


DWHSA
DESTINATION WEDDING & HONEYMOON
SPECIALISTS ASSOCIATION

DWHSA Online Course Lesson 1.1

The World of Romance Travel


Destination weddings

- DWs revolve around travel - and, typically, they last longer than one day.
- 16 to 24 percent of engaged couples in North America plan a DW. (86 percent of engaged couples consider a DW, even if many of them ultimately plan a hometown wedding. Plus, about a third of couples getting married have been married before - and they're more likely to pick DWs.)
- Why do they pick DWs? They want to do something different. They want an intimate, informal ceremony. They want to save money. They want a carefree event. They want "neutral" territory. They want a wedding that feels like a vacation. And, they're in love with their chosen destination.

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Honeymoons

- Nearly 9 in 10 couples take honeymoons after their wedding - it's an entitlement.
- Average trip cost these days: \$4,900 (up 37 percent from the year before)
- The average length is 8.6 days, and the trip was booked on average 5.1 months before the wedding date.
- Seven in 10 DW couples honeymoon in their wedding locale.

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Engagement trips

- Trips dedicated solely to proposing marriage in a memorable way are a new trend that's growing in popularity, especially among Millennial clients who want their wedding plans to be unique and memorable.
- "Engagementcations"
- Short weekend trips and cruises fit the bill.



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Anniversary trips

- These trips can be geared around a return to the wedding locale or planned for different destinations but timed around the wedding date.
- Many couples plan the trip a year in advance and then spend the 12 months leading up to it saving for the trip.
- Anniversary travel gifts can match the traditional gift ideas for wedding anniversary dates (e.g., the first anniversary is usually a paper gift, so that's airline tickets; the second year is cotton, so that's a beach towel for a beach vacation).



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Vow renewals

- Some couples enjoy repeating their vows several years after the main event – in the same destination as the initial wedding, or in a different spot.
- Cruises work very well for vow renewal trips.
- Couples may travel alone or bring family and friends with them.



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Babymoons

- Babymoons are getaways taken by couples who're expecting a baby, so that they can enjoy one last vacation before the newborn arrives.
- Sometimes, they're taken while the couple is trying to get pregnant.
- Resorts that offer babymoon-related services like prenatal massages and couples spa services are popular choices.



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Familymoons

- Familymoons are DW trips, honeymoons, or a blend of both that involve not just the couple but also their children (as well as other relatives and even close friends).
- They're a great option for "blended" families (couples that have children from previous marriages) - 65 percent of remarriages fit this description.
- The kids and others traveling with the couple can take part in the ceremony, but also enjoy separate activities while the couple enjoys alone time.



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Romantic getaways


- Surveys show more travelers who're busy with work or who're trying to save money may choose two- to four-day weekend getaways each year instead of longer romantic vacations.
- These trips are less expensive, they're easier to plan (especially with little notice), couples can drive in most cases, and they can visit a wider variety of places.
- You should think about weekend trips from your market area with commissionable aspects that you can recommend to your couples.



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Focus on the “lifetime value” of romance clients

- Your goal = becoming THE romance travel expert for your client base, and for your local market area at large!
- Your value to the couples you book doesn't end with that initial DW or honeymoon – it's just starting. You don't want to book sales – instead, you want to create deep relationships with those couples to serve them year after year.
- The true value of each new couple you bring in as clients isn't the commission from that first sale – it's the “lifetime value” of those clients' trips booked with you year after year!

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DWHSA Online Course Lesson 1.2

**The Latest Trends in
Destination Weddings and Honeymoons**

Basic Wedding Stats

- Average wedding budget: US\$28,427 (not including the honeymoon)
- Average wedding gown cost: \$1,211
- Average marrying ages: 29 for the bride, 31 for the groom
- Average number of guests: 139
- Average number of bridesmaids: 4 to 5
- Average number of groomsmen: 4 to 5

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Basic Wedding Stats

- Most popular month to get engaged: December (16%)
- Average length of engagement: 14 months
- Most popular month to get married: June (17%)
- Percentage of destination weddings: 24% (note: surveys typically define a "destination wedding" as any ceremony taking place more than 50/75/100 miles from the couples' hometowns, so this percentage includes more ceremonies than those trips typically thought of as "destination weddings" by travel agents)



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Basic Wedding Stats

- Brides are spending more on their weddings. The average wedding spend keeps growing year over year (\$204 per guest in 2012).
- Blue is the most popular wedding color (33%), followed by purple (26%), green (23%), and metallics (23%).
- More couples issue save-the-date notices (68% in 2012, compared to 57% in 2009). Twenty-eight percent created these online, versus 19% in 2009.



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Trend # 1: DWs continue to explode!


- Destination weddings are growing in popularity. In 2011, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) couples had a destination wedding; this has grown from 20% in 2009.
- 66% of international destination wedding brides and 45% of domestic destination wedding brides opted for a destination wedding because they wanted a special, fun or exotic locale. The second most popular reason why international brides chose a destination wedding was to host a more intimate affair with fewer guests (65%), while domestic brides wanted a destination that was special to them as a couple (44%).



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Trend # 1:
DWs continue to explode!

- Destination weddings have an average of 86 guests (vs. 77 guests in 2009).
- Breakdown: 96 guests for domestic U.S. destination weddings vs. 62 guests for international DWs
- 70 percent of destination weddings take place in the continental United States (FL, CA, and NV are the top three locations domestically; internationally, the top choices were the Caribbean [39%], Mexico [24%], and Hawaii [20%]).

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Trend # 1:
DWs continue to explode!

- Destination weddings are lasting longer - 60% last three or more days. (Nearly half of the international destination weddings last four or more days.)
- 51 percent of DW couples use a wedding planner of some sort (e.g., a travel agent, an on-site resort wedding coordinator).
- 69 percent of DWs are held outdoors.

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Trend # 1:
DWs continue to explode!

- Destination wedding couples are spending more on a per-guest basis than their more traditional wedding counterparts. The median destination wedding spend is \$404 per guest internationally, and \$225 per guest domestically, compared with the national wedding average of just \$137 per guest.
- The average total destination wedding spend is \$20,890 (not including honeymoon, engagement ring or travel expenses).

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Trend # 1:
DWs continue to explode!

- Aside from the traditional rehearsal dinner, after-party and next-day breakfast, 1 in 3 (32%) destination wedding couples plan a group activity like a sightseeing tour for their guests.
- Of the couples who plan a group activity, more than half (53%) cover the cost for at least some of their guests.
- For those couples who contribute to the cost, they spend an average of \$2,598 internationally and \$2,280 domestically planning these group events.

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Trend # 1:
DWs continue to explode!

- Couples are also considering their guests' expenses, with 2 in 5 (39%) paying for travel/accommodations for at least some of their guests.
- More than 4 in 5 international destination wedding couples and guests stay at the wedding destination beyond the wedding date, while more than half of their domestic counterparts do the same.

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Trend # 2:
Inclusive, Casual, Spiritual

- Brides are focusing more on creating an experience for guests. More than one in four brides provided additional guest entertainment and spent more on those activities.
- Casual and fun weddings are more popular. Seventeen percent described their nuptials as "casual" in 2012, compared with 16% in 2011, 14% in 2010, and 12% in 2009.
- Weddings taking place in religious institutions are also declining. Only 35% of brides held their weddings in a house of worship in 2012, down from 41% in 2009. And, more couples (33%) are having a friend or family member officiate the ceremony up from 29% in 2009.

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"The idea of having a destination wedding is growing among our brides, and it goes hand in hand with the fact that most people no longer live where they grew up. When family is spread all over the country, a destination wedding is the perfect way to bring everyone together."

(Carley Roney,
XO Group Inc. co-founder)



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Trend # 3: Honeymoons are back!

- After several years in which fewer couples were taking honeymoons, in 2012 77% said they took a honeymoon.
- Another survey found that 82% of the surveyed brides took a honeymoon (8.6 days was the average length; the trip was booked 5.1 months before the wedding, on average; and 24% of the honeymooning couples had a travel-specific gift registry).
- The stats are even higher for DW couples: Nearly 9 in 10 couples doing a destination wedding still plan to take a honeymoon with 7 in 10 of them honeymooning in their wedding locale – either for part of the honeymoon or the whole trip. In addition, nearly 3 in 10 will have another party when they get home.



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Trend # 3: Honeymoons are back!


- Couples spend nearly three times more on honeymoons than typical vacations (67 percent spent \$2,500-\$5,000, while 23 percent spent \$5,000-\$10,000).
- Asked what their clients would do to reduce honeymoon costs, 28% of the surveyed agents said budget-conscious honeymoons favor all-inclusive vacations, while 22 percent said their clients would shorten the honeymoon's duration to save money.
- 71% of the surveyed agents' honeymoon bookings fell between May and September (June was the most popular month - 44%).



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Trend # 3:
Honeymoons are back!

- 43% of brides do the honeymoon planning alone, but 87% said they made the final trip decisions as a couple.
- 37% used travel agents for honeymoon planning (while only 13% said they used agents for non-honeymoon travel).
- Honeymoon destinations include the Caribbean (34%), followed by the continental USA (24%), Hawaii (16%), and Europe (15%).

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Trend # 4:
Millennials are in charge!

- Until 2007, most wedding couples were Gen Xers.
- Since then, Millennials (ages 35 and under, generally) have taken over. They now account for 60 to 83 percent of weddings in 2013-2015 (depending on the surveys you read).
- Oldest are 34, youngest are 13 - they'll be wedding/honeymoon consumers for a long time

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Trend # 5:
The GLBT market is hot!

- Same-sex couples have longer engagements and are older when they get married, compared to traditional couples.
- They're also more likely to have a casual wedding, fewer guests (but spend more per guest) - and, they're less likely to have a bridal shower or a bachelor/bachelorette party, but they're more likely to have an after-party, engagement party, and couples party.

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Sources

- "Real Weddings Study" (annual) - March 7, 2013 - 17,500 brides married in 2012 were surveyed - sponsored by XO Group Inc. (the parent company of TheKnot.com and WeddingChannel.com)
- "The Knot Market Intelligence Destination Weddings Study" (annual) - June 18, 2012 - Almost 3,000 U.S. couples who held a DW in 2011 or 2012 - sponsored by XO Group Inc.
- 2013 Travel Trends Survey of travel agents - sponsored by Allianz Travel Insurance
- 2012 American Wedding Study: Travel Edition - sponsored by Brides magazine



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DWHS Online Course Lesson 1.3

Why Should You Specialize in Romance Travel?

It's exploding in popularity!

- DWs began in the 1970s but waned as Princess Diana's royal wedding fueled demand for "traditional" hometown weddings. But, from the 1990s onward, surveys show constant upticks year over year for DWs.
- Couples pulled back on honeymoon bookings in the late 2000s due to the global recession, but surveys show they're back to spending almost three times as much on honeymoons now as typical getaways.
- You can't trip over bridal magazines and web sites these days without finding lots of media coverage on DWs, honeymoons, and romantic getaways.



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It fits demographic patterns for the next 20 years!

- Baby Boomers are entering the life stages to spend more money on anniversary trips, vow renewals, and familymoons.
- Gen Xers are ready for babymoos and familymoos, too.
- Millennials represent a HUGE surge in demand for DWs and honeymoos – 60 to 83 percent of all wedding bookings nowadays – and they're ready for engagement trips, annual anniversary trips, and romantic getaways throughout the year.



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It's a recession-proof travel niche (honestly)!

- Surveys show that, while consumers will pick "staycations" over annual family vacations to save money, they won't cancel or substitute other things for their wedding and honeymoon travel.
- They may pull back on specific trip expenses here and there, but they regard their honeymoos (and, increasingly, their DWs) as entitlements.



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It's built around packages!

- While you may customize some romance travel bookings from scratch, generally the majority of your bookings in this niche will be packages – pre-planned, pre-assembled trips with options that your clients can pick to customize the pieces of the trip without your planning everything from the ground up.
- Today's romance travel packages offer many choices for clients, particularly with wedding and reception details.
- For you as the agent, packages mean higher volume, quicker turnover with clients, and bigger commissions with your preferred suppliers.



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It's supported by a huge network of strong suppliers!

- While some niches have a smaller supplier base (e.g., faith based travel, culinary travel), romance travel boasts a deep bench of highly regarded suppliers with whom you can partner.
- Those suppliers include not just the cruise lines and resort companies, but also a range of wholesalers who can offer you more booking and marketing support (plus, higher commissions in some cases).
- These companies are committed to the romance travel niche – they're showing by their dollars that they'll be there to work with you.



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You'll work as a counselor, not an order taker!

- If you're tired of spending an hour on hold with a cruise line or resort to book a trip that nets two-figure commissions, this is the niche for you.
- If you thrive on relational selling – working closely with a smaller number of clients who really want to work with you and who want your expertise – this is the niche for you.
- If you'd rather become an expert in one area of travel, and really dig deep into learning about specific properties, ships, and destinations, instead of being a "jack of all trips but master of none," this is the niche for you.



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You'll earn much more money over time!

- As you concentrate your marketing efforts in this single niche, and as you build your client base over time, and as you generate repeat and referral bookings from these clients, your overall sales volume will rise year over year as you start feeling momentum.
- If you concentrate your bookings with a select number of preferred suppliers, then this growing volume will yield much stronger commissions year over year as well.



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You'll face very little local, in-person competition!

- If you were a cake baker, photographer, or dress shop owner, you'd probably face stiff competition in your local market area. In most U.S. and Canadian cities, you can't throw a handful of rice in your downtown area without hitting competing wedding businesses!
- But, as a romance travel expert, you're working in a specialty that's still relatively new. In most towns, you won't face a competing agency on every street corner selling DWs and honeymoons. Sure, there's competition – but it's not as tough as the other wedding niches.



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Your local presence is a HUGE selling point!

- Too many agents overlook the value of their local address as an enormous competitive advantage against online travel agencies and direct-selling suppliers.
- Because you're based in your local market area – you live there! – you'll be there for your clients if they have questions or if they run into problems on their trips. They can find you IN PERSON to talk to and to ask questions. (Try doing that with an online agency or a supplier based outside North America!)



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It's a fun, fulfilling way to build a business for life!

- Month after month, year after year, we've talked with hundreds and hundreds of travel agents in the USA and Canada who're tired of doing business the way they're doing things now – chasing fewer dollars and doing more work than ever before facing stiff competition ...
- There's no comparison between typical travel sales and the chance to help clients plan their trips of a lifetime (and other romantic getaways that they'll treasure and remember forever!).



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**Are YOU Ready For
The Romance Travel Niche?**


Familiar with the basics of booking travel?

- Do you have experience already booking the basic components of a trip for clients (e.g., hotel rooms, cruise ship cabins, airline seats)?
- Have you done any work with groups yet? Many DW clients in particular turn into small group bookings almost automatically. You may find yourself dealing with suppliers' group contracts and group booking codes – so, it's important that you know how these group rules work.
- If you're very new to the travel agency business, you should strongly consider signing up with a reputable host agency to learn the booking ropes before you begin helping brides and couples with their romance travel requests.

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Connected to preferred suppliers in this niche?

- Because you will not escort your couples in most cases as they go on their destination weddings and honeymoons, you'll rely heavily on the services offered by the suppliers with which you book your clients. So, it pays to have a lineup of preferred suppliers – wholesalers, hotel/resort companies, and cruise lines – that you know offer exceptional romance travel products and services.
- Having access to preferred supplier relationships (e.g., via your host agency, consortium, or franchisor) will allow you to book at higher commission levels in many cases – and, that extra 1%-5% (or more!) in higher commission rates can mean hundreds or thousands of dollars in additional profit over a year's time.

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Detail oriented and organized?

- Client details (building prospect and client databases, using client questionnaires to prepare for initial consultations)
- Travel details (booking trips – including air, hotel, and cruise components – for different individuals coming from many different cities and tracking deposits and final payments)
- Group details (planning/confirming the wedding ceremony components)



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Working with back-office systems already in place?

- Do you have a filing system (online, offline, or both) to store client records and booking details? Is the system secure, and is it accessible to you if you're traveling away from your office?
- Do you have a calendar system to alert you when clients' booking, deposit, final payment, and departure dates are approaching?
- Do you have a marketing calendar or plan that prompts you to take consistent action, month in and month out, to promote your business?
- Do you have methods for tracking and collecting your earned commissions?



