

Jennifer's Stress Free Honeymoon Planner

by Jennifer Prymula

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Most brides and grooms spend countless hours, days, weeks and months planning for the “Big Day.” Unfortunately, *honeymoon* planning often gets much less attention. And that's too bad, because the honeymoon is your chance to unwind after all the excitement of the wedding – and it's the beginning of your new life together. It should be a celebration all its own, not an afterthought! So, I've taken it upon myself to write my own “Stress-Free Honeymoon Planner.” Consider it my wedding gift to you!

9–8 months before the honeymoon

- **Dream, dream, dream.** Start discussing what each of you wants for your dream honeymoon. You need to agree on a general theme (e.g. tropical or cosmopolitan, romantic or adventurous), then you can let your imaginations soar. It's a great way to put some snuggle time and fun into your wedding preparations!
- **Get out your calendar.** Determine how long your honeymoon can be and schedule the time off of work. Remember that honeymoons to distant destinations like Tahiti and Fiji will require more than a week because of travel time and time zone differences. No matter where you go, be sure to plan a day or two to recuperate after you get back home.
- **Budget realistically.** -Budget realistically (ok- I agree this part isn't fun!) – you'll need to include airfare, transportation once at the destination-typically called transfers, accommodations, sightseeing, gratuities, meals and souvenirs. And starting now will mean that you don't shortchange your honeymoon by spending it all on the wedding.
- **Don't shortchange yourself.** As you work out your budget, keep in mind that your wedding lasts but a couple of hours, while your honeymoon goes on for a week or more, so don't put all of your funds into the wedding! Which do you think you'll remember more in five years --- the centerpieces at the reception or a private candle lit dinner on the beach? The unique placards for your guests or your enjoyment of the in- room Jacuzzi? And don't kid yourselves that your room category doesn't matter -- you will be newlyweds after all! Believe me, hearing the ocean while enjoying the view of the sunset on your balcony with your new spouse will be immensely more romantic than one of the parking lot!

8–7 months ahead

- **Hire a travel agent.** Contact travel agents and interview a few to see who you click with. A great way to do this is at bridal shows. The travel professional should ask a lot of questions about what the two of you want for your dream honeymoon before making any recommendations. Be honest about budget and expectations and then relax. The travel professional will get to work for you!
- **Book it!** Review the options, choose a honeymoon package, then place your deposit with your travel agent and relax. That's one more thing off the wedding to do list! Booking this far in advance will get you the best pricing, the best choice of room categories and the best flights. Plus, as an added bonus, when the wedding plans start to get hectic, you can daydream about your fantastic honeymoon knowing it's just waiting for the two of you! Don't forget to purchase travel insurance!

6 months ahead

- **Get your travel documents in order.** If you don't already have a passport, apply for one now (yes, it can take months for your passport to arrive). If you do have passports, check the expiration dates to be sure they will be valid when you travel. A good rule of thumb is that your passport should be valid for six months beyond your return date; in fact, some countries require this, so check with your travel agent or visit the State Department Web site at www.travel.state.gov. Also check to see if you will need any visas and shots. If there are back child support issues-now is the time to clear them up-before you apply for a passport!

3 months ahead

- **Review current luggage requirements.** Check the luggage you have available against your airline's luggage requirements. You will need to check both size and weight limits. Airline rules are strict, so borrow or buy new luggage if you have to. Also check special TSA requirements concerning locks, contraband and carry-on restrictions. Current rules restrict the amount of liquids and gels that can be brought aboard the plane. Currently the rules state that each person can carryon liquids and gels provided they are in container of

3 oz. or less and all containers must fit in a clear, quart-size, zip-top bag -- so, no, you won't be bringing that magnum of champagne aboard.

- **There are no restrictions currently about liquids in your checked luggage.**
- **Dress for success.** If you have any questions about the dress expectations at your honeymoon destination, contact your travel agent. Be sure to bring a sweater or light jacket (planes and air conditioning can get quite chilly), along with sturdy shoes for that long romantic walk on the beach and for sightseeing. If you plan to ride horses, you'll need a pair of blue jeans as well as those shoes (no sandals). I recommend at least two swim suits for both men and women. Swimsuits may not dry as quickly in tropical climates as they do at home, and it's uncomfortable putting on a damp swimsuit (trust me on this one!). Bring along a couple of gallon size zip top bags to transport damp swimsuits home in!
- **Buy sunscreen and bug repellent.** Sunscreen is a must! While a nice tan can be very sexy, there is nothing romantic about a sunburn! I usually bring two sunscreens: one high SPF for the first few days and then a slightly lower SPF for the rest of the week; I also pack aloe vera, which soothes sun-kissed skin. If you are traveling in the tropics, bug repellent with DEET is a high priority.

2 months ahead

- **Make final payment.** This is as easy as calling your travel agent and saying go ahead and use the credit card on file!
- **Take care of the home front.** Make arrangements for a house sitter and a pet sitter if you'll need them, and have a backup plan in case these fall through. Also arrange for someone to deliver wedding gifts and keepsakes to your house from the reception, take your wedding dress to the cleaners, return any formalwear or other rentals, and otherwise take care of the wedding cleanup.

3 weeks ahead

- **Copy everything.** Make a copy of your travel arrangements, your passports and your credit cards and leave it with a trusted family member or friend. Be sure to give him your travel agent's contact information as well.

- **Hold the deliveries.** Unless someone can pick up your mail and newspapers every day, make arrangements to stop delivery. Nothing says “Come rob this house” like a stack of newspapers in the driveway.
- **Check your camera.** Check that your camera is in working condition and pick up extra batteries, memory card(s) or film if you’ll need them.

2 weeks ahead

- **Take out your list and get packing.** Two weeks will give you enough time to pick up anything you need and still attend to all the last-minute wedding details. Be sure to pack an extra bag or bring an extra suitcase for those souvenirs and gifts you’re bound to bring home.
- **Cross-pack.** I recommend cross packing, i.e., putting half of your clothes in each other’s suitcase. This way, if the airline misplaces a suitcase for a day or two, neither of you is completely out of clothes! Pack a few gallon-size, zip-top bags to carry damp clothing on the way home.
- **Consider your carry-on carefully.** Pack your tickets, passports, money, personal items, and a change of clothes in your carry-on bag. Also pack your glasses and any medications, making sure they are in their original labeled bottles.
- **Alert financial managers.** Call your bank and credit card company to let them know that you’ll be traveling for how long. Most financial institutions will freeze your account if they see suspicious charges, and you’d hate to have them lock you out just when you need them the most! Advance notification may also provide protection if unauthorized charges show up.

The day before

- **Attend to last-minute details.** Confirm flight schedule. Double check carryon bag.

Day of departure

- **Get ready for take-off.** Know that the getaway can be hectic, especially if you are leaving directly from the wedding reception. There will be aunts to kiss and tin cans to remove from the back of the car, so start early. You must arrive at the airport early to allow for security screening; for international flights, you may need to be there three hours before departure.

- **Drink up.** Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated both before and during travel.

- **Relax and go with the flow.** The wedding is over and now you can enjoy each other!
Have a Mai Tai for me!

About the author:

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