

DWHSA Master Class: South Asian Destination Weddings

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Why focus on South Asian DWs?

- **Huge market:** As South Asian immigrants continue spreading across many Western countries, they're planning DWs to unite friends and family spread across their country or the world.
- **Big attendance:** South Asian DWs can involve 100 to 300 guests (or more). Families tend to invite lots of people to avoid offending anyone - and, to avoid offending the families, the guests almost always say "yes."
- **Supplier support:** More resort companies now offer South Asian DW ceremonies and packages, making it easier for DWHSA members to arrange the travel but turn the ceremony planning over to the supplier's experts.

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What do we mean by “South Asian?”

- This term usually means seven countries: India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- In religious terms, it can mean people who consider themselves Hindu, Persian, Sikh, or Muslim.

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What's involved in a South Asian DW?

- This region features more than 30 different cultures, so **no two South Asian DWs will be alike**.
- The couples and their families will talk with you (and work with the resort's coordinator) about **the specific activities and customs they wish to have**. So, this webinar will show you a typical timeline, but in practice some families may change the order of events.
- Notes: It's possible to host a South Asian DW aboard a cruise ship, but typically they're held at hotels and resorts. And, same-sex couples may hold South Asian DWs, but the vast majority involve a bride and a groom.

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Pre-wedding activities

Muhurta ("auspicious time")

Taking the bride's and groom's birthdates, a Hindu priest (the "pandit" or "pundit") will consult astrological records to pick the best date and time for the ceremony.

(This tradition make it tough for couples based in North America who favor weekend dates - and it's why you'll lots of South Asian DWs on the same few dates each year.)

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Pre-wedding activities

Haldi or Pathi Ceremony

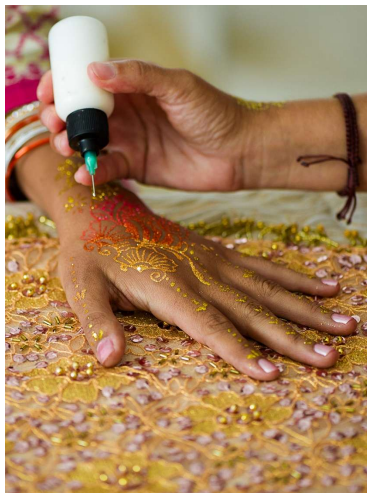
The bride and the groom will hold separate haldi events at their respective homes. As cleansing activities, the haldis involve family members and close friends applying turmeric paste ("haldi") to the face, neck, arms, hands, knees, and feet of the bride or groom while they offer blessings and sing songs.

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Pre-wedding activities



Mehndi/Mehendi

The bride, bridesmaids, and female relatives and close friends will gather with a professional henna artist who uses a dark paste (made with the ground leaves of a plant mixed with lemon juice usually) to paint designs on their hands and feet. This bonding ritual may last several hours to allow the henna paste to dry, and it's typically done the day before the ceremony. The darker the henna dries, the more auspicious it is. (The henna designs can last up to seven days.)

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Pre-wedding activities

Sangeet

Meaning "sung together," the Sangeet is basically a mini-reception before the ceremony where the bride's and groom's family plus friends gather for dancing, songs, and food. Traditionally, the Sangeet was reserved for women, but nowadays men may attend as well. The Sangeet can take place a couple of days before the ceremony or the day before.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Many South Asian DW ceremonies are conducted outside to incorporate the natural light of the sun. However, ballrooms and other indoor spaces may be used as long as they permit the use of an open flame for the ceremony.

South Asian DW ceremonies carry deep religious meaning - they're considered sacraments, not contracts in the Western sense.

Guests should be prepared to remove their shoes in some cases (e.g., a ceremony conducted inside a Muslim mosque) and cover their heads with a scarf or handkerchief.

There are four major types of ceremonies: Hindu, Persian, Sikh, and Muslim. Today, we'll cover Hindu (the most common type).

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Traditional Hindu ceremony



B(h)araat

The groom begins the ceremony with his own processional. While guests dance around him to the beat of a drum ("dhol"), he'll arrive in a fancy car, on a horse, or even on an elephant.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony



Milni (meeting of families)

After he removes his shoes, the groom will walk down the main aisle to the "mandap" (a dome-like covering similar to a Jewish "chuppa"), with each pillar of the mandap representing a parent. He'll greet his family and the bride's family there. The mother of the bride may offer him sweets as a sign he's welcome to marry her daughter, and the men may exchange gifts as well.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Ganesh Puja/Pooja

The groom and the two sets of parents will remove shoes (if they haven't already) and walk into the center of the mandap that's considered a sacred space. They'll offer prayers to the Hindu god Ganesh asking for blessings on the wedding.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Kanya Aagaman (arrival of bride) and Kanya Daan (giving away of bride)

Next, the bridesmaids, the flower girl, and the ring bearer (if the couple plans to exchange rings) walk down the aisle, followed by the bride walking with an uncle or oldest male relatives. (Sometimes, she's carried down the aisle.)