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Comfortable with lots of direct client contact?

- Many agents build their businesses selling "one off" trips (e.g., weekend cruises, family vacations) that require minimal client contact once the booking has been made. In the romance travel niche, however, clients' bookings tend to be longer term, with lots of moving parts between the initial consultation and the departure date.
- You'll be in constant contact with clients as well because they'll be planning their wedding ceremony details and you'll be handling the bookings for their wedding party members and other guests.
- In today's hyper-connected world, those contacts may come via your cell phone, late-night emails, or a barrage of Facebook posts ...



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Protected by a thick skin?

- Most agents in this niche agree that true "bridezillas" are few and far between. However, you'll have the occasional bride (or groom, or parent, or wedding guest) who questions your trip recommendations or who finds "Internet specials" that are less expensive than what you've given your clients. Are you patient and tactful in dealing with clients who may not be convinced you're as good as you say you are?
- It's difficult at times to be criticized or questioned by clients, even if they mean no disrespect (e.g., Millennials have grown up questioning everything, but they're just doing their own research in most cases – they still trust you!). Can you avoid taking things personally with clients?



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Prepared to work with Millennials?

- They want to collaborate - it's about creativity, not saving money. (They grew up on Martha Stewart, etc.)
- They're very "do it yourself" focused - so, "Don't DIY - leave it to me as the agent" doesn't work.
- They want everything custom - it's a need, not a luxury.
- They'll disagree with you on things, but they don't see that as disrespect - instead, it's "teamwork" with you.



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Consistent with your client follow-up?

- If you miss a deposit or final payment deadline on a client's weekend cruise or getaway, the biggest loss is that weekend. But, if you make paperwork or booking errors with a DW or honeymoon plans, the fallout can be huge!
- Are you comfortable following up with romance travel clients who sometimes "disappear" on you, failing to return calls and emails for weeks at a time?



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Ready with a working web site?

- Do you have a web site for your travel business that looks professional?
- Can you add your own content to the site, or do you have to go through a webmaster or third party to make changes?
- If your current site is focused on your travel agency selling every type of travel to everyone, can you create a separate page (or a separate site) that's just focused on romance travel?
- In most cases, you absolutely need an email address that's branded for your romance travel business. "Free" email addresses (e.g., Yahoo!, AOL, Gmail) may not seem professional, especially to Millennial clients.



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Skilled with/ready to learn about Facebook and Pinterest?

- Today's couples live on social media. Fifty-nine percent of brides say Pinterest, Facebook, and blogs are their best sources for wedding inspiration (above magazines and friends/family). With Facebook, three in five brides update their status or name within one day of walking down the aisle, and with Pinterest two in five share "boards" with bridesmaids and family.
- Do you feel comfortable setting up a Facebook business page and Pinterest boards for your romance travel business?



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**Packages vs.
Built-From-Scratch Trips**


Two types of romance travel bookings

- Packages – off-the-shelf, pre-planned wedding and honeymoon trips in which the major decisions about ceremony locations, officiants, food and drink, music, etc., have been made (with options for couples to choose among in many cases)
- Built-from-scratch trips – completely custom-planned destination weddings and honeymoons in which you assemble the entire booking (not just the travel components, but any wedding ceremony plans as well) yourself as the clients' agent

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Two types of romance travel bookings

- In the major romance travel destinations – the Caribbean, Mexico, Hawaii, and the South Pacific – packages are by far the most common choice made by clients. They're easier to book, they're less expensive than custom-built trips, and most resorts now offer couples many options for picking the colors, styles, flowers, and other components within the basic wedding package they're booking.
- Packages are also the predominant format for cruise weddings and honeymoons as well (with some options for customizing).
- However, in destinations where DWs and honeymoons are not as frequent (e.g., Africa, Europe, Asia), you may need to customize a standard tour package or create a trip from scratch, because packages that are romance-travel specific may not be available.

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The big advantage for working with packages

- While packages offer many advantages for your clients as well (e.g., lower prices, more options these days to customize package elements), they're great news for agents in this niche because they allow you to grow the volume of your romance travel business easily and quickly.
- Planning custom trips for several clients at a time can be a full-time job! But, if you're able to offer different packages to different clients, you're not buried in the fine-print details of creating these trips – instead, you can focus on closing the bookings and getting the rest of the wedding guests to book with you, too.

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The specific challenges with built-from-scratch trips

- You really need to be very familiar and comfortable with the destination in which you're planning a trip from scratch. There's no time to learn the basics while you're trying to prepare an FIT itinerary!
- You may struggle to find suppliers for each custom trip component that will pay sufficient commissions to compensate you for your planning time, so you should consider service fees for clients who ask you to create a built-from-scratch trip for them.
- One silver lining with FIT-style romance bookings is that you may develop a true niche within this niche (e.g., dive weddings, weddings in a popular but off-the-beaten path destination, weddings for disabled clients) that you can market to a national or global audience.



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The Leading DW/Honeymoon Wholesalers

Why book through a wholesaler?

- A wider range of options for packaging your clients' lodging with add-ons such as airline tickets, shore excursions, transfers, etc.
- The ability to earn higher commissions in many cases
- The ease of the wholesalers' booking engines and procedures (e.g., the use of booking codes for wedding guests departing from different cities)
- The buying power when wholesalers combine the bookings of many different agents – and, their resulting clout when problems arise at a hotel or resort

The best place to start? Your preferred supplier list!



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DWHSA Online Course Lesson 2.3

**The Leading DW/Honeymoon
Hotel and Resort Companies**

Two types of hotel/resort suppliers for romance travel


- **All-inclusive properties** (hotels and resorts that offer "all inclusive" rates that cover not just the use of a room by clients but also their basic meals and beverages, on-site activities, the use of the property's recreational facilities, and other services)
- **Standard properties** (hotels and resorts that do not offer all-inclusive rates but instead charge separately for services above and beyond the use of a room by clients)



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Questions you should ask as the agent

- Who are the on-site wedding coordinators (if any), and how may they be reached?
- How many weddings does the resort do per day/per week/per weekend? At what times?
- What specific locations do they have for (a) ceremonies and (b) receptions (get pictures if possible)? Are there any special rules governing the use of these locations?



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Questions you should ask as the agent

- What wedding packages does the resort offer, what's the pricing, what's included specifically, and can you make changes/substitutions?
- How many rooms does the resort have (and what categories)? What constitutes a room block? And, what special needs or connecting rooms are available?
- How far in advance does the resort get booked up?
- Does the resort plan renovations in the future (e.g., during your clients' stay)?



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Questions you should ask as the agent

- Can you use outside vendors if you wish, and can the resort/coordinator help locate the vendors?
- What are the deposit and payment requirements?
- Can the resort/coordinator take care of paperwork, documents, licenses, marriage certificates?



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Questions you should ask for your clients

- What's included in the rooms (e.g., climate controls, plunge pool, safe, balcony/patio)?
- What are the food and drink options - how many restaurants and bars, all-inclusive or not, food types, reservations process, wristbands or towel cards, well or premium liquor, beer/wine choices, room service, kids menus, special dietary requirements?



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Questions you should ask for your clients

- What is the resort's dress code?
- What about the resort's amenities (e.g., spa, onsite entertainment)?
- Does the resort encourage/accept kids (and, what about kids clubs/programs, restrictions, babysitting services)?



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Questions you should ask for your clients

- How does the resort handle Internet access (free or pay, public areas only or rooms too)? And, how good is the cell reception?
- How close is the resort to the nearest airport, and how are transfers handled? What are the transfer costs?



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The Leading DW/Honeymoon Cruise Lines


Types of cruise weddings

- At-sea weddings aboard the ship
- In-port weddings aboard the ship
- In-port weddings off the ship (ashore)
- Weddings on shore at the line's private island
- Vow renewal ceremonies in any of these locations

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Types of cruise weddings

- Onboard wedding coordinators employed by the cruise line
- "Intermediaries" such as Royal Ocean Events and The Wedding Experience

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Types of cruise weddings


- **The Wedding Experience**

Exclusive wedding service provider for Azamara, Celebrity, Norwegian, Princess, and Windstar, as well as selected ports for Carnival and Costa

<http://www.theweddingexperience.com>
- **Royal Ocean Events**

Exclusive wedding service provider for Holland America and Regent Seven Seas, as well as selected ports for Carnival

<http://www.royalwed.com>

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The typical cruise wedding

- The officiant (a ship's officer or a non-denominational officiant)
- The ceremony with a bridal bouquet and a groom's boutonniere, recorded music, and a keepsake certificate
- A simple cake with sparkling wine or Champagne
- Photography services (but not the actual photos)



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The big challenge with cruise weddings

- With very few exceptions, **cruise lines do not pay commissions on the wedding package portion of these trips!**
- Instead, they suggest agents focus on the fact that you'll earn higher-than-standard commissions in most cases on the blocked group space for the wedding party and guests sailing on the ship.
- You can work with shore excursion/ground operators to plan ceremonies in port so that you can earn commissions from those operators who're working independently of the cruise line.



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Cruise wedding tips

- Learn the fine-print details in the wedding packages offered by your chosen cruise line.
- **Only a handful of cruise lines offer legally binding marriages at sea:** Azamara Club Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Cunard, Norwegian, Princess Cruises, and Royal Caribbean among major lines that accept U.S. passengers.
- Many cruise weddings take place on the day of embarkation, so always ask about priority check-in and boarding for the wedding party and the guests.



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Cruise wedding tips

- Also, due to this early boarding, port transfers offered by the cruise line may not operate early enough to get your clients to the ship on time.
- With day-of-embarkation ceremonies, the wedding party should carry everything onboard that will be needed for the ceremony.
- Onboard ceremonies typically take place in a library, lounge, chapel, or deck space. However, some lines offer unique venues now (e.g., the FlowRider or the carousel on RCI's larger ships).



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Cruise wedding tips

- Many lines allow you to bring a limited number of non-sailing guests onboard the ship to observe the actual ceremony. (You may be required to pay extra food/beverage costs for them, as well as additional coordinator time.)
- Ask about possible surcharges, depending on the season in which you've booked the wedding.



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Cruise wedding tips

- If you plan an in-port wedding (either on the ship or ashore), think ahead about your "Plan B" if the ship must skip that port or if it experiences tender problems.
- Remind your clients not to plan any post-cruise receptions at home too early, in case something happens with their cruise date (e.g., a full-ship charter or a hurricane).



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**Narrow Your Focus and
Find the Best Partners**


**“Everything to everybody”
doesn’t work these days**

- In the “old days,” travel agents could promote themselves as true travel experts – with lots of knowledge about the most popular destinations and suppliers requested by most consumers.
- Now, in today’s hyper-competitive world, no agent can keep up with every new resort opening, every new cruise ship debut, and every minor policy change made by suppliers! And, it’s not unusual to meet new clients who’ve done their homework and already know more about a specific destination, resort, or ship than we do ...
- So, the key to long-term success in romance travel is narrowing your focus – mastering the details about the most popular destinations and suppliers that most of your clients want!

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The 80/20 rule

- Eighty percent of your destination wedding, honeymoon, and romance travel clients ...
- ... will end up picking 20 percent of the available destinations and suppliers!

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Narrowing your focus

- With a legal pad or a new document on your computer, start by making a list of your nearest air gateways – the airports from which you send most of your clients on trips.
- While we may serve clients from other states and provinces or even other countries from time to time, most agents recruit the majority of their clients from within two to four hours' drive of their home offices or storefront agencies. So, it makes sense to begin narrowing your focus by concentrating on that small list of nearby airports from which the great majority of your clients depart already.



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Narrowing your focus

- With that list of nearby air gateways, take each airport and think about the three to five most popular romance travel destinations that may be reached from that gateway. From the eastern coast of North America, for example, locations in the Caribbean and Mexico might make your list; meanwhile, agents on the western coast might pick Hawaii, the South Pacific, and Mexico.
- Under each air gateway, list those top destinations that your clients can reach from that airport.



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Narrowing your focus

- Next, take each destination from the lists beneath individual airports and identify your top three to five preferred suppliers that serve those destinations from those gateways. For example, which wholesalers, resort companies, and cruise lines on your preferred supplier list offer romance travel packages to Jamaica from BWI or CVG or LAX or YYZ?
- You may need to dig through brochures or web sites for your key preferred suppliers to confirm that they still offer packages from your local gateways to these top destinations.
- And, if you find "holes" in your preferred supplier list where you can't match local gateways with their DW/honeymoon packages, that's a sign you may need to prune and add to your vendor lineup ...



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Narrowing your focus

- Finally, take your new list of top romance travel supplier partners, pull their brochures or go to their agent-only sites, and collect as much detailed information as you can about their specific DW/honeymoon packages. This collection of information is now your romance travel library!
- Learn these packages down to the fine-print details. Review the booking policies of these suppliers, too, especially their rules for group contracts and group booking codes.
- Then, take a step back and refresh your knowledge about the destinations on your list – their tourism seasons, their climates, their legal marriage requirements, etc.



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Why go through this exercise?

- You can no longer be an expert on every corner of the world and every supplier in the industry! But, if you narrow your focus to the top three to five destinations that are most popular from your local air gateways (and, the suppliers that serve them, and those companies' DW/honeymoon packages), you can become an expert on that 20 percent of the destinations and packages that 80 percent of your clients will choose!
- You'll also find that mastering these details will help you tremendously as you're meeting new clients, conducting initial consultations, and preparing proposal and quotes – because, this new knowledge will remain "top of mind" to help you quickly identify the best destinations and packages to fit the needs of different clients. (You won't always have to run back to the office to do research every single time!)



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**The Key Questions For
Your DW Clients**

Prequalifying Questions

- Why are you thinking about a DW?
- How comfortable do you feel dealing with the details of your DW or honeymoon?
- How involved do you want to be in planning this trip?
- How many people do you want to invite - and, in general who are they?
- Can your guests carve out the time to attend your DW - and, can they afford the trip?
- Do you have any destinations in mind?




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Prequalifying Questions

1. Who's paying for the destination wedding – and, what's the budget?

- There's no firm etiquette with DW expenses.
- Don't start with the wedding dreams and then figure out how to pay for that trip – instead, start with an idea of the budget, and design the DW trip that fits that budget.




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Prequalifying Questions

1. Who's paying for the destination wedding – and, what's the budget?

There are six major expense categories with the typical DW trip:

- The site visit
- Wedding communications
- Wedding travel
- The DW ceremony
- The reception
- Other wedding trip activities




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Prequalifying Questions

2. Who's coming to the destination wedding?


- Urge your clients to avoid the pressure to invite everybody! Most DWs are small affairs.
- Start with the wedding party – how many attendants?
- Then, make an initial guest list – followed by strict prioritizing (A, B, and C guests).
- Recommend that your clients consider a larger reception when they return home for the B and C guests.


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Prequalifying Questions

3. Who's planning the destination wedding?

- For most DW bookings, you'll deal mainly with two levels of client contacts: (a) the day-to-day contact (typically, the bride, the groom, or both) with whom you'll discuss ceremony details, issues with guests' travel plans, etc., and (b) the party(ies) paying in whole or in part for the DW (e.g., parents or other relatives) who may need to be consulted as well for major trip decisions.
- Now's the time to discuss service fees ...

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The Location

Questions for your clients

- Geographical proximity
- Budget
- Styles and paces
- Venue types
- Climate and language



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Questions for you as the agent

- Wedding venue options
- Sufficient airlift, lodging, and ground transportation services
- Safety questions
- Legal marriage requirements



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Why do couples pick a particular destination?

- The destination's natural beauty
- The presence of beaches
- Favorable climate/weather
- Previous visits to the destination (and a desire to get married there)
- Accommodations

(Top picks, in order? Continental USA/Canada, the Caribbean, Hawaii, Mexico, and Europe.)



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Picking the ceremony venue

- Indoor or outdoor?
- Size of the wedding group?
- Proximity to (a) couple's room or spa suite and (b) the post-ceremony reception?
- The time of day for the ceremony?
- The open, public nature of the venue?
- Any local/company rules governing the venue?
- Transfers (if it's an off-site ceremony)?



