

Images from Afar

By Robert London

Why go through all the extra expense and hassle of making travel arrangements to bring a Photographer from your area to your destination wedding? The simple answers are control and peace of mind. There are so many things large and small that happen on ones' wedding day that something is bound to not go as perfectly as you planned. The Florist may bring the wrong bouquet, and the minister may speak the wrong passage (my own experience). We should take these small missteps in stride for no one - barring yourself - knows that the plans did not go perfectly, and the only thing they will remember is what a great time they had. Eventually, you will be joking at what the Minister said, however, there is one mishap that you will not find amusing. If you do not have great pictures of your destination wedding – how are you going to remember how fantastic it was? That was one of the reasons to have a destination wedding in the first place - right!

The best way to solve this is to hire a great photographer from your area, or at least your home country. In most destinations, the photographer recommended from the destination area will not be up to the caliber worthy of your fabulous wedding. There are exceptions, in areas that have a large destination wedding industry talent would have moved to the area, for instance the Riviera Maya in Mexico. However, even then having your photographer in the home state means all the back end will be accomplished near you. Wish to see sample albums before you make your final album decision –no problem. Problem with a print you ordered? You can show the photographer personally. Also, if something does go terribly wrong there would be no language miscommunication and the laws of the home country would enforce the contract, if that becomes your last resort. Remember as I noted in my: "[hiring a wedding photographer](#)" article, the photographer is a member of your crew that you will be spending a great deal of time with. Having the ability to meet with them on a few occasions before the wedding is a big advantage. This way you will be able to ascertain whether this is someone you could spend your special day with. In addition, having your engagement portrait, wedding, and album done by one photographer will be much less stressful and convenient for you. It is also great to establish a relationship with the engagement portrait and then continue to build upon that energy through the whole photographic process ending with your beautiful and wonderful album. Do not expect a local photographer to help with your album, virtually all photographers will not help you make an album if they did not shoot the event. Regardless, if I am not familiar with your wedding day, it significantly limits the quality of input I would have if I were to help in creating your album.

I talk in great length about how to find a photographer in my "[Choosing a Photographer](#)" article, but there are a few things to consider when hiring a destination photographer. The first thing is to ask immediately if they will travel. Some photographers refuse to travel or

are unwilling to negotiate any missed shooting days charging full price for travel days. Another is that digital has a big advantage over film when it comes to destination weddings. With digital the files can be backed up on a hard drive before the photographer leaves to return home. X-Rays do not affect hard drives; with film there is always that possibility that the X-Rays may have an adverse effect. Also, when traveling there is a greater opportunity for things to become lost. Images on film exist in one place when it becomes lost there is no recourse. With digital I leave a destination with three exact copies, if one gets lost and then another damaged I still have a perfect copy left. Every film photographer has a “war story” about how their film was lost or damaged. If that is your photographer, then you have only a memory.

What does it Really Cost?

Before you begin to look for the photographer of your dreams to bring along to that ultimate destination, be prepared for additional expenses beyond their posted fees. You are typically responsible for all the obvious expenses incurred as part of traveling and staying at the destination; however, there are certain expenses you may never have thought of. I would work out before you begin a good estimate on how much this is actually going to cost. There are the basic big items like airfare and accommodations, but there are also many ancillary items that can grow into a sizable amount. If you are accustomed to traveling on the company credit card these items could come as a shock when they arrive on your bill. There are airport connections, extra luggage, car rental, tips etc. and remember you want to keep them well fed and perhaps an off-hour drink to keep them happy. A content, well-slept healthy photographer will take the best pictures.

One expense you might never have imagined is the “potentiality” cost. This is the lost revenue for not being able to book the day before or after your wedding. It is not unheard of for a photographer to charge close to the full booking rate. Others will charge a travel fee based on time to and from the venue or there might be some hybrid formula. There is no industry standard, it depends on the photographer’s interest in working that venue and how busy they are. For instance, I charge no additional fees to the Riviera Maya but have a hybrid method, subsidizing some charges to other locals.

If you have already done some research you have noticed that day rates vary greatly between photographers, but that does not necessarily correlate directly with destination expenses. What you may consider a very expensive photographer may charge little extra to travel, while a “reasonable” photographer may insist upon full day rate fees while away from the studio. This travel rate is seldom published and is dependent on varying factors associated with both the destination and the photographer. For instance, I may charge full travel fees for a destination in Detroit whereas I might be more responsive to negotiation if the destination were the Cayman Islands. If you are lucky, you may catch the photographer when their

significant other just told them that they really need to go away for a weekend soon. The bottom line, if the location, and schedule are agreeable so as the photographer can extend the stay - creating a mini vacation after the wedding - your negotiating power will be greatly enhanced.

Typically three nights of accommodation are expected for the photographer and crew unless the flight is over ten hours were four nights would be expected. The extra day is needed for the crew would need time to acclimate to the new time zone. What may seem to be an unnecessary extra day allows the photographer to settle in, scout the location and adjust to the new environment. If the photographer wishes to upgrade to an extra room to bring his kids along or stay a fourth day that would be his responsibility or sometimes covered as an act of appreciation.

When discussing fees consider having the photographer cover the rehearsal dinner and perhaps even the brunch following the wedding day. This extra work for the photographer can help to off-set some of the lost income incurred resulting from being unavailable in the hometown, and you will obtain some great additional images to enhance your memories. Some photographers will do this gratis as an appreciation for the destination work. Also at the rehearsal dinner family and friends will get to know the photographer and warm up to him, hence being more comfortable at the wedding. On the wedding day everyone will be familiar and comfortable with one another assuring a stress-free day.

Strategies to Make It Work

You already know a great photographer but during the wedding season he is always booked on Saturday and often on Friday and Sunday. You cannot afford the extra travel fees he would deserve for missing the extra income. Try to take advantage of the fact that warm weather months are the busy time for any wedding photographer. However, weather for most destinations is wholly different from the home city –that is usually one of the main reasons your having a destination wedding! Schedule your wedding during the local off-season. Also, you could have your wedding on a Monday thru Thursday, that way the photographer would have time to return and work locally on Saturday, hence not missing potential income and you can go enjoy the weekend as newlyweds! With a little planning, you may be able to entice the photographer who once seemed out of reach.

After you have chosen the photographer to capture your dream wedding now you have to figure out how to best get him there. As mentioned earlier, it is best to bring the crew in two days before the wedding. If this is not possible and the photographer is arriving the day before the wedding, make sure that the crew is not booked on the last flight to arrive that day. This insures that if some connection is missed, or baggage lost there is still another

flight to rectify the situation; this has saved me more than once. A direct flight can also help to avoid baggage issues.

Treat your team well! Do not try to save a few dollars by treating your photographer and crew with a lesser standard than your guests. Granted they do not need to stay in the penthouse suite like your Mother-in-law is demanding. But, the whole travel and lodging experience should be equal to what you are providing your guests.

In the end, when you display your destination-wedding album to your friends and family it should express how great you looked within that magnificent environment and what a wonderful time everybody had. For those not lucky enough to have been with you, it should inspire them to get engaged and travel there themselves. The best way to have that album is to hire the right photographer.