videos guests take (e.g., Wedbox, Wedshoots, GuestCam, GuestPix).
- Most of all, remind them not to block the official DW photographers and videographers!

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Additional issues: personalizing the ceremony

There's so much flexibility with a DW ceremony that you should really encourage your couples to **add their own meaningful touches**.

Examples:

- Use the family's Bible or religious heirlooms in the ceremony as appropriate.
- Wear an item of jewelry or clothing that honors cherished relatives who've passed on.
- Add decor items with personal significance to them (e.g., conduct the "sand" ceremony with their school colors; set a frame with their pet's photo on one of the chairs).

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Additional issues: things to toss

This tradition can continue with DWs, but it's critical to remember **the environmental impact of what's being tossed!**

Safe options include bubbles, flower petals, biodegradable confetti with flower seeds, or small bells to ring (or simply taking candid photos of the couple).

And, check with the suppliers for any restrictions that may apply.

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Additional issues: marriage license/certificate

With all types of ceremonies – including symbolic and religious – **there should be a “certificate” signed by the officiant** to commemorate the occasion! Ask the supplier ahead of time to make sure plans have been made for the couple to receive a certificate this way.

For lawfully binding ceremonies, it's always a best practice to help your clients understand the legal requirements for that ceremony and even assist them in making the necessary arrangements – but **consider adding language to your client agreements reminding them that, ultimately, it's their responsibility to satisfy those requirements** (not yours).

Before a lawfully binding ceremony, the couple should secure the marriage license – that's the permission to get married in the destination.

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Additional issues: marriage license/certificate

Then, once the legal requirements have been met, they will ultimately receive the marriage certificate – that's the proof that they're legally married!

Because the certificate may need to be approved, filed, stamped, etc., by local authorities, it can take several weeks or even months before the couple will receive it. **You should be ready to follow up with the supplier and the officiant if needed to track its progress.**

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Ready to make some money?!?

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Questions?

support@dwhsa.com

615.730.9977

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