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Clients' advance site visits

- Clients travel to the resort or sail on the ship that will host their ceremonies
- Meet with on-site wedding coordinators to discuss ceremony/reception options
- Meet photographers, musicians, and other wedding vendors and discuss arrangements
- Sample wedding cakes and other banquet items
- View the venue and room/cabin options



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The Dates


Special dates of significance to the couple

- The date on which they met for the first time
- The date of their proposal/engagement
- Dates with special meaning for their family members or friends (e.g., the wedding date of the grandparents who're paying for the bulk of the DW expenses)
- Dates with cultural or religious significance (e.g., Christmas Day)

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Sufficient planning time to set things up

- Ideally, a date that's 12 months down the road, so that you have a full year to plan the trip and book the wedding guests' travels
- If the couple's chosen date severely compresses your planning time, it's critical that you advise your clients accordingly (in writing!) so that they're aware that their close-in date may cause issues with planning the ceremony or arranging travel.
- Some circumstances may dictate less planning time (e.g., clients wanting to fly to Las Vegas this weekend for a quick wedding!) – depending on the destination, you may find preferred suppliers who can handle a last-minute booking (while also paying you commissions).

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High and low seasons/ climate patterns

- Even if your clients have done their Internet homework, they may not honestly understand how tourism seasons and climate patterns affect the availability of hotel rooms, wedding venues, airline seats, etc.
- For example, they may believe that scheduling their wedding in the Caribbean or Hawaii during the week of Christmas Day means many of their guests may be off work during that holiday season and thus can make the trip easily – without understanding that, during these "high season" holidays, there's little chance you can find enough affordable airline seats and resort rooms to plan the trip then!

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Holidays

- U.S. and Canadian holidays may appeal to some clients because they assume their relatives and friends will be more flexible in traveling (because they'll be off work then), but those holidays may also coincide with high-season times in the chosen destination (meaning affordable rooms and airfares will be hard to find).
- Another issue is holidays in the destination itself. It pays to confirm with the resort or the tourism office whether the couple's chosen dates may coincide with local or national holidays and festivals in that destination.



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Unique circumstances

- Even if the chosen dates work well for the couple's schedules, it pays to run the dates by the key wedding party members as well to uncover any conflicts they may have in their schedules.
- The couple may not be aware of possible conflicts (e.g., the bride's sister will serve as the maid of honor, but she hasn't told anyone yet that she'll be eight months pregnant on the selected date!).



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The Legal Marriage Requirements

General rules

- Residency rules
- Minimum age of the parties being married/parental consent
- Documents certifying the end of any previous relationship (e.g., divorce, death of a previous spouse)
- Certifying, translating, and authenticating requirements
- "Affidavit of eligibility to marry"/"Certificate of No Impediment"



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Legalizing a DW at home

- Typically, your returning clients should contact their local court house to learn the filing requirements for their DW marriage once they're back from the trip.
- Every county, state, province, and country is different when it comes to these requirements! Sometimes, it simply requires filing the marriage certificate and paying a small fee.



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Legalizing a DW at home

- Usually, the officiant or the on-site wedding coordinator will provide couples an official copy of their marriage license. Sometimes, this happens on the spot - or, the couple might receive an initial official copy, with the final, translated copy (the legally valid copy they'll need to file at home) mailed to them up to a few months after the ceremony.
- Sometimes, the couple must translate the certificate from another language (e.g., Spanish) to English - and, there may be other rules as well. It's better to know in advance before the couple departs!



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Sources for marriage rules

- Your wholesalers, hotel/resort companies, and cruise lines (get their recommendations in writing!)
- Tourism offices
- The U.S. or Canadian embassy/consulate for that destination:

<http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>

<http://www.international.gc.ca/ciw-cdm/embassies-ambassades.aspx>



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Basic guidelines

- Be prepared for "loosy goosy" advice from coordinators - just get everything in writing!
- The couple cannot be legally married already to qualify for a civil (legal) ceremony.
- Religious ceremonies carry their own rules - ask ahead (e.g., baptismal certificate, confirmation certificate, letter from the couple's local priest or rabbi giving them permission to marry in Mexico).



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Basic guidelines

- If a bride or groom is a national or citizen in that destination, additional steps and forms may be required.
- All documents (except passports) provided for a wedding typically become the property of the local jurisdiction.
- If any forms must be translated into another language, make sure you use a "certified" translator who's acceptable to local authorities (talk with the resort/cruise coordinator about this).



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Basic guidelines

- Some destinations require an "apostille" seal (basically, a more formal style of notarizing a document). Ask the coordinator ahead of time if this is required, and make sure the notary or government agency you're working with follows the guidelines shown at:

http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial_2545.html or
http://apostille.us/Documents/Service_Apostille.shtml



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Basic guidelines

- Couples may have their own officiants conduct ceremonies, but typically a locally recognized legal officer (e.g., a justice of the peace) must be present to authenticate the ceremony.
- Individual resorts may require longer residency stays than the destination does, in order for the on-site coordinator to prepare everything.
- ALWAYS keep a paper trail of (a) the info you received from sources and (b) the info you've shared with clients.
- Errors and omissions (E&O) insurance is critical in case you make an error (or you pass along an error from other sources).



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Mexico

- Marriage request form
- Original birth certificates (plus one copy apiece)
- An original "prenupcial certificate" with blood test results (blood type plus HIV-negative and STD status) issued less than 15 days before the wedding date
- A "Single Status Statutory Declaration" confirming that the couple aren't married already



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Mexico


- The couple's valid passports and Tourism Migration Forms (note: passports aren't always needed for entry into Mexico, but they are required for legally binding marriages)
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable)
- Original IDs (plus copies) for four official witnesses who are at least 18 years old and who accompany the couple to the resort (most resorts will provide local witnesses at no additional cost)



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Mexico


- Any bride or groom who's been divorced must wait at least one year after the final divorce date to be married legally in Mexico. The divorce decree must also be translated into Spanish (handled, again, by the resort in most cases). If the bride has been divorced less than one year, she may be required to take a pregnancy test at the resort - and, if it's positive, a legal ceremony cannot be conducted. Plus, if the bride is divorced and her passport still bears her ex-husband's last name, she must present an original birth certificate and an original divorce decree (translated and apostilled).



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Mexico


- Birth certificates must be translated into Spanish by a certified translator (usually, the resort will handle this for an extra fee).
- If the bride or groom has undergone a legal name change for any other reason, that decree should also be brought along.
- The names on the passport, birth certificate, Tourism Migration Form, etc., should ideally match if possible. If there are big differences, talk to the on-site coordinator about what to do.



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Mexico


- Blood tests: The test will usually be conducted at the resort, with results returned within 24 hours. If a test returns positive for HIV or STDs, the couple must sign a release to proceed with the ceremony (except in Cozumel, Isla Mujeres, and Playacar, where the ceremony will not proceed if a test returns positive).
- Legally binding same-sex ceremonies may be performed legally in Mexico City and in the state of Quintana Roo (Cozumel, Isla Mujeres).



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Mexico


- To take care of these steps above, most resorts require couples to arrive on property at least three full days before the ceremony (Saturday and Sunday don't count).
- Many couples' home jurisdictions require the wedding certificate from Mexico to carry an "apostille" seal (basically, a more formal notarizing step); the on-site coordinator can handle this for your clients.



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Mexico

- In January 2013, new rules allow couples to include their parents' names on the wedding certificate if they present their (the couples') original birth certificates bearing an apostille seal and translated properly. Otherwise, the parents' names may not appear on the certificate.



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The Bahamas

- Valid passport plus evidence of the date of their arrival in the Bahamas (e.g., the Bahamas Immigration Card or the entry stamp in their passports)
- Original birth certificates
- Declarations from both parties confirmed they have never been married before (sworn before a notary public at home or in the Bahamas - this is part of the marriage license application)



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The Bahamas

- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- 48 hours' residency in the Bahamas, which may include the date of arrival, weekends, and holidays (e.g., Friday arrivals may be married on Sunday)
- Two witnesses (at least 18 years old) to sign the marriage license



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The Bahamas

- Couples arriving by cruise ship must obtain a letter from the ship's purser confirming that they've been in Bahamian waters for at least 24 hours.
- Minors may be married in the Bahamas provided they have written consent from all living parents.



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Jamaica

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- 24 hours' residency in Jamaica, provided the couple has applied already for the marriage license (in any case, they must apply for a marriage license at least 48 hours before the wedding ceremony)



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Dominican Republic

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- A "Single Status Affidavit" (the resort can handle this on site, or the couple can bring these from home if they're notarized and/or apostilled)
- Two witnesses (at least 18 years old) to sign the marriage license



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Antigua

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates (plus copies)
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- 48 hours' residency, which must include one business day (holidays not included, and no weddings on Sunday)



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Aruba

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates (plus copies)
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- A "Certificate of No Impediment" confirming that the bride and groom are single and free to marry (the resort can handle this on site, or the couple can bring these from home if they're notarized and/or apostilled).



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Aruba

- Two witnesses (at least 18 years old) to sign the marriage license
- While resorts can offer a "beach blessing," legally binding ceremonies must take place at the local Civil Townhouse.



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Barbados

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- An affidavit confirming that the bride and groom are single and free to marry (the resort can handle this on site, or the couple can bring these from home if they're notarized and/or apostilled).



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Barbados

- The couple must apply in person at the office of the Ministry of Home Affairs in Bridgetown
- Wedding arrangements must be made with a "Marriage Officer" (a magistrate or a minister of religion authorized to conduct marriages). The couple must present a letter from the marriage officer who's agreed to perform the ceremony when they apply for the marriage license.



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Bermuda

- Couples getting married in Bermuda must file a "Notice of Intended Marriage" form with Bermuda's Registrar General's office, attaching copies of certificates (e.g., birth, divorce, death of a previous spouse) as asked.
- Then, the Registrar General's office publishes a notice in two local newspapers about the intended marriage. If there's no objection, the Registrar General will issue the marriage license on the 15th day after the application, and it's valid for three months. The couple or a designated person must pick up the license at the Registrar General's office.



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Puerto Rico

- Valid passports
- An affidavit from the couple that they're not Puerto Rico residents and that their sole reason for visiting Puerto Rico is getting married (non-U.S. citizens must also state that they will not be staying in Puerto Rico for longer than what is allowed legally)
- Original birth certificates
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse



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Puerto Rico

- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- A medical certification showing that the couple complies with any medical tests required for marriage in their place of residence (valid for 10 calendar days only from the date of issue!)



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St. Lucia

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates (plus copies)
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)



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Turks & Caicos

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates (plus copies)
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- An affidavit confirming that the bride and groom are single and free to marry (the resort can handle this on site, or the couple can bring these from home if they're notarized and/or apostilled)



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Turks & Caicos

- 48 hours' residency in the Turks and Caicos before submitting the application for a marriage license
- Cruise ship passengers may now apply for a special license for a marriage to take place on the same day of arrival.



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Tahiti

- Valid passports
- Original birth certificates (plus copies), with apostille seals and a translation into French done by an approved translator and legalized by the French consulate
- Divorce or death certificates for previous spouses (if applicable), plus related marriage certificates involving the deceased spouse
- Any certificates involving legal name changes or adoptions (if applicable)
- A letter signed and dated by both future spouses, addressed to the mayor of the commune chosen for the marriage ceremony



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Tahiti

- A "Certificate of Non-Marital Status" (translated into French and legalized by the French consulate)
- Proof of residency (e.g., a utility bill - photocopies are acceptable)
- A copy of any prenuptial agreement (translated into French and legalized by the French consulate)
- Two witnesses (at least 18 years old)



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Tahiti

- The couple cannot be French nationals or residents of France.
- These materials above should be expedited to the mayor's office of the chosen commune at least 45 days before the ceremony date.
- Couples can be legally married in Tahiti on the day in which they arrive - there are no residency requirements.



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Same-Sex DWs

- In the United States, 37 states plus the District of Columbia now allow lawfully binding same-sex marriage ceremonies,
- Generally speaking, destination weddings conducted lawfully in another country may be registered locally in the U.S. states that offer same-sex marriage, and they may qualify for civil union status. But, the key is checking with the local court house where the couple resides!
- In July 2005, Canada became the first country outside Europe to allow same-sex marriage nationwide. Generally, couples may register their lawfully conducted destination weddings in their province when they return home.



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Cruise Lines

- Six major cruise lines now have legal permission from their countries of registry to offer legally binding wedding ceremonies at sea (in international waters): Azamara Club Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Cunard Line, Norwegian Cruise Line, Princess Cruises, and Royal Caribbean (a new addition to the list).
- Numerous lines offer shore excursions built around legally binding weddings in various ports or on their private islands, but the rules of the destination that governs that port or island apply.



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The Wedding Ceremony Details

The ceremony time and venue

- Individual resorts and cruise ships may restrict the number of ceremonies that may take place each day (perhaps only one ceremony daily!), so you should confirm your clients' requested time on their chosen date as soon as possible.
- Also, you should ensure that your clients understand the range of venue options they have at the resort or on the ship and that their chosen venue is confirmed (and, you should reconfirm it before their departure).
- Ask the resort/ship coordinator ahead of time what "Plan B" options are available if the chosen venue isn't available (e.g., bad weather on the beach), and inform your clients ahead of time about these options.

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The officiant and the actual ceremony plans

- As part of their standard wedding packages, many resorts and ships include the services of an officiant – a minister, retired judge, justice of the peace, or another official who's authorized to perform weddings.
- Ask your clients if they want a secular, spiritual, denominational, or religious ceremony well in advance, so that plans can be made accordingly (e.g., finding an approved officiant in that destination who can perform Jewish or Roman Catholic ceremonies).
- If your clients have poems or scriptural readings they wish the officiant to read, remind them to type up the reading and provide it to the on-site coordinator or the officiant in advance.
- Alert the officiant before the ceremony who will be holding the rings.

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Music

- Many DW packages also include the basic music required for the ceremony (e.g., the bride's traditional entrance music) provided by CD/MP3, a disc jockey, or a live musician/band. Your clients can usually upgrade for an extra charge (e.g., go from CDs to a live musician).
- If your clients have special requests for their music, check with the on-site coordinator ahead of time to see if those requests can be accommodated. Music license issues may prevent your clients from playing their "special song" from a CD they've carried with them to the resort or ship.
- If your clients wish to hire local bands or DJs above what the resort offers in its packages, work with the resort coordinator to try to book those musicians through the resort (so the resort can intervene if they don't show up or if they don't work out).



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Flowers

- Two basic floral items - the bride's bouquet and the groom's boutonniere - will be included as part of the price in almost every destination wedding package.
- However, your clients may wish to request certain types of flowers not included in their package, and they may also desire more flowers as part of the ceremony (e.g., bridesmaid bouquets, flower petals, flowers in an arch or chuppah). Ask your suppliers ahead of time whether substitutions can be made (and at what price).



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Dress code and beauty tips

- While many DWs are casual in terms of dress code, tell your clients upfront if their chosen resort or ship does enforce specific dress requirements.
- Also, your clients should carefully communicate to their guests any dress code rules from the resort/ship or from the couple themselves.
- If your clients insist on men's items such as tuxedos, remind them that (unlike North America) many destinations do not always have ready access to tux shops.
- Ask the resort/ship if pressing is available for dresses (and, check the prices - this service can be pricey!).
- Work with the on-site coordinator to provide your clients as much weather/climate information as possible, so they can prepare in terms of cosmetics and attire.



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Photos and Videos

- Help your clients understand what's actually included in their packages for photos and videos. For example, many cruise wedding packages promise "photography services" - that means the presence of a photographer and usually a single print!
- Other details you should confirm with photos and videos are the additional costs for extra prints/DVDs/CDs and the turnaround time for proofs and prints/images. For videos, confirm the format in which the video will be delivered.
- If your clients want to bring friends who'll take photos or videos, remember that certain venues (e.g., cruise ships) may prohibit anyone other than their approved staffers from doing so - so, check ahead with the coordinator.
- If your clients have key shots they want taken (e.g., a father-daughter photo), ask them to submit that list to the coordinator well ahead of time.



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Food and beverage

- Most DW packages include a basic wedding cake and selected beverages, as well as hors d'oeuvres and drinks for a reception following the ceremony.
- However, the resort or ship will also offer upgrade options if your clients prefer different types of food and drinks. They should order these upgrades as early as possible to allow the on-site coordinator to make these arrangements.