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Jai Mala and Hasta Melap

In the jai mala, the bride and groom will exchange flower garlands (usually with roses). The groom may also give the bride a mangalasutra ("auspicious thread") necklace with black, red, white, and/or gold beads, and cords may be tied to their wrists. The father of the bride may give away his daughter by placing her hands in the groom's hands ("kanyadaan"). Couples who live in North America may also exchange rings at this time.

Then, for hasta melap, the groom's scarf is tied in a knot with the bride's sari by female relatives of the groom (usually a sister).

The priest will light a sacred fire ("agni") in the mandap.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Mangal Phera and Saptapadi (seven steps)

For mangal phera, the couple will hold hands and take four steps around the fire - each step representing a stage of life:

- * Pursuing life's religious and moral duties ("dharma")
- * Pursuing prosperity ("artha")
- * Pursuing earthly pleasures ("kama")
- * Pursuing spiritual salvation ("moksha")

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

They may race back to seats inside the mandap - and the first one seated will supposedly have the upper hand in the new household!

Then, in the saptapadi, they will take their first steps together as husband and wife. In the North India tradition, they will walk seven circles around the agni fire. In the South India tradition, the groom's brother will spread seven stones in a straight line, and the couple will move from stone to stone, touching each stone with their toes as the pandit reads seven verses:

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

1. We will live with respect for one another.
2. We will develop mental, physical, and spiritual balance.
3. We will prosper, acquire wealth, and share our accomplishments.
4. We will acquire happiness, harmony, and knowledge through mutual love.
5. We will raise strong, virtuous children.
6. We will be faithful to one another and exercise self-restraint and longevity.
7. We will remain lifelong partners and achieve salvation.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Sindoor

The groom may apply red powder to the center of the bride's forehead, and the powder may also be applied to her hair, showing her new married status.

Vidai/bidhai

This is a tearful farewell to the bride who's officially leaving her family to join her new spouse's family.

Ashirwas ("Blessings")

The couple will thank the guests, the elders in their family, etc.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Then, the couple will recess down an aisle sprinkled with rose petals.

There's usually no first kiss as husband and wife - that's considered too personal to do in public.

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Traditional Hindu ceremony

Receptions at South Asian DWs are typically long blowout parties (7 pm to midnight) with food of all types (not just Indian), Bollywood-style dances, and toasts.

It's tradition to ask guests not to give wedding gifts (usually, guests receive a party favor or gift from the couple). If gifts are allowed, it's usually money (in amounts that end in 1, such as \$101).

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Suppliers with South Asian DW packages

- [Barcelo Hotels & Resorts](#)
- [Hard Rock Hotels](#)
- [Hyatt Inclusive Collection](#)
- Karisma Hotels & Resorts
- Palace Resorts
- Palladium Hotels & Resorts
- Playa Resorts
- Royalton Hotels & Resorts
- Sandos Hotels & Resorts

(among others!)

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How do you promote South Asian DWs?



Get a feel for how these ceremonies work.

- Get brochures and videos from your preferred resort suppliers.
- Check videos on YouTube.

Break down the South Asian DW packages offered by your preferred suppliers. Then, collect images (and videos) from them to use in promoting your agency for South Asian DWs. Tell your BDMs you're focusing in this area.

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How do you promote South Asian DWs?



Add a page to your web site with lots of South Asian DW content.

- Those images and videos from your key suppliers
- Descriptions of their South Asian DW packages

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How do you promote South Asian DWs?



Brainstorm ways you can get in front of South Asian consumers in your marketing area.

- Targeted social media ads (Facebook and Instagram)
- South Asian community groups in your marketing area
- Videos done with preferred supplier BDMs talking about their South Asian DW packages
- Consistent (quarterly) posts and emails on this topic
- An IC from this community

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What if you've never booked a South Asian DW before?



Stress your expertise in handling the **travel** components of the trip while partnering with **on-site experts** who'll handle the ceremony aspects

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Consider SADW Certification



DWHSAs offers a trip each year to earn your "South Asian Wedding Specialist" certification with the South Asian Wedding Institute!

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Questions?

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DWHSAs's Facebook group

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