

# How to Handle Your First Destination Wedding

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**You'll always remember your first DW groups!  
Your couples will be so grateful for your help.**



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**A destination wedding =  
a preformed group trip plus a ceremony. That's it.**



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If you've ever sold a preformed tour group or cruise group, you can handle a DW group.



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### Before you talk to couples

- Identify your preferred tour operators, resorts, and cruise lines to work with. Ask in advance for their DW ceremony package details (and maybe a copy of their typical group contract).
- Decide how you will collect booking information and payments from the DW guests.
- Prepare your standard client agreement for the DW couples plus any disclaimers/reminders for DW guests. Also, consider creating a DW questionnaire to give the couple before you set up the consultation.

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### Before you talk to couples

- Figure out how you will communicate with DW guests (e.g., a Facebook group for that DW group, Loom videos, emails).
- Decide how involved you want to be in the ceremony planning.
- Set any service or planning fees that you will charge the couple and the guests.
- Familiarize yourself with the timeline for a typical DW booking from 12 months out until after the couple and guests return home.

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## How most DWs are booked

**STEP # 1:** You will **check the couple's preferred wedding dates with the resort/cruise line** for ceremony availability. The couple will ultimately sign the ceremony contract with that supplier and pay any deposits or fees.

**STEP # 2:** You will **check room availability with that supplier** (or the tour operator) and **negotiate the rates and details of the room block**. Usually, your agency will sign the room block contract with the supplier - then, in turn, you'll have the couple sign an agreement with you taking financial responsibility for the room block.

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## Step # 1: Qualify

- **Collect their names and preferred contact information** when the initial contact is made (e.g., use an online contact form, ask them if they call you).
- **Ask the key initial questions:** When do they want to travel for their DW? What regions or properties have they thought about? And, how many people do they expect will come with them? (Remember: **When? Where? and How Many?**)
- **Send them a questionnaire** with more detailed questions about their DW plans (e.g., how many invitations will they send out, do they want anyone under 18 to attend, what's their wedding budget, what's the travel budget for their guests, how much research have they done already, are they working now with any travel advisors or suppliers).

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## Step # 2: Consult

- **Set up an initial consultation** in person or via phone or Zoom. At the end of the consultation, bring up the subject of any service or planning fees you charge. Also, nail down the location (based on geographical proximity, budgets, styles, venue types, climate, and language) and the dates (based on dates significant for the couple, high and low seasons, climate patterns, holidays, and sufficient planning time for the trip).
- **Conduct the consultation** and - based on the information you gather - **prepare a proposal** with the three best options for the couple.

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### Step # 3: Propose

How do you pick the resort/ship/destination options for the proposal? (We recommend three options – and charge a research fee if the couple wants you to return later with more options.)

Ask the couple questions until you get a strong sense of their vision for the ceremony and the reception - styles, decor, activities, menu, etc.

- How many guests do they really think will come on the trip>
- Will they have guests under 18?
- What special requests will some guests have (e.g., family suites, special categories, disabled-accessible rooms)?
- Where are the guests traveling from?
- How long will the average guest length of stay be?

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### Step # 4: Request rooms

Once the couple has made a final selection, you can help the couple finalize their room block request:

- Encourage them to send a "Save the Date" survey to guests before the real invitations or STD cards go out.
- Get a copy of the couple's planned guest list showing contact information and relationships - that list will help you help them identify who's attending for sure (e.g., wedding party members, family members) and highlight any special room requests (e.g., disabled access rooms, family connecting rooms).
- Take a hard look at where many guests will be traveling from (this will help you figure out the average length of stay needed).
- Collect the travel dates and room category preferences of the couple, the wedding party, and the immediate family so you can specify those requests when you ask for the room block.

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### Step # 4: Request rooms

With your first DWs, it makes sense to request quotes from a preferred tour operator rather than booking direct with a resort or cruise line. You'll be assigned a groups rep by the operator who can answer your questions about the whole booking, and the operator will support you if something goes wrong at the property or on the ship.

What's the best way to "guesstimate" the number of rooms your couple should ask for? It's important to give the tour operator your best guess without overbooking (leaving the resort possibly with unsold rooms at the end) or underbooking (it's tough these days with mostly full resorts to go back later and request additional rooms, especially at the same rates you got earlier from the supplier). Start by counting on the guest list the number of people who are almost guaranteed to be there (wedding party members, close family). Then, count the rest of the guest list and assume that 20 percent to 30 percent will attend. You can add a few extra rooms on top of that count if you want a buffer. That final number may be the closest way to predict how many rooms you should request from the tour operator.

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## Step # 4: Request rooms

### THE FORMULA:

Count all of the "must attend" folks.

Then, count the rest of the guest list and multiply by 20% to 30%.

Maybe add a few more rooms as a buffer.

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## Step # 4: Request rooms

**Understand the pros and cons of getting a "flex code"/"booking code" contract for the rooms versus a true group room block contract.** The code arrangement won't require your couple and/or guests to place big deposits upfront to hold the rooms, but the rooms are not guaranteed for the group (they're totally based on availability at the time the guests book). Room block contracts hold those rooms apart for the DW group, but your couple could be liable if they don't fill enough rooms with guests to satisfy the contract terms.

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## Step # 5: Confirm ceremony

Once you've locked in the rooms, **help the couple work with the resort/ship to confirm the ceremony package and arrangements.**

In the beginning, it's best to rely upon the supplier's on-site coordinator to handle the ceremony details directly with the couple. But, you should stay in the loop to make sure they're communicating!

Also, **manage your couple's expectations** (e.g., in today's environment, many coordinators are so busy that they may not begin working on the couple's ceremony until weeks before the arrival date).

Recommend strongly that the couple should **choose a civil (legally binding) ceremony at home first** just to get the legalities out of the way, so they can do a symbolic ceremony during the DW trip. They can designate the DW ceremony date as their official wedding date.

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## Step # 6: Stay in touch

Beyond those initial steps, the most important tip for managing the DW group between deposits/reservations in the beginning and the departures at the end is **constant communication with the couple and the guests**.

With the couple, **keep them updated on the bookings within the group every four to eight weeks** so they'll see the progress they're making (especially if they're earning "perks" for filling the room block such as a free ceremony, a free reception, or a room upgrade for themselves).

With the guests, **communicate with them every few weeks** (e.g., passport information, weather forecasts, the DW itinerary) so you'll remain top of mind with them and they won't be tempted to start searching the Internet looking for answers.

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## Questions?

**support@dwhsa.com**

**615.730.9977**

**DWHSA's Facebook group**

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