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Other ceremony details

- If your clients have other special requests for the ceremony or the reception - anything from candles and special lighting or unique decorations to a separate dance floor or specific table settings - many resorts and ships will try to accommodate these requests with sufficient notice (and, usually, additional fees collected from the couple).
- If the requests involve transporting items from the clients' hometown to the destination (e.g., decorations with a sports team logo that the groom wants to display), remind the clients that those items must be carried and transported through customs (or shipped ahead, usually at prohibitive cost).



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Gifts, welcome bags, and packing

- Remember the hassles and expense of shipping gift bags, favors, and welcome bags to the destination (or trying to carry them through customs)! Also, remind your clients that wrapped gifts may be unwrapped by airport security employees.
- With most destination weddings, wedding favors aren't always a big deal - the trip itself is the souvenir.
- Suggest a honeymoon registry or gift registry to your couples, in place of wrapped gifts.
- DWHS offers sample packing lists that you can customize for your clients.



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Guests' use of social media

- If your clients have specific requests for guests regarding social media (e.g., the taking of photos during the ceremony, the posting of those images to Facebook or Pinterest), they should communicate those to guests ahead of the ceremony.
- Many couples prefer posting the first image of their wedding to Facebook before guests do so.
- Recommend smartphone apps such as WeddingSnap or WedSocial that allow your guests to upload the photos they take to an online album for everyone to enjoy.



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Wedding communications

- Save-the-date notices
- Wedding invitations
- Wedding web site
- Welcome packets
- Thank-you notes
- Other on-site collateral (e.g., programs, escort/seating cards, menu cards, signage)



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Travel and Wedding Insurance

Three types of coverage


- Errors and omissions/professional liability insurance
- Travel insurance
- Wedding insurance



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E&O/professional liability insurance

- Errors and omissions ("E&O")/professional liability coverage protects you as an agent from claims filed against you, your agency, and your employees and independent contractors that result from actual or perceived errors any of you make in the course of working with clients (e.g., typing incorrect dates when you finalize a booking, failing to advise clients that they need visas to travel to a particular destination).
- Typically, these policies also cover against catastrophic claims from any personal injuries your clients suffer (e.g., they are jailed temporarily because they don't have those required visas, or they fall ill during the trip because they didn't get required immunizations you should have told them about before the trip).



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E&O/professional liability insurance

- You should always carry your own E&O/professional liability policy, even if you fall under a policy that's held by your host agency, franchisor, consortium, or travel agent organization.
- Confirm that the policy provides worldwide coverage (applying no matter where the claim is made or where you've sent your clients) and "first dollar defense," meaning you won't pay out of pocket for legal expenses (so, any deductible in your policy would apply only to paid claims).



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Travel insurance

- Travel insurance is coverage for the most common things that can go wrong on a client's trip - illness or injury, baggage loss or delay, trip delays or cancellations, the financial default of a travel supplier, etc.
- So many things can go wrong on a destination wedding trip that travel insurance is crucial for your clients.
- You should make it a standing policy that you will never sell a destination wedding unless (a) the clients and their guests have purchased travel insurance before they depart or (b) you have collected signed travel insurance waivers from any wedding travelers who don't want the coverage.



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TRAVELSAFE INSURANCE WAIVER FORM

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING TRAVELSAFE INSURANCE

Client's Name _____
Date of Departure _____

PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY

Now that you have arranged your trip, as professional travel agents we feel that it is our responsibility to recommend travel insurance to protect your investment. Please read the TravelSafe Enrollment Form carefully in order to make an informed decision concerning this important matter. Email or call us with any questions you may have.

AT THE TIME OF FIRST PAYMENT:

- I have been advised of the cancellation penalties for my purchase. I acknowledge receipt of the TravelSafe Insurance Enrollment Form.
- I understand that TravelSafe Insurance can protect me from possible loss of money due to supplier bankruptcy/default, unexpected trip cancellations/interruption due to accident, sickness or death, baggage loss, medical expenses, and emergency air transportation costs.
- I understand that I must purchase TravelSafe Insurance immediately to obtain maximum coverage.

AT THIS TIME, I CHOOSE: (CHECK ONE)

- I purchase the recommended insurance. I have mailed my completed TravelSafe Insurance Enrollment Form to TravelSafe at the address on the form.
- I decline the recommended insurance.
- I think about my decision. I understand not all benefits may be available if not purchased immediately.

Name (Please Print) _____

Signature _____ Date _____



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Travel insurance

- Talk with your current travel insurance vendors to make sure the policies you typically recommend to travelers contain sufficient coverage for trip cancellation, trip/delay interruption, and medical/repatriation expenses to handle any claims that might result from destination weddings. Also, ask your insurers if there are any exclusions in these policies that might preempt coverage for destination wedding-style travel.
- In almost every instance, it makes more sense to recommend third-party insurance to your clients (plans that are sold and administered by independent insurance companies) instead of insurance plans offered by the travel suppliers operating the DW trip. (In many cases, these supplier plans are not "insurance" – they're actually waivers.)



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Travel insurance

- Trip cancellation protects clients if they're unable to depart on the trip as planned (sudden illness, unpredictable accidents)
- Trip interruption/delay reimburses clients for losses incurred due to factors that delay or interrupt the trip (e.g., flight problems) - very important if clients have multiple connections or destinations
- Baggage delay/loss/theft protects clients if they have issues with luggage (typically, checked bags)



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Travel insurance

- Medical/dental coverage applies if clients become ill or injured on the trip (most U.S./Canadian government plans [Medicare, Medicaid, provincial health plans] do not cover costs on out-of-country trips, and they will not pay upfront as medical providers in other countries may require)
- Evacuation (medical or non-medical) applies to transportation costs associated with medical emergencies or with urgent crises such as civil unrest



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Travel insurance

- Most clients buy travel insurance primary for the trip cancellation coverage - but, it's the things that can happen once your clients have departed that can cause the biggest headaches!
- Do your travel insurance plans offer "primary" coverage (i.e., the travel insurer won't ask clients to seek coverage first from their other insurance plans before paying bills)?
- Check the limits and exclusions in the trip cancellation coverage (e.g., not just airline strikes but also bad weather and mechanical breakdowns; terrorism/civil unrest incidents; job transfers/losses/revoked vacation time).



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Travel insurance

- Many travel insurers offer coverage in the event of supplier defaults and bankruptcies - but, they keep a "list" of suppliers whose packages aren't coverage. Make sure your preferred suppliers aren't on your travel insurer's list!
- When does the baggage delay/loss/theft coverage kick in (e.g., 12 hours, 24 hours)? And, remind your brides to carry their dresses on their flights if possible ...
- Do your plans cover both medical and non-medical emergency evacuation - and, what are the limits?



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Travel insurance

- If your insurer offers coverage for hurricanes and inclement weather, do your clients' destinations need to be under a hurricane/bad weather warning for the coverage to apply - and, if so, what are the time frames?
- It's always best if clients buy travel insurance (or, sign the waiver refusing it!) at the time they make the initial bookings with you and place that first deposit. Many insurers offer extra benefits (including pre-existing condition waivers) if their plans are bought within seven, 14, or 21 days of that initial booking/deposit.
- Clients sometimes turn down travel insurance because they believe they're covered by other types of insurance. Remind them to confirm those coverage details (e.g., insurance provided by a credit card issuer may not apply if the trip wasn't paid for using that card).



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Travel insurance

- What's the after-hours support for clients who have emergencies during their trips?
- If clients purchase add-on services (e.g., shore excursions, sightseeing tours) after they've booked their trips and departed, will those add-on services be covered by the travel insurance plan they bought?
- Many travel insurers also offer "cancel for any reason" clauses - but, confirm the details, and find out if the refunds come as cash or future travel credits. Also, your clients who are paying the bulk of the DW/honeymoon expenses (e.g., parents) should consider buying/adding the "CFAR" clause to protect those big investments they're making!



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Wedding insurance

Beyond travel insurance, you might consider offering wedding insurance to your clients - especially those planning expensive trips or customizing DWs and honeymoons from scratch with you.

Wedding insurance policies cover disasters that affect the ceremony itself:

- Cancellation or postponement due to sudden illness within the couple or wedding party, bad weather, military deployments, etc.
- The loss or theft of the couple's luggage, wedding attire, gifts, or jewelry (with exceptions)
- Mishaps or no-shows by the officiant, caterer, florist, photographer, videographer, DJ/band/musicians, limo service, etc.
- Sudden closure or unavailability of the wedding venue
- The couple's personal liability if guests become ill or injured or cause damage or harm during the trip



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Wedding insurance

Typically, these plans don't cover the following:

- Cancellation due to "cold feet"
- Losses that occur due to negligence (e.g., the bride leaves an heirloom diamond necklace on the counter in her bathroom at the resort unattended)

Most wedding insurance plans cover the entire event, from the rehearsal dinner through the post-ceremony reception. Premiums can range from less than \$100 to \$600 or more, and your clients can buy the policy up to two years ahead of the ceremony date or as late as the day of the wedding (depending on the insurer).




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Wedding insurance

Who offers wedding insurance in the United States?

- WedSure.com (Fireman's Fund - the only insurer that offers "change of heart" coverage, but they'll only reimburse the party paying for the wedding expenses and the cancellation must occur at least one year before the ceremony date)
- WedSafe.com (Aon - offers the highest liability limits [\$5 million])
- ProtectMyWedding.com (Travelers - its policies have no deductible)



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Wedding insurance

Who offers wedding insurance in Canada?

- WedSafe.com and WedSure.com
- WeddinGuard (PAL Insurance Brokers Ltd. - www.palcanada.com/en/weddinguard)
- WedEnsure.com (currently suspending operations)
- Other independent brokers



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The Initial Consultation

Your goals for the initial consultation

- **Increasing your odds of turning prospects into paying clients** (a consultation booked after that bride/s/couple's initial email or phone call to you takes you a big step closer to a sale!)
- **Get an up-close-and-in-person feel for these prospects** (what are their personalities like, what types of questions do they ask) – and, give them the chance to get a feel for you, too
- **Collect facts and impressions that you'll use** to research trip options and present them when you follow up (from destinations requested by the couple to their body language when you ask about the budget)



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When, where, and who

- After your very first contact with a romance travel prospect (they call your office, they meet you at a bridal show, they send you an email, etc.), **your goal is scheduling that initial consultation as soon as possible!** Remember: You're probably one of several agents the prospect has contacted – so, follow up ASAP and ask to meet.
- **You must be polite yet aggressive in following up to schedule the consultation.** Simply saying "Hey, here's my card – call me when you're ready to talk!" doesn't cut it. Consider a multi-step approach after your initial contact with a prospect: Email first asking to meet; follow with a phone call; then, send a direct mail piece asking for the appointment. Follow that with periodic emails and phone calls until the prospect schedules the consultation or asks you to back off!



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When, where, and who

- If you're meeting the prospects in your agency or home office, **take a long, hard look at the atmosphere you're projecting.** Does your office or agency scream "romance travel" in its furnishings, décor, and displays? Is it clean and professional in appearance? Can you set wedding magazines or supplier brochures around, play wedding music in the background, etc.? Also, have refreshments ready
- If you're meeting in a public location (e.g., a coffee shop), **get there at least 15 minutes early and scout out a quiet spot** where you can talk without straining to hear each other. Send directions to the prospect if there's any confusion over the location. And, be prepared to buy coffee/soda/water and a light snack for the prospect.



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When, where, and who

- Ideally, the consultation will include both members of the couple, so that you can get a feel for each person, gauge their respective interests in the trip, and answer directly any questions each might have. However, you may be meeting with just the bride or the groom alone if schedules conflict. **Push politely but firmly to set a time where you can meet with the couple together – but, follow their lead and don't pester them.**
- With DWs, it's not unusual for parents, relatives, or other significant contacts to pitch in to pay for part (or all) of the DW trip. In these cases, ask the couple if it's possible for that "decision maker" to be present for the consultation (but, go along with the couple's reaction – they may not want that person involved in the initial discussions for some reason).



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Before the consultation

- Via phone or email, **go through several prequalifying questions** to get an initial idea of how serious the couple is, how much planning they've done already, and how much they've thought about who's coming on the trip, what the budget is, and who'll do the planning.
- **Some agents use client questionnaires** that they ask couples to complete and return before the consultation (DWHSA has samples).
- **Email a reminder about the consultation** (with time, location, and directions) they day before.



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Before the consultation


- **Prepare to dress to impress.** The prospects will be "buying" you during the consultation!
- **Review your notes about the prospects** to prepare for the consultation. Did they ask questions when you met them that might steer the conversation during the consultation?
- **Check out their Facebook pages and other social media pages** to learn more about their backgrounds, families, jobs, etc.



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During the consultation


- **Greet them when they arrive, get their beverages and snacks, and let them settle in** before you start the actual consultation.
- **Be prepared with "conversation starters" to let them do the talking at first.** It's hard to go wrong with "How did you two meet?"
- **Ask lots of open-ended questions – and, let them continue to do the talking.** Resist the urge to share your life story and everything you do at ABC Travel! Instead, sit back, listen, and let the couple share what they want you to know about their romance travel plans.
- **Take notes and pay attention to what's being said (and what's not being said).** Body language can tell you a lot about any couple!



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During the consultation


- **"Play back" what you're hearing from the couple at points during the consultation.** Every so often, step in to say "OK, John and Jane, you mentioned that you really want to make your destination wedding a very intimate affair with your closest relatives and friends – is that right?" This technique shows the couple that you're truly listening to their needs – and, it helps you confirm the basics for the trip options you'll present them later.
- **Wait until the end of the consultation to talk about what you do.** Once you've gone through your questions and the couple has talked at length, you can take a minute to describe what you do. Instead of taking 10 minutes to share your life story, though, have a "take home" piece (e.g., a trifold brochure with your card) that explains your background, your services, your specialties, your rates, etc.



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During the consultation

- **Keep track of the time.** Thirty minutes from the time you have coffee in hand until you're handing over your take-home piece makes a great consultation – an hour, tops.
- **Don't get into specific trip recommendations or costs if you can help it.** While you do want the couple to share their budget ideas with you, you should hold off suggesting specific resorts or ships and talking about specific price quotes at this stage. You'll want to go back to your office, mull over what you've learned, and prepare a proposal or quote.
- **Let the prospects know specifically the next step you'll take in helping them.** When will you follow up with them, and what will that involve (e.g., sending them a quote, or meeting again in person?).



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After the consultation

- **Send a personalized thank-you note** (an email if you must, but a handwritten card is great!) to the prospects immediately. Have the envelope addressed and stamped before you leave home for the consultation, then write the card and mail it afterwards.
- **Review your notes from the consultation while they're fresh in your mind.** And, decide the research you'll need to do to prepare your proposal or quote.
- **Get to work on the proposal or quote** so that you can deliver it to the prospects as you promised!



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The “secret sauce” with initial consultations

- They're the “critical bridge” between prospects you've just met and clients for life! What you learn in the initial consultation will frame how you work with these new clients on their very first trip with you.
- The more initial consultations you schedule, the more DWs and honeymoons and romantic getaways you will book, and the more profit you will make as a travel seller ...



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Proposals and Quotes

Your goals for the proposal or quote

- **Win the trust of your prospects or clients** – show them that you listened carefully when they shared their dreams with you and that you've found solutions to make those dreams come true!
- **Demonstrate your expertise and your professionalism** – the proposal shows your extensive travel industry contacts and knowledge, and it looks like a quote prepared by a professional
- **Trigger a decision from the prospects** – lay out options for them and use the best "calls to action" to spur them to make their decision and book with you!



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Using your research

- **Narrow down prospective destinations/trips/vendors** using the information you've gleaned from your prospects.
- **Pull the necessary information from suppliers' brochures and sites** (including rates, fine-print details, and images if you use them)
- **Confirm availability of requested dates with these suppliers** if your clients have very firm desired travel dates already in mind
- **Check the booking methods required for the desired trips** (e.g., booking codes or group contracts?)



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The "Rule of 3"

- **Build three recommended trip options into your quotes and proposals**, to give your prospects a range of ideas to consider (one or two options won't give them a variety to choose from, while four or more may overwhelm them)
- **But, break this rule when circumstances demand it** (e.g., if the clients can't pick between two different destinations – you may need to offer three trip options for each competing destination)




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Following up on proposals

- **Build "calls to actions" right inside the quote** (make it easy for clients to know what their next step is – calling you, emailing you, going to a page on your web site, etc.)
- **Incorporate deadlines if possible** (e.g., "The Category B swim-up suites pictured here book up quickly in the summer months – today, the resort has 21 of them open over the dates you're requested, and you wanted 10 of them, so we should reserve those as soon as possible.")
- Consistently, politely, but firmly **follow up with your clients after you deliver the proposal** – don't wait on them to call you! And, don't take it personally if they "go missing" and don't reply to you – just keep following up ...



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Service Fees

Service fee basics


- Service fees charged by travel agents became a common practice after the airline commission cuts in the mid-1990s.
- Today, **88 percent of agencies charge service fees on at least some of their sales**. Though airline ticket fees are the most common type of service fee agents charge, the fastest growing type of service fee is customized trip planning.
- Of those agencies charging fees, **19 percent of their total annual revenue comes from service fees** (up from 10 percent in 2002).



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Service fees – yes or no?

- Should you charge service fees - or, should you not charge them and make that a selling point? **There's no absolutely right or wrong answer to this question.** You must choose your stance on fees based on your service philosophy, your revenue needs, and other factors that are uniquely personal to you.
- NOTE: This lesson will offer the pros and cons of charging fees and advice on implementing fees - but, DWHSAs does not set service fee policies or amounts for its members, and you are 100 percent free to make your own service fee decisions!

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Arguments in favor of charging fees

- "You're not just selling travel - you're selling the VALUE of travel!" (DWHSAs member Brad Martin)
- These fees help weed out prospects who aren't truly serious about booking with you.
- Service fees will supplement your commission income from suppliers.
- They protect you if clients change their minds about trips after you've already invested significant time, effort, and expense in working with them.
- They compensate you fairly if you feel you're adding wedding/honeymoon planning on top of your standard trip booking/planning services.

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Arguments against charging fees

- You may feel you're justly compensated with supplier commissions only.
- You may worry that charging fees will put you at a competitive disadvantage compared to other agents in your market area or online travel agencies.

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“Plan to go” fees versus true service charges

- **“Plan to go” fees are actually advance deposits collected by agents before trip planning commences.** If clients actually go on the trip, the “plan to go fee” deposit is applied against the cost of that trip. But, if the clients fail to travel, that “plan to go” fee typically converts into a nonrefundable service fee kept by the agent.
- By comparison, **true service fees are retained by the agent as a professional fee earned for providing advice and counsel** to the clients, and it’s never treated as a trip deposit.
- At this stage, you should decide where you wish to fall on the spectrum of selling primarily pre-packaged romance travel or adding customized wedding planning services as well ...



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Service fee disclosures and receipts

- **ALWAYS disclose your service fees to clients early in the discussions with them** (e.g., the initial consultation). And, it makes sense to disclose your fees (or your “plan to go” deposit rules) in writing. These disclosures should specify (a) the amount of the fees, (b) what they cover (e.g., are they “plan to go” deposits or true service charges, and if they’re service charges, what services are included), and (c) the refundability or nonrefundability of the charges.
- Once service fees are paid, **always issue a receipt** that reminds clients about the refundability of the fees and what the fees cover.



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Questions you should ask yourself

- **“What’s my competition doing?”**

You should identify your key competitors - local agents or agencies that focus on DW bookings, or even nationwide agencies in this niche - and find out if they’re charging fees (and, if so, for what services). From a legal standpoint, it’s OK to ask other agencies about their fee structures, as long as you don’t cross the line into unfair restraint of trade by collaborating on, or agreeing to match, service fees.



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Questions you should ask yourself

- "How do my hours spent on the typical DW booking compare to my total net commissions received?"

The service fees you might charge should be commensurate with the effort you're investing in those bookings. If you find that you're booking all-inclusive wedding packages most of the time, with few changes to the packages and very little additional work on your part to book wedding guests, then you may be justified in not charging fees above and beyond the commissions for those packages. However, if you're spending hours and hours customizing packages for clients (or creating DW trips from scratch), then it makes sense to calculate your commission income from these bookings, compare that total to the hours you've invested, and then consider whether you need service fees to make up the difference.



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Questions you should ask yourself

- "Can I easily explain to clients why I charge fees?"

This question is critical if you want to succeed in crossing the barriers into service fee territory! If you've decided that service fees are best for your business, don't apologize for charging them. Instead, be ready to explain to clients in plain English why you charge the fees and what they get in return for them - and, be ready to say goodbye to clients who don't want to pay them (but who may have caused you more work than the lost income is worth).

Remember: **Only you can make the decision whether service fees for DW bookings will work for your travel business.** Review the facts, decide "yes" or "no," and move ahead in that direction.



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Client Agreements and Payments

Why should you use client agreements?

- **They spell out – in writing, signed by the clients and you! – who's responsible for what, and when.** By signing this form, your clients will find it tough to complain later that you didn't disclose due dates or you weren't clear about how changes and cancellations would be handled.
- **They "bind" clients to you and to their trip plans.** Without a signed client agreement, your prospects can "fish" all they want with you – but, with the signed agreement (and any required deposits or fees), their planning gets much more serious.
- **They protect you legally** if disagreement arise later with your clients.



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What should be covered in your client agreement?

- **Spell out the specific travel planning services you will offer clients:** helping them choose the destination by suggesting locations and soliciting/presenting quotes from suppliers for these locations and the final destination, negotiate the group contract or group booking code (to include discounts where the clients book sufficient rooms/volume to earn those discounts and perks), lock in the dates desired, arrange travel plans for guests, offer legal marriage requirement details, etc.
- **State upfront how involved you (as the agent) will be in dealing with wedding ceremony details** - will you deal with travel only, or will you work with the couple and the on-site coordinators to discuss and confirm ceremony details?
- **Discuss how you plan to communicate with the couple (phone, email, in person, etc.), and ask the clients to verify their preferred methods of contact.**



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What should be covered in your client agreement?

- **Remind the clients that it's their ultimate responsibility (and, their guests') to submit initial deposits, final payments, and other required funds** according to the deadlines you give them.
- **Provide complete details about any "plan to go" deposits and/or service charges** your agency must collect - amounts, dates due, what those deposits/charges cover, etc. Make sure you spell out what happens to those funds if the clients change their mind, go elsewhere, miss payment dates, etc. (To protect yourself against unfair "chargebacks" by clients, your agreement should be as specific as possible in this section!)
- **Consider stating your policies and procedures if clients request "price matches"** or question the value of what you've proposed for their trip.



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What should be covered in your client agreement?

- If you offer other services - e.g., honeymoon registries, wedding web sites - **describe those in detail** and any additional fees the clients may need to pay to secure those services.
- If you've learned over time that clients sometimes expect extra work from you that you don't provide (e.g., help with wedding dress packing and shipping), **you might add a clause to your client agreement that specifies you do not provide such assistance.**
- **Describe your specific policies governing changes and cancellations** - and, remind clients that they must abide by the policies enforced by the supplier(s) chosen for the trip. Specifically, you should address how changes may be submitted and the usual timing deadlines after which changes may not be possible.



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Other client agreement tips

- **Make it easy for your clients to sign and return the agreement** (e.g., print two copies, sign both, and mail them to clients with a stamped pre-addressed return envelope, so they can just sign one copy and drop it in the mail back to you right away).
- **Be careful about accepting "electronic" signatures for the client agreement.** Such signatures are more common nowadays, but there's nothing better if questions arise later than an agreement signed in ink by the client(s).
- **Keep these signed client agreements on file forever** (it's so easy nowadays to scan them in and store them online).



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Client payments

- For the typical romance travel booking, **your clients (and their guests) will usually pay in installments:**
 - Initial deposits
 - Full deposits
 - Additional partial payments
 - Final payments
- **Each supplier applies its own rules for payments**, so it's critical that you understand how your preferred suppliers typically ask for and process payments.



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Client payments

- **It's always safest to have clients pay for travel with a credit card** that's submitted directly to the supplier.
- **If you accept checks**, many agents ask clients to make the checks payable directly to the supplier and then forward those checks. Sometimes, agents will accept checks from clients made payable to the agency and, then, issue an agency check to the supplier - but, unless you have a compelling business reason to do so, this approach has risks.



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Client payments

- With credit cards, **it's safest if clients present you the card in person**, so that you can photocopy the front and back of the card (use your computer printer, or take a photo with your smartphone) if the supplier requires that. Chargeback issues rarely result when clients present cards in person - it's those over-the-phone, sight-unseen credit card bookings that sometimes result in fraud.
- And, **be very careful about accepting credit card payments into your agency account** and then using an agency card or check to submit the funds to suppliers. In these instances, your clients may lose their "chargeback" protections (because you as the agency "ran" their card, not the supplier directly).



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Client payments

- **Confirm that your credit card processor is "PCI compliant"** at this time (i.e., the company abides by the very latest security measures for protecting credit card data from thieves and hackers).
- You should avoid storing credit card numbers from clients, but **you should keep a copy of the receipts generated by your credit card processor** for each client payment you have run via credit card (18 to 24 months is a good time frame).
- If you do store credit card numbers, make sure they're encrypted online, that they're securely locked up if they're kept in print form, and **NEVER store the card security numbers alongside the credit card numbers** (that's a huge mistake).



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Client payments

- **Know each client group's deposit and final payment deadlines** - put these dates on your agency calendar. Also, make sure you notify couples and their guests in writing (postal mail or email) about the payments and the deadlines.
- **"Pad" the group's payment due dates by two weeks** (or more), to give yourself enough time to collect funds if needed and to track down procrastinating payers.
- With cruises, **consider collecting higher deposits** than the \$25-\$50 "courtesy hold" deposits.



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Client payments

- **Encourage group members to pay early** - perhaps offer a special gift for doing so?
- **Keep an eye on any "inventory recall" dates or rules** enforced by a supplier (e.g., many cruise lines specify in group bookings that unsold cabins can be recalled at any time).
- **Know your suppliers' policies and fees** for (a) name changes, (b) guest cancellations, and (c) transfers of independent reservations into group bookings.



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Communicating Travel Details to Clients and Guests

Sharing the travel details

- With the typical destination wedding, **you'll have two levels of trip bookings and confirmations:** (a) the reservations for the couple and the primary wedding party, and (b) the reservations for their invited guests who aren't part of the ceremony itself.
- With the couple and the wedding party members, you'll typically communicate with them directly (email, phone, fax, direct mail) with the trip dates, itinerary, costs, and booking/payment procedures.
- With the other guests, you'll need to share this same information – dates, itinerary, costs, and booking/payment procedures – with them so that they're up to speed on the details and they know how (and why) to book with you.



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Communicating with guests

- **Talk with your couples about your preferred methods of sharing these trip details with their guests:**
 - A page on your agency web site, on the couple's wedding web site, or both
 - Information added to (or inserted with) the "save the date" mailing, the wedding invitations, and other wedding communications
 - Emails and direct mail sent by you to the guests directly (using a list provided by the couple)
 - A presentation made by you at a family function, a bridal shower, etc.



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Calls to action and objections

- **Make it easy for the guests to understand how they can book with you** (e.g., links taking them to an email form or to the registration form on your agency site).
- **Think about possible objections that may arise from guests**, and nip them in the bud by putting detailed responses in your trip information (e.g., "This trip description includes your airfare and all air-related fees, as well as the taxes and service charges assessed by the resort. Remember: Many prices you'll find on the Internet don't include these extras – so, don't be fooled! Please contact me if you have questions about any competing offers you see online, and I'll check them out with you!")



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Confirmations for guests (and for the couple)

- Along with any confirmations automatically generated by the suppliers the guests are booking with, **send the guests your own confirmation emails or letters** updating them on the trip booking details from your agency. Also, now's the time to remind them about travel insurance!
- **You should update your couples periodically on the bookings being made by their wedding guests**, so that they'll know who's locked in for the trip and who hasn't made plans yet. Many agents send their couples a spreadsheet or a list every few weeks.



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Capturing the Bookings of Wedding Guests

Why is capturing guest bookings so important?

- With the average travel reservation, your work is largely done when you book the trip and collect the funds from your clients.
- But, **it's very different with romance travel bookings**, especially DWs. After you've confirmed the basic DW plans - the date, the destination, the venue - with the happy couple, now it's time to pull in the bookings from their friends, family members, and other contacts who've been invited!
- **Being able to "multiply" the work you've done** - taking that basic itinerary for the happy couple and immediate wedding party members, and simply rolling that out to book the rest of the guests - **is a huge time saver and revenue source for most DW agents**. However, **it's very common for DW guests to avoid (or forget) booking their trips with you**, opting instead to go online or try a different travel agent, usually with the goal of saving a few bucks (they believe).



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Why is capturing guest bookings so important?

Couple = 2 people in 1 room

Wedding party = both sets of parents + maid of honor (+1) + best man (+1) = 8 more people in 4 more rooms

Wedding guests = 10 guests (plus their +1s) = 20 more people in 10 more rooms

You've gone from 10 people in 5 rooms to 30 people in 15 rooms - but, **you've sold the same basic itinerary and package each time**, which means you've multiplied your revenues without much extra effort!



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The obstacles

- **Your couples don't always understand the true benefits** of having the wedding guests book as part of their group - or, they feel guilty or embarrassed about insisting that everyone book through you.
- **DWs represent a significantly higher expense** for the average wedding guest than a "hometown" wedding, so they're automatically eager to search for travel deals.
- **The guests may not truly understand the benefits** of booking within the wedding group (or, the disadvantages if they don't).



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Step # 1: Teach the couple why the group matters.

- **Make sure your couples** - and, the key decision makers such as relatives who're paying part or all of the trip expenses - **truly understand the benefits** for having guests book within the wedding group.
- One obvious factor is **the list of added values the couple will receive** typically with a larger booking group (e.g., ceremony upgrades, bridal/honeymoon room upgrades, add-on activities from the resort). **Share actual numbers with them** (e.g., 10 rooms = the basic ceremony, but 20 rooms = the basic ceremony plus a better location and nicer menus for the reception).
- **Match their guest list numbers with those desired upgrades** (e.g., if all 30 of their guests book within the group, they'll receive x and y amenities), so that they feel the incentive to encourage their invited guests to book with you.



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Step # 2: Teach guests why they should book with you.

- **Get the couple's endorsement and support of you upfront** - and, enlist their help in explaining to guests how booking through you benefits the couple and the overall trip. For example, if the invitations contain clear travel details, with the couple's request that their guests book through you, that gentle nudge goes a long way toward keeping the bookings in your court. And, the more information you can include in the invitations - and, the more follow-up emails and contacts you can have with DW guests to remind them to book with you - the more likely you'll capture that business.
- In many cases, **it helps to explain to the guests in clear language the benefits that accrue to the couple** when they book with you (e.g., some amenities for the couple may depend largely on your collecting enough bookings to "make" the group numbers the resort or cruise line requires).



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Step # 2: Teach guests why they should book with you.

- Also, it may help to **explain some of the big disadvantages for guests who don't book within the group** (e.g., if bad weather or an overbooked situation at the resort causes travel disruptions, all guests within the wedding group will be helped as a unit, but guests who've booked outside the group [and away from you!] will be on their own).
- Finally, **enlist the couple's help in using their "informal" networks** to spread the word that guests should book with you. A little peer pressure never hurts!



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Step # 3: Get the guest list and do your own follow-up.

- **You should insist on making your own follow-up contacts with the invited guests** (rather than relying on the couple to do the follow-up).
- If you have the guest list, for example, you can send follow-up emails after the main travel information has been distributed.
- Some agents do follow-up contacts every few weeks up until a few weeks before the wedding departure date.



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Step # 4: Keep the couple informed on who's booked.

- **Make it a practice to update the couple every so often** (e.g., once a month) **on who's booked with you to date** - e.g., send them a spreadsheet or list with the entire guest roster, highlighting those who've booked so far.
- That way, the couple can begin following up with some of the more obvious procrastinators (urging them to contact you to get the trip locked in).



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Step # 5: Offer a bonus for booking with you.

- For example, some agents throw in free basic travel insurance, a bottle of wine in their rooms, or something of value to encourage booking with you.
- Gifts are a great way to push DW guests to book early, too.



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What if you don't book the travel for some guests?

- As the departure date approaches, **remind the couple that your hands are largely tied** when it comes to helping guests experiencing travel problems on the way to the DW location if they didn't book with you. You can give them some advice if they call you, but you can't grab their PNRs and do much really because you're not their agent of record.
- If critical guests (e.g., the officiant, any members of the core wedding party) didn't book with you, **it may still make customer service sense to ask them to share with you their flight/travel information**. If one of these guests doesn't show up on site, the couple will still turn to you first in many cases for help – and, at the least, you can confirm flight times and arrivals and offer some basic information to help the couple.



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**Managing Clients and Guests
Through the Departure and Beyond**

Staying in constant contact

- **Use email (and direct mail at times) to keep your name and trip information in front of the couple, the wedding party members, and the invited guests.** Beyond confirming the trip bookings and recommending travel insurance, you can also share travel tips, weather forecasts, local sightseeing/activity ideas, language hints, packing lists, and other travel information as “excuses” to send email to everyone!
- **Think ahead about how you want to handle questions and responses from guests.** You can't be on call 24/7/365! With your office and cell phones, consider setting “office hours” when you'll be taking calls live (and, for other times, let callers know when you'll return messages). Do the same with your email addresses.

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Special needs and “bad news”

- **When bookings are made, ask immediately about any special travel needs or accommodations that the travelers might require.** Remember that, in destinations outside the United States and Canada, many countries don't have rules requiring disabled-access hotel rooms, wheelchair-friendly entrance ramps, and other aids that we take for granted. From mobility issues to dietary restrictions, these requests should be presented by you to the suppliers involved in the trip as early as possible.
- **Anticipate any “bad news” that might crop up before the departure date** (e.g., inclement weather, surprise renovations). It's always best that news like this should come from you to the guests – not after they watch CNN or find out on the resort's web site.

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Special needs and “bad news”

- In terms of price drops, resort overbookings, etc., **it pays to know the suppliers' policies in advance before these things happen.** For example, does the resort your clients have booked protect currently booked guests if deals or price reductions occur after they've already placed deposits? Do you have strong contacts with the suppliers' local business development managers (BDMs) or sales reps who can intercede on behalf of your clients if these issues crop up?



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Tracking guests' payments

- While it's ultimately the guests' responsibility to make the deposits, interim payments, and final payments on their bookings, **you should create a spreadsheet or calendar for each DW group with these deadlines clearly marked.** Issue reminders to the guests well ahead of any interim or final payment deadlines so that they know what's expected of them. And, if key wedding party members or guests are in danger of missing a deadline, bring your couples into the loop so that they know ahead of time.



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Confirming departures and handling on-site issues

- If you've booked guests' airfares (or if they're using charter flights), **it never hurts to confirm those flight departures** on the scheduled departure days, in case last-minute flight delays or cancellations might cause any worries for guests getting to the DW on time!
- **Remind the couples to check in with the on-site wedding coordinator** at the resort or on the ship when they arrive.
- **Give the couples (or a designated wedding party member) your cell number** for any absolute emergencies that occur on site which aren't handled properly by the resort/ship coordinators.



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The Components of a Honeymoon

Honeymoon components

Honeymoon trips contain many fewer "moving parts" than a destination wedding! So, in this lesson, we'll focus briefly on the main elements that go into the typical honeymoon booking:

- Flights/transportation
- Lodging
- Entertainment/activities/shopping
- Dining

In many cases, you'll sell honeymoon packages already created by wholesalers, resort operators, and cruise lines – but, you may branch into customized honeymoons as well ...

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A Deeper Look at Current Honeymoon Trends

Key honeymoon planning tips with clients

- **Ask the couple to list their priorities for the trip** - open schedule vs. lots of activities, great weather vs. luxury hotel suite - **and start planning the honeymoon based on those priorities.**
- If the couple want a destination wedding, **help them review the pros and cons** of (a) going to a different destination for the honeymoon or (b) staying in the same destination as the wedding ceremony itself (in the same property or a different location).



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Key honeymoon planning tips with clients

- **If the couple disagree on their interests**, consider (a) a resort that offers the type of lodging one spouse wants with activities or nearby excursions the other spouse desires or (b) splitting the honeymoon between two destinations.
- **Remind couples of the value of planning the honeymoon** - don't leave things to chance or just assume that everything will work out once they get on site.



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The latest honeymoon trends


- **Minimoons**
- **Friendmoons**
- **Volunteermoons**
- **Adventure excursions** (hiking, safaris, four-wheeling/ATV treks, cycling, skydiving)
- **Private villa rentals** (more privacy, "home away from home" feel - but, pricey)



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The latest honeymoon trends

- **"Green," eco-friendly honeymoons** (minimal impact on the environment, locavore menus, everything is recycled)
- **Small-ship cruises** (river cruises, barge cruises, yachts)
- **Sporting events** (milestone games/matches or participatory sports)
- **Foodie activities** (cooking classes, wine tastings, restaurant hopping)
- **Destination hopping** (splitting the honeymoon between two or more hotels, ships, cities, or countries)

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The latest honeymoon trends

- **Small, boutique hotels and inns** (unique styles, ability to rent the entire property)
- **Honeymooning in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Hawaii - but not in the main resort cities** (colonial Mexico, smaller Caribbean islands, smaller Hawaiian islands)
- **Luxury splurges** (staying in a standard resort but moving on the last night to an upscale hotel)
- **Beach beds and private plunge pools**

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Planning the Honeymoon With Clients

Honeymoon planning

Again, planning the typical honeymoon is much less involved than a destination wedding – here are the main factors that apply with most couples:

- **Budget:** How much money does the couple have for this trip?
- **Timing:** Will they depart immediately after the wedding ceremony, and how long do they want to stay on the honeymoon?
- **Location:** Have they picked a specific destination yet, or narrowed down their choices to a short list?
- **Activity Level:** Do they want to relax on the beach with no plans made in advance – or do they want to hike mountains, do zip-line excursions, and snorkel on specific days?



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DWHS Online Course Lesson 6.1

Client and Prospect Databases

Essential database fields


- Clients' full names (one field or split fields?)
- Birthdates, wedding dates, and other special dates
- Gender; citizenship; age
- Current mailing and street addresses
- Phone numbers (work/daytime, home/evening, cell, fax)
- Email addresses and social media "names"



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Essential database fields

- Spouse/fiance/fiancee information; family information
- Divorced or widowed (previous spouse[s] name[s], how long ago/dates)
- Passport info (country of issue, issue date, expire date, number)
- Referral source
- Employment information
- Emergency contact details

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Essential database fields

- Credit card information (with a big caveat)
- Loyalty program information (frequent flyer memberships, hotel frequent guest clubs)
- Hobbies and interests
- Past trips booked with you (or booked elsewhere); "bucket list" romance trips
- Physical or mental challenges that could affect travel

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Essential database fields

- Groups that this client is associated with (e.g., "Smith-Jones wedding")
- A field for other notes, remarks, and client preferences

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Critical database functions

- The ability to sort profiles and to search profiles
- The ability to "back up" the database contents (both within the program and outside it as well)
- The ability to roll or pull both individual profiles and sorted lists into your online and offline marketing tools (e.g., email newsletter programs)
- The ability to access your database via secure online connections (outside your office)
- The ability to generate helpful reports quickly and easily



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Popular database programs

- ClientEase (clientease.com)
- ClientBase/TRAMS (trams.com)
- ClientMajic/TravCom CS (travcom.ca)
- VacationCRM (vacationcrm.com)
- LessAnnoyingCRM (lessannoyingcrm.com)
- Travel eSolutions (travelesolutions.com)
- General business database programs such as ACT! or Goldmine CRM
- MS Excel/MS Access/Google Docs spreadsheet



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Other database tips


- Make it a habit to search your database as the first step when you're ready to create a new client/prospect profile, so that you avoid "dupes."
- Use your database functions to create lists of profiles with common interests, past destinations, and other characteristics.
- You must be able to pull up profiles and view (a) past travel history and (b) travel wishes and preferences when you're talking with a client or prospect.



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Other database tips

- Use reminders ("ticklers") from your database for dealing with brochure requests, payments, "welcome home" calls, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
- Make it a habit to create new client/prospect profiles "on the spot," instead of letting these names pile up on your desk for later entry. Keep your database open on your computer all of the time when you're in the office!

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Client Files, Spreadsheets, and Due-Date Lists

"Res cards" versus group files and binders

- When stripped to their basic structure, **many romance travel bookings are built the same way as other types of bookings** for individual travelers or couples. So, you can use the same res forms and follow-up reminders you use when you sell travel in general (e.g., "res cards," your agency's online back-office system).
- But, **other types of romance travel bookings have a group structure** - e.g., destination weddings, familymoons - and **they require group files** similar to what you'd use for cruise and tour groups.


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One central file for each romance travel group

- A manila folder for each romance travel group booking
- A three-ring binder for each group booking
- An online folder for each group booking, if you're truly comfortable working online

The key criterion: **One central place where everything related to that group goes!**

As your business grows, you may also want a "whiteboard" in your office to track all active romance travel groups at any given time.




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One central file for each romance travel group

In this central folder or binder, you'll collect both **GROUP** information and **PASSENGER/TRAVELER** information.

Examples of group information:

- The DW group contract or group booking code details
- The couple's signed client agreement
- Correspondence with the couple and the supplier(s) about the group as a whole
- The master group list/rooming list
- A calendar for the group with deadlines




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One central file for each romance travel group

Examples of passenger information:

- Each traveler's reservation form or reservation information
- Special requests
- Payment history and schedule
- Any cancellation or change requests



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The critical paperwork you should keep together

Here's a short list of the critical forms and paperwork you may want to keep in that single location:

- The group contract or group booking code agreement
- The couple's signed client agreement
- Each guest's individual res form
- The master group/rooming list
- The calendar with that group's deadlines (with those dates transferred to your everyday working calendar)



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Sample forms you can use

You can use these sample forms to track the progress within each group:

- A "guest list travel tracker" to help you keep on top of which invited guests for that DW group have booked with you to date
- A "final guest list tracker" you can offer your couples who wish to do their own tracking
- A sample of the final rooming list form required by Apple Vacations



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The critical dates you must track for each group

You must discipline yourself to think ahead about the major **decision/action dates** that affect each romance travel group, and note those dates not only in your group files/binders but also on your daily calendar so that you don't miss anything:

- Deadline dates for returning signed group contracts or group booking code agreements
- Initial deposit dates
- Additional deadlines for incremental payments



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The critical dates you must track for each group

- Final payment deadlines
- The change/cancellation schedule that applies to each group
- Final dates for submitting special requests
- Final dates for locking in ceremony details
- Deadlines (padded as you're able) for submitting paperwork or handling chores associated with the destination's legal marriage requirements
- Any recall dates you've been given for blocked space not yet paid with full legal names submitted



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Group Contracts and Booking Codes

Two types of group bookings in romance travel

- **Traditional group contracts** (the couple signs an agreement putting a "block" of rooms or cabins on reserve for their guests to book into, usually with the idea that many guests will depart from the same airport or region for their flights)
- **Group booking IDs/codes** (the supplier assigns the couple a code or number that their guests will use to book their trips, so that the couple is credited with those bookings while the guests may depart from numerous airports in different regions – but, in most cases, rooms and cabins are not reserved, so guests' bookings are subject to availability at the time they make their reservations)



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Traditional group contracts

- **Best for groups of 10+ rooms that are ready to lock in air/land packages for everyone at the time of booking** (e.g., passengers will likely depart from the same airport or region)
- **The supplier will issue a contract setting aside the air seats/rooms/other trip components** that the couple believe will be needed to handle their expected number of guests. (Note: Your couples should always sign these contracts - not you or your agency!) The contract will spell out the components being reserved, booking and payment deadlines, any "comps" being offered, and other rules such as attrition (what happens if the group doesn't book the minimum space/seats held in the contract).
- **Wedding guests typically book their trips through you as the agent**, and in turn you will book these trips as part of the group contract.

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Group booking codes


- **Best for groups of 10 passengers or more not yet ready to lock in everyone's travel plans at the start** (e.g., passengers will be coming from many different cities)
- **The supplier assigns a "booking number" or "group code" to your couple** so that their guests' bookings are credited to them for things such as comps, but there is no group contract required. Since there is no contract, however, the supplier won't typically hold space for your clients - all bookings by their guests will be subject to availability at the time of booking. **Guests may book their trips through you as the agent, or they may be able to call the supplier directly** or use its web site to do their own bookings. Also, booking codes give your clients greater flexibility with air arrangements, especially if the guests may originate their trips from different airports.

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Example: Sandals

Option A: Group Code

Sandals will issue a group code (no later than 60 days prior to arrival). Guests (or you as the agent) will use this code when booking stays for the wedding (three nights minimum). Bookings will be subject to space availability, current promotional rates, and blackout dates at the time of booking. A \$400 per-room deposit is due at the initial time of booking to issue a group code, and additional rooms may be added with the group code later (with \$400 deposits). Final payment is required 45 days before arrival. Cancellation penalties apply (\$400 per room 30-45 days before arrival; 50% penalty 15-29 days before arrival; 100% penalty within 14 days before arrival [including no-show rooms]).

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Example: Sandals

Option B: Group Contract

Sandals will prepare a contract to reserve the total number of rooms desired by the couple. Those rooms will be held upon receipt of the signed contract plus a 10% deposit. A second deposit of 35% percent is due 90 days before arrival. Then, final payment is due 45 days before arrival, along with a final rooming list and flight information. Cancellation penalties apply (no fee if canceled more than 90 days before arrival; 10% deposit is forfeited 75-90 days before arrival; 45% of full room revenue 46-74 days before arrival; 100% of full room revenue within 45 days before arrival [including no-show rooms]).



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“Comps” and “perks”

Both booking methods (group contracts and booking codes) **typically give your couples “comps” for reaching certain minimums** (in terms of rooms or guests):

- A free trip for every x travelers (e.g., one free airfare/room/package for every 20 paying passengers)
- A bonus credit for the couple (e.g., \$10-\$20) for every passenger/guest booked
- A free wedding ceremony, a free reception, a package upgrade, or other DW- and honeymoon-related services

However, **the rules governing comps for wedding couples vary greatly by supplier and can change often!** (The rules in place when you create the group contract/booking code and place the required initial deposits should typically remain in place until the group travels, unless a supplier has reserved the right to make changes without notice.)



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Key questions to ask ...

Whichever method may be used, **watch for these critical details and double check them before your couples sign anything or place a deposit:**

- Does the paperwork show the correct travel dates for the wedding/honeymoon trip?
- Does it specify the supplier's desired methods for you/your clients to make reservations and submit payments?
- Are deposit, interim, and final payment amounts and dates specified and correct?
- Does the contract block sufficient rooms for your clients without overpromising what they honestly believe they'll book?
- Are “comps” and “perks” for the couple (e.g., free wedding ceremonies, credits for booking minimum numbers of guests) spelled out clearly?



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Key questions to ask ...

- What does the contract say will happen if your clients don't book the required minimum number of rooms/guests? Is there a "cut off date" past which any remaining blocked rooms will be released? And, what will happen if you try to book rooms after the cut off date has passed?
- Does the paperwork specify the actual wedding ceremony time, date, and location/venue?
- Are the room types/categories specified in the contract?
- What additional fees does the paperwork mention or impose on your clients (e.g., early departure penalties, baggage handling/porterage)?
- What are the cancellation terms and penalties?



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Critical Legal Issues for Romance Travel Specialists

Disclaimer

This lesson provides general information only and does not constitute legal advice. No attorney-client relationship has been created with any DWHS members. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

We recommend that you contact the following attorneys directly or consult your own qualified local counsel familiar with your specific situation before taking any action:

Alexander Anolik, Esq. (USA) – anolik@travellaw.com

Douglas Crozier, Esq. (Canada) – dcrozier@hclaw.com



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Issue # 1: Complying With “Seller of Travel” Rules

- **Several U.S. states still have “seller of travel” laws** on their books requiring travel agents to register with state agencies, post a bond, or take other steps. See this list collected by noted U.S. travel attorney Al Anolik:

<http://www.travellaw.com/page/travel-law-faq>

(Note: Nevada has suspended its rules for the time being.)



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Issue # 1: Complying With “Seller of Travel” Rules

- Canadian travel attorney Doug Crozier says **three primary provinces enforce such rules:**

- **Ontario** – www.tico.ca
- **British Columbia** – www.consumerprotection.bc.ca (go to the “Travel” section)
- **Quebec** – www.opc.gouv.qc.ca



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Issue # 1: Complying With “Seller of Travel” Rules


- Generally, **if you live in a state or province that has seller of travel regulations, you must register with that state or province.** What if you’re an outside agent - doesn’t the host agency bear the responsibility for registering the host agency itself as the seller of travel, so that you don’t have to register separately? That’s true to a degree in most jurisdictions that have seller of travel laws, but you should check with the state or province in which you live and with your host agency to confirm this.
- Technically, **some jurisdictions also require on paper that you register if you sell to residents in those states or provinces** (even if you don’t live there yourself). Those rules are rarely enforced (except in California - if you find yourself selling often to California residents, or if you have a big wedding group comprised mostly of California residents, you should consider registering there).



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Issue # 2: Reducing Your Legal Risks Overall


- **Consider adopting a legal structure for your agency** that protects your personal assets from your business activities (e.g., limited liability company, corporation).
- If you work as an outside agent, **insist on having a written agreement with your host agency** (and, vice versa if you're an agency owner who works with sub-agents or independent contractors).
- **Make sure you have your own errors and omissions/professional liability policy** (plus, general liability coverage for your business).
- **Offer travel insurance to every single client who books with you** – no exceptions! – and collect either the premium or a signed waiver.



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Issue # 2: Reducing Your Legal Risks Overall


- **Organize your working files and your daily calendar** so that you're constantly tracking due dates for clients – and, keep copies of any emails or communications that deal with due dates, payments, etc.
- **Avoid the temptation to store clients' credit card numbers.** If you do, don't store the card security numbers alongside the CC numbers.
- **Insist that your clients and their guests always pay suppliers with credit cards,** not checks or cash payments.
- **Draft a client agreement that you like – and, use it with every client.**



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Issue # 3: Using Disclaimers With Clients

- **You should consider using consumer disclosures and disclaimers** (either as separate forms or as language incorporated into your client agreement and other paperwork), so that your clients understand - in writing! - the things for which you are not responsible.
- It's best if clients sign a copy of the disclosure/disclaimer form, and you give them a signed copy for their records. However, the next best option is **including the language in your web site terms and conditions, on the backs of invoices and itineraries and proposals, and anywhere else you can** so that (down the road, if needed) you can prove that your clients received the disclosure/disclaimer language.



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Issue # 3: Using Disclaimers With Clients

- Another note for U.S. agents: Due to new U.S. Transportation Department regulations requiring agents to disclose all airline fees and taxes, **you should adopt the practice of always disclosing all travel-related fees and taxes (in detail and in writing) to clients** - not just airline fees, but resort fees and other add-on expenses the clients might be forced to pay. You can break this out in detail in your quotes or in your booking forms - the more detail, the better!



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Issue # 4: Dealing With Supplier-Caused Problems

- For many years, **travel agents have enjoyed a significant degree of legal protection** through their status as the legal "agents" who simply serve as the conduit for bookings going from their clients to the travel suppliers (known legally as "principals") that actually operate the purchased travel services (e.g., flights, hotel stays, cruises). Since the agents typically have no control over the principals in operating and providing those services, then legally the agents could not be held liable in many instances when things go wrong!
- However, **this longstanding protection is changing**, because many agents like DWHSA members have become more deeply involved in planning trips for their clients (using supplier services as trip components) and have begun charging service fees for their expertise.



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Issue # 4: Dealing With Supplier-Caused Problems

- So, the more "hands on" you are in planning and operating trips for your clients, the more legally exposed you may be if mistakes are made or things go wrong. Agents selling off-the-shelf DW and honeymoon packages offered by wholesalers, for example, may be less liable than agents who assemble wedding trips and honeymoons from scratch using supplier components (e.g., airfares from a consolidator paired with lodging provided by a resort company). Also, **you may have more legal risk if you charge service fees and promote yourself as a romance travel specialist.** That doesn't mean you shouldn't do these things! But, if you do, you should be aware that you must protect yourself with your own errors and omissions/professional liability insurance policy, with travel insurance policies offered to your clients (and signed waivers collected if they turn down the coverage), and with disclaimer/disclosure notices.



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Issue # 4: Dealing With Supplier-Caused Problems

- Also, take a hard look at what you're promising clients in the "marketing language" on your web site, on your social media pages, in your brochures, etc. If you promise "we'll take care of everything for you," then a litigious bride may try to hold you to that promise in court some day! Consider including a list of specific things that you are not responsible for in your client agreements and other paperwork.



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Issue # 5: Preventing "Rebookings" by Suppliers


- Some suppliers will approach your clients while they're on a current trip you've booked for them with offers to book future stays and trips on the spot - and, it's not guaranteed at all that you'll receive credit (and commissions) for the new bookings.



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Issue # 5: Preventing “Rebookings” by Suppliers


- Generally, **you have the legal right to advise your clients about the pitfalls of booking future trips** while they’re enjoying their current getaway.
 - U.S. and Canadian consumer protection laws won't protect your clients who sign booking forms or sales agreements in another country.
 - They should think twice about travel offers that require them to place an immediate deposit or sign a booking form on the spot to claim a promised credit or discount.
 - The sales reps approaching them during their vacations work directly for the resort, cruise line, or supplier - whereas, you (as their agent) work for them as clients.



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Issue # 5: Preventing “Rebookings” by Suppliers


- If they book future travel directly with a cruise line or resort, it may be impossible for you to take over that booking in the future (which means they’re stuck with the supplier for customer service).
- The special offer they’re getting will probably require them to return to the exact same resort or ship next time, with no variety of options.
- Why should they waste their valuable vacation time sitting at a sales desk booking future travel?



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Issue # 5: Preventing “Rebookings” by Suppliers

- **DWHS**A has advisory notices with these tips that you can customize and give to clients before they depart.
- Another suggestion: **Add the following sentence to any agreements you have with suppliers:** "Supplier agrees not to bypass booking agent without agreeing to pay agent for bookings of passengers." This may work with smaller suppliers - but, in the case of larger suppliers, you can try adding this on the back of checks sent in for payments, etc.



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Facebook

Creating your FB business page

- Log into Facebook through your personal FB profile.
- Go to <http://www.facebook.com/create.php>
- Select "Company, Organization, or Institution" and select the category you feel best describes your business. (Don't select "Local Business or Place" unless you have a storefront location!)
- Beneath the Category menu, enter your Page name. You can use your business name, but also think about keywords you may want in the Page name. (You can change your Page name until you've gotten 200 fans/likes.)



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Creating your FB business page

- Click the "I agree to Facebook Pages Terms" and then click Get Started.
- Add your profile picture.
- Add your basic About information.
- Like your own Page from your personal profile.
- Share your first status update, add a cover photo, and review the permissions settings.



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Finding great content for your FB business page

- **YOU** (your experience and knowledge, past fam trips)
- **Your clients** (testimonials - with images, if possible - and tips)
- **Suppliers and tourism offices** (agent-only sites)
- **Google Alerts** for travel keywords
- **Others' content** (blogs, travel publications - fair use and full attribution)

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Facebook rules of thumb

- **Make your Page (and your posts) fun!** Entertain your fans and visitors with great photos, tips, facts, and trip ideas ...
- **Don't sell all of the time!** Use the 4:1 ratio - 4/5 of your FB content should be tips and helpful information and fun photos, while 1/5 should be sales messages and specials.
- **Find ways to engage your fans and visitors.** Your goal is building connections with them and getting responses - so, ask them questions, follow up on posts, respond to their questions, share photos and articles that they can like and share ...
- **Include clear calls to action.** Tell them what you want them to do - like or comment on a post, watch a video, call or email you ...
- **Post every day.** You'll get more exposure if you're posting regularly.

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Upgrade your Page

- **Consider adding a custom Welcome Page (Welcome Tab) on your Page.** This is the tab you may have landed on in the past asking you to Like a Page before you get to its Wall. Custom tabs can increase your Likes by 50 percent or more, studies show. You can find many third-party apps that will help you create a welcome page/tab. Once you add the custom tab, set it as the default landing tab (click the Edit Page button in the upper right corner of your page; then, in the Manage Permissions section of your Page Dashboard, go into the drop-down menu next to Default Landing Tab and select the name of the custom tab you installed).

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Upgrade your Page

- **Make your profile picture larger.** It can be up to 180 pixels wide by 540 pixels tall, so use all of this space! (You can use free photo editing tools to resize your picture to get close to the 180x540 size.) Once you have the larger photo, click the edit Page button in the upper right corner of your page, and select Profile Picture from the Page Dashboard. Upload the photo; then, beneath the image, click the Edit Thumbnail link to pick the part of the photo that will be displayed next to your posts.



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Use FB Groups with clients


- <https://www.facebook.com/about/groups>
- The link above will show you the steps for creating a **"Facebook Group"** - a network of other Facebook users who can share and view messages among themselves. Creating a Facebook Group for each couple and their invited guests for a destination wedding can be a great way to communicate with everyone and encourage them to book through you!
- You can't use your business page with Facebook Groups - you must create and interact with FB Groups through your personal profile. (Make sure your business page is linked to your personal profile, so that when you post within the group, your business name will appear when other group members hover over your name and they can click through to your business web site. To link your business page to your personal profile, edit your profile and add your business name as current employment information in the Work section.)



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Use FB Groups with clients


- When you create a group, Facebook will give you a link that you can send to your couple and their guests - they will click on that link to request to join the group. (As the group's creator and administrator, you must approve the group members.)
- Also, consider making the group "closed" or "secret" when you create it. "Closed" is the default option - the group members will be visible to anyone on Facebook, while "secret" means the members and content are private.
- As the group creator, you can create posts within the group and "pin" them to the top, so that everyone can see important information you're sharing. You can also post photos, trip itineraries, and other information to build excitement about the destination wedding!



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Use FB to research your competitors

- Want to see what other agents (or suppliers and destinations in the romance travel niche) are doing on FB? **Go to <http://www.facebook.com/search>, and select the Pages option** (so that you're only seeing pages in the search results). You can enter competitors' business names or keywords to find pages that might compete with your business. (Note: The FB search tools aren't always accurate, even if you type in a competitor's full business name.)
- Or, go to competitors' web sites and look for FB icons or links on their sites that you can click on to view their pages.



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Use FB to research your competitors

- Look for these things to see how your page compares to theirs:
 - How often do they post - and what days/times do they seem to post the most?
 - What are they posting, and are their posts designed to generate interaction (e.g., questions, videos)?
 - Do they use a welcome tab or custom tab on their page?



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Set up a FB content calendar


- **Set up a calendar to plan your FB posts** - it will make you think about what you're posting, you can make sure you're covering all of the topics you want to cover, and you'll avoid repeating yourself!
- In your calendar, **plan two different types of content:** (a) promotions and specials, and (b) engaging content such as romance travel tips, trip ideas, client testimonials, videos, photos, etc.
- **Think about setting a pattern for your posts** that your fans can expect week to week (e.g., Monday is a photo of the week, Tuesday is a question of the week, Wednesday is a travel tip, and so on).



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Create a FB ad campaign

- <http://www.facebook.com/business/ads>
- Many agents run targeted FB ad campaigns to go after FB users who fit the picture of your ideal clients - and, you can run effective campaigns while limiting the amount of money you spend each time.
- Instead of using keywords (as you would with pay-per-click search engine ads), you'll create ads based on the interests and demographics of the targets you're searching for. With FB, you're not limited to text in your ads - you can add an image too, which helps your ads stand out. You can also narrowly target your ad - e.g., searching for female FB users in selected locations who've recently changed their status to "Engaged," if you're promoting honeymoon sales. The FB system will tell you immediately (in the Estimated Reach section as you're creating the ad) how many possible FB users might see your ad!



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Create a FB ad campaign

- You can also use FB's "Sponsored Stories" service to re-post items that mention your page (in hopes of getting the post in front of your fans again or reaching FB users outside your fan base).



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Run a FB contest

- http://www.facebook.com/promotions_guidelines.ph
- Facebook allows you to run contests for your fans and their friends. Contests can be a great way to generate enthusiasm and engagement for your page.
- Think about what types of entries you want to collect - e.g., 100-word essays, photos from past romantic getaways - that you can use on your page to promote your romance travel business specifically.



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Run a FB contest

- **These apps have set up the technical framework for running contests on FB** (some are free, while others charge a nominal fee):
 - <http://www.shortstack.com>
 - <http://www.blazonapp.com>
 - <http://www.easypromosapp.com>
 - <http://www.pagemodo.com>



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Monitor your FB EdgeRank

- Under FB's current structure, **how often your posts appear in front of your fans depends on a formula that FB calls "EdgeRank."** This formula takes into account three measures of how interesting the content you're posting may be to your fans and other viewers:
 - **Affinity** - how closely you're linked to individual fans (e.g., how many times you've Liked or commented on each other's posts)
 - **Weight** - the value given by FB users in the past to your comments and posts (the more often your content has been liked, commented on, shared, tagged, etc., the more weight you'll have)
 - **Time Decay** - how long ago a post was created (the older it is, the less value FB assigns it)



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Monitor your FB EdgeRank

- You can use a third-party app called <http://www.EdgeRankChecker.com> to gauge your EdgeRank score.
- And, the best way to improve it over time? **Post great content** that your fans will comment on, click, like, share, or tag - and, **remember to ask them to take these actions** (don't just assume they'll do it on their own!).




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Check your FB Insights

- <http://www.facebook.com/insights>
- **You should periodically check the "analytics" FB collects about your page.** Click the Edit Page button in the upper right hand corner of your page, and select "Insights" in the navigation options on the left.
- The page that appears will have two sections: "Users" (displaying counts of FB users who've viewed or interacted with your page, even if they didn't Like it), and "Interactions" (displaying counts of FB users who've actually Liked or commented on your posts).
- Both sections have "See Details" links you can click on to learn more (e.g., the sources where many of your Likes are coming from).

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Pinterest

Pinterest is popular!

- Pinterest launched in March 2010
- 70 million Pinterest users around the world (fastest growing social media network ever!)
- **80 percent of Pinterest users are women - and, the most popular age group on Pinterest is 25-34 year olds (Millennials!)**
- 14.2 minutes: Average time spent on Pinterest per visit

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Pinterest is popular!

- 98 minutes: Average user time spent on Pinterest per month
- Pinterest grabs 41 percent of e-commerce traffic (FB is 37 percent)
- **Pinterest drives more referral traffic than LinkedIn, Google+ and YouTube combined**



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Tip # 1: Set up a personal account, and play around.

- <http://about.pinterest.com/basics/>
- <http://blogs.constantcontact.com/product-blogs/social-media-marketing/getting-started-on-pinterest/>
- Also, **check out your competition's Pinterest boards** - see what they're doing.
- **Search bridal topics on Pinterest** to get a feel for what users like to pin and the types of boards they create for weddings in general - and for destination weddings and honeymoons in particular.
- Finally, **spend time engaging with other Pinterest users** who like DWs and honeymoons - like, comment on, and repin their information.



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Tip # 2: Create your business account.

- Pinterest recently updated its terms of service to require that **you should have a business account if you use Pinterest for commercial purposes.**
- <http://business.pinterest.com>



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Tip # 3: Create boards and start pinning!

Where can you find great content and images to "pin" on your "boards" in Pinterest?

- **YOU** (your experience and knowledge, past fam trips)
- **Your clients** (testimonials - with images, if possible - and tips)
- **Suppliers and tourism offices** (agent-only sites)
- **Google Alerts** for travel keywords
- **Others' content** (blogs, travel publications - fair use and full attribution)



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Tip # 3: Create boards and start pinning!

- **Use categories** to keep your Pinterest page organized.
- **Think visually** - use eye-catching images as often as possible, plus interesting text to capture attention and keep followers interested.
- **Keep your page fresh by pinning new content every few days** (if you don't have new content, repin or like other content that you see).
- **Focus on sharing great information and inspiring ideas** - not selling yourself outright. And, remember to "cross promote" by linking to your web site, your Facebook business page, your blog, your Twitter account, etc.
- **The winning formula?** Great images + content that solves a problem, inspires, appeals to popular interests, or offers something that brides want!



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Tip # 4: Mix your own content with "repins."

- You don't have to come up with brand-new content all of the time for your Pinterest page. **Mix your fresh content with repinned resources** from tourism offices, supplier sites, and bridal sources (as well as your clients' own Pinterest boards).



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Tip # 5: Follow popular Pinterest users in this niche.

- **Use Group Boards** (e.g., Brides magazine and other bridal publications) by leaving comments and repinning their content, so that you "piggyback" on their audiences to grow awareness of your own page.
- **Search keywords on Pinterest** (e.g., "honeymoons," "destination weddings") to find the "big names" in this niche - then, follow them, comment on their pins, and repin their content. If you share great content with them, they will follow you, and your popularity on Pinterest will grow!



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Tip # 6: Use the best Pinterest tools.

- <http://about.pinterest.com/goodies/>
- On this page linked above, start by **downloading the Pinterest Bookmarklet or the Pinterest Browser Extension** - they will allow you to pin things you find on the web.
- Also, **install the "Pin It" button on your own web site**, so that your visitors can easily pin anything they find on your site on their own Pinterest boards. You should add **Board Widgets** to your site so that visitors can follow your boards directly from your site.



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Tip # 6: Use the best Pinterest tools.

- If you use your smartphone a lot, you should **download the Pinterest app** (Apple or Android version) so that you can take and pin photos from your phone or browse boards on the go ...
- Also, there are **many third-party tools** you can use to improve your Pinterest presence:
 - **Repinly.com** helps you track what's hot and trending on Pinterest's most popular boards and pins.
 - **Pinstamatic.com** gives you tools such as "sticky" notes and calendar icons you can customize to spruce up your boards.



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Tip # 7: Measure your Pinterest reach.

- Use these helpful tools:
 - The **"Pinterest Pin Count" tool** - tells you the number of times any single piece of content has been pinned and repinned within Pinterest (i.e., how many pins are linked to a URL)
<http://pinterestplugin.com/pincount/>
 - The **"Pinterest analytics" tool** – tells you which pins drive the most click-throughs to your site
<http://business.pinterest.com/analytics/>



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Testimonials

Testimonials are “social proof”

- In today's crowded marketplace, "social proof" is one of the best strategies for standing out!
- Social proof is "the positive influence created when someone finds out that others are doing something" ...
- In bridal and travel marketing, **it's getting your happy clients and couples to brag about you and say how great you are** (instead of your saying great things about yourself!) ... these are "testimonials."



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Whom should you approach?

- **Many agents ask all of their clients for testimonials** - you just never know which ones will write the glowing reviews or share amazing trip photos that will look great on your site!
- **Other agents pick and choose their testimonial targets.** Make a special effort to request testimonials from clients who are your ideal customers - the ones you'd like to have every time as repeat clients. Also, follow up closely with clients who'd have a great story to tell (e.g., they had trouble on their trip, but you fixed things and they were very grateful) or who are "influencers" (anyone with clout or name recognition within your market area).



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When should you ask?

- Marketing experts say the optimum time to approach clients for testimonials is during their "**moments of happiness**," when they've just used a product or service and they're still enthusiastic about what it did for them.
- So, **many agents approach their clients once they return from the DW/honeymoon trip** - a day after they've gotten home and settled, or within that first week.
- Approach your clients based on how you've communicated with them during the trip booking and planning process (e.g., if a client preferred email, send an email).



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What should you ask for?

- The simplest approach may be following up with clients once they're home to see how the trip went - and, in that conversation or email, tell them you'd like to share their story on your web site. Ask if they'd email you a few sentences about their experiences and the best photo they took on their trip. **For many agents, that's the perfect testimonial - one paragraph, one photo.**
- However, some agents expand their testimonials into full stories - how the couples met, what they did on their trips, and more details. If you like this approach, you may need to ask the clients if they'd be willing to share this information, and then send them a short questionnaire to fill out or call them and take notes while you "interview" them.



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What should you ask for?

- **You should ask clients to focus on telling THEIR story and THEIR feelings about their trips**, so that prospects reading the testimonials can identify with them (rather than having the clients rave about you as their agent). The raving about you is great, but Millennials in particular want to identify with other couples and their experiences, not a testimonial that might sound like an ad.
- **Getting the photo is critical for any testimonial**. And, if they'd like to share more than one photo, use the others if you can. Also, ask your webmaster if you're able to upload short video clips (15 to 60 seconds) that clients might share with you!



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What should you ask for?

- **There's nothing wrong with "shaping" the testimonial**, especially if the clients say they're not sure what to write. You can prompt them by asking if they'd comment about what they liked best about the resort or ship, the best meal on the trip, the excursion or activity they enjoyed most, and (of course) what specific services or support you gave them that they appreciated the most.



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Where should you use them?

- **Create a testimonial page on your web site** where you can list the entire collection of testimonials you receive.
- But, also, **consider posting a glowing testimonial right on your home page**, as well as any other pages in your site that get the most traffic. (if you leave the testimonials on a separate testimonials page, some prospects may never look at them.)
- Once you receive a new testimonial, post it on your Facebook business page, share it on Pinterest (perhaps you should have a "board" just for client testimonials), add it to your email newsletter ... **use it everywhere you can!**



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Do you need the clients' official permission?

- If you've asked clients to give you the testimonial, you've told them how you plan to use it, and they've gladly provided one plus photos and/or video clips, then **you don't need to worry generally about getting explicit permission** or using some type of consent form to use their content.
- It makes sense to save the email they sent you with the testimonial content as a "paper trail" that the clients did indeed provide you that content to use.
- Of course, if they ever ask you to take down or stop using the testimonial (e.g., if they get divorced a year later!), then you should respect their wishes.



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Other tips

- Once you've posted the testimonial, **follow up with your clients and let them know where they can see it.**
- **Thank them for helping you** - send a handwritten note or even a small gift if you can.
- Every few months, **review your testimonials.** Look them over as if you're a new prospect - would the testimonials you're currently using seem current, and do they reflect the nature of your business now? (if you've refocused your business on Hawaii primarily, for example, does it make sense to keep testimonials that reference the Caribbean and how great the region is?)



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Repeat Bookings and Referrals

Getting repeat bookings

- The old joke among wedding planners is that, if we do a great job the first time and the couple truly love each other, we shouldn't expect any repeat bookings from them!
- But, what we mean by "repeat bookings" is (a) the next romantic getaways the couple wants to take (anniversary trips, vow renewals, babymoos, familymoon, long weekend trips) and (b) the couple's other trips, such as family reunions and vacations, business trips, etc.



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Why focus on repeat bookings?

- **Repeat customers are much less expensive than brand-new clients.**

Think about the "lifetime value" of your clients. Their worth to you is so much more than that initial booking, because you're building a relationship that can generate multiple bookings over the clients' lifetimes. It's not over when the clients return home from that first trip - that's just the beginning of what could be a lucrative series of bookings over time.

- **Repeat customers share their good experiences with lots of other prospects.**

Marketing experts say that every person has a "circle of influence" between 50 and 300 people - family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other contacts with whom they share information about their daily lives. If you "wow" your first-time clients and they come back to travel again, the chances are great that they've told dozens of other people about what they're doing.



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Stay in front of your clients

- Here's the secret for increasing your chances of earning repeat bookings from your past clients:

You must stay in front of them, consistently and regularly, month in and month out - even if they don't respond for long periods of time or it takes them years to book that next trip.

- The truth is **that clients will only book their next trip when they're ready to do so**, not when we want them to book it. So, at any given time, only a few of your past clients are truly "in the market" to book their next romantic getaway. And, the only way to find those few is to stay in front of your entire client list - starting with a steady stream of emails.



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Suggest trips to them – don't wait for their calls

- Another critical strategy is **suggesting future romance travel ideas to them** - don't wait for them to come up their own ideas and approach you!

Many DW clients or honeymooners return home after that first booking with you, and they fall back into their regular lives of working, paying bills, taking care of the kids, and just living day to day. They'll rarely take time to dream about and research their next romantic getaway.

So, it's up to us to remind them to put themselves as a couple first sometimes!



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Suggest trips to them – don't wait for their calls


- **Mark their wedding dates on your calendar**, and follow up four to six months in advance to remind them about an anniversary trip.
- **Send them regular emails with ideas** for long weekend romantic escapes from local gateways or within a decent drive.
- If you're comfortable doing so, **check their social media posts and messages** for developments such as babies on the way (to suggest a babymoon).



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Get to know your clients as well as you can

- **Use a client database program** such as ClientBase, ClientEase, etc., to build information about each customer - not just their trip data, but any details you can gather about their interests, habits, work lives, family lives, anything that might help you get to know them better.
- One effective strategy is **pulling a dozen or so past clients every month or so from your database**. Review their records, think of several trip ideas that match their personalities and interests, and then spend that month touching base with them (one on one, personally) to reintroduce yourself, suggest those trips, and find out what other types of travel they might want. Take a dozen past clients, "love" them to death this way, and see what happens ...



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Put your clients on your email lists – and email them

- **Sending your past clients a steady stream of emails** is the # 1 technique many successful agents use to generate consistent repeat bookings.

What should you put in these emails?

- Romance travel ideas - where can they go next?
- Travel tips they can use
- Stories and testimonials from other couples having fun
- Any special events or activities with your business (e.g., bridal shows where you'll exhibit)
- Finally, deals and specials - but sparingly!



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Find other ways to stay in front of them

- Your web site (did you collect a testimonial from them that's still posted, or do you post romance travel tips and ideas they can find easily?)
- Your blog (do you post great content regularly that would draw past clients to your blog?)
- Your Facebook page, Pinterest boards, and other social media tools (ditto)
- A personal follow-up phone call every now and then (pull a dozen past clients each week and give them a quick call)



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Referrals – the lifeblood of your romance business

If you've done an outstanding job on a couple's wedding trip or honeymoon, you were a tough negotiator getting the best rates for them, and you handled every surprise and concern that arose along the way, your clients should be thoroughly impressed with you - and, ready to tell their friends and family to book their next trips with you too, right?


Unfortunately, it's still difficult for many agents to ask for referrals. And, your happy clients may ask themselves "What's in this for me?" when you request referrals, or they may worry about losing a friend or contact if you disappoint the referral ...



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Tips for getting more (and better) referrals


- **When's the best time to ask clients for referrals?** When they're in their "happy place" after returning from the last trip you booked for them! Ask for the testimonial first if you wish - and, at the same time (or later, once the testimonial is done), ask them if they know anyone who's ready for a romantic trip.
- Explain to clients that, as a high-touch, high-service-level business, **your romance travel agency depends on word of mouth referrals**, and you're eager to serve any of their friends and contacts when they're ready for a romantic trip.
- You may give your clients a small gift for referring you, but some agents give their clients gifts that can be passed along to the referrals instead (e.g., a DW/honeymoon planning checklist, a wedding favor).



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Tips for getting more (and better) referrals


- **Always think about referrals when you're going about your daily business.** Pass out business cards everywhere you can, include some in the thank-you notes you send clients, etc.
- **Decide where you want referrals to go first** - your web site home page, your Facebook page, etc. - **and make sure the content on that page strongly communicates what you can do for them** (and gives them easy ways to contact you, such as your phone number in big type or a link to click for emailing you). Post a few of your best testimonials on this "landing page" where referrals will go first.



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Tips for getting more (and better) referrals

- **If you offer free consultations, emphasize that in your referral promotions.** Remind your clients who're doing the referring that you're giving a free half hour or hour of your time to their friends and contacts, so there's no obligation. Be a "low risk" referral, and make the call to action for referrals very easy to follow.
- **Consider joining a networking group in your city or region** that offers "warm" referrals - Business Network International, local chambers of commerce, civic and community clubs.



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Tips for getting more (and better) referrals

- Remember: **You're not begging for business or inconveniencing anyone by asking for referrals!** You're giving those couples and clients the chance to allow their friends and contacts the chance to experience your excellent service and expertise, too.
- **Don't forget these referrals if they don't result in immediate bookings.** Put them into your prospect list, and follow up with regular emails and other contacts forever (until they tell you to leave them alone).
- If you're comfortable doing so, **ask clients to write about their experiences with you on their social media sites** and offer that (free) referral consultation. Those mentions will be seen by every fan/friend/contact in those clients' networks - you never know who'll see them and follow up with you!



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DWHSA Online Course Lesson 8.1

Price Shoppers and "Tire Kickers"

The first step ...

- What's the first step in learning how to handle price shoppers and "tire kickers?"

Just get used to it - they're here to stay!

- Couples (and their wedding party members and guests) have been trained by online travel agencies and direct-selling suppliers to use price as the starting point for travel plans. With Millennials, in fact, they've grown up learning to question everything, which means they'll question you about price even if it's not the determining factor for them when they book.



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Tip # 1: Don't get upset about pricing questions.

- **Don't take these questions personally.** In many cases, couples don't know as much as they think about travel, especially planning group trips like a destination wedding - so, they focus on the one thing they think they do know: haggling over price. And, again, Millennials have just grown up questioning everything like prices ...
- So, remember: When prospects or clients ask about prices, they're not accusing you of gouging them ... **they're just starting the conversation with you.**



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Tip # 2: Explain (with passion) the value ...

- **Many clients don't understand the "apples vs. oranges" nature of Internet trip deals,** for example. They don't know that the \$299 "all inclusive" seven-night resort special they got in the email doesn't include air, transfers, taxes, any wedding services, etc.
- So, **it's your job to teach them the difference!** Explain the values included in the pricing of the proposal(s) you've given them - make sure they understand everything that's included. (This means your service fees, too.)
- And, as you teach them, **do it with excitement and passion for their trip** - not the annoyance you may secretly feel at explaining what's obvious to you as a travel professional ...



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Tip # 3: Give quick answers, then move along.


- What if you're not yet at the proposal stage - instead, you've gotten a "cold contact" from a couple asking price questions?
Give a quick response with an initial price point or range - but, then, **change the direction of the conversation** by asking more open-ended questions (not "yes/no" questions) that show the prospects that you're an expert in romance travel. Ask about the basic building blocks of the trip: date, location, number of guests ...
- Then, jump into questions that force the bride or couple to share their dreams (what wedding themes/colors/flowers/reception plans have they thought about, what have they seen at other weddings that they like or didn't like).



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Tip # 4: Help them, and tell them what to do next.

- Stephanie Padovani with BookMoreBrides.com suggests **thinking of that price shopper as a friend of yours** who just happens to be planning a wedding. What would you do with a friend? You'd share wedding ideas and tips, you'd listen to her stories and dreams, you'd send her article links to read, you'd make recommendations ... Stephanie says this is the quickest way to get away from price and begin building a relationship that will lead to a booking!
- Once you've left price behind in the conversation, **describe the next step you need the clients to take - then, direct them there.** Deep down, serious prospects want a romance travel expert like you to take charge and make the planning process easy! (If they resist too much, they're probably not serious prospects.)
- Check out Stephanie's "Price Shopper to Profit Email Report" at <http://www.bookmorebrides.com/priceshopper>

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Tip # 5: Learn to control “price” conversations.

- To run a productive romance travel business, you must learn early on how to weed out the callers and emailers who aren't serious from those prospects who're asking about price because they don't know any better yet!
- Here's the critical thing to remember: **You're not trying to convert every caller or emailer into clients.** Instead, you're trying to identify whether they're ideal prospects you should spend time with. Don't worry if folks hang up or move on - pat yourself on the back if this happens that you saved a lot of time and energy not working with them.
- The best technique with price questions, over the phone or via email, is using **“open ended” questions to change the conversation** from price to more important topics. So, take control of these conversations by asking a series of questions (in response to that initial pricing query) that focus on wedding/honeymoon details (e.g., dates, number of guests, time of year, colors, themes, add-on activities).

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Tip # 5: Learn to control “price” conversations.

- Remember: Use **“open ended” questions that can't be answered quickly with “yes” or “no”** - questions that start with “What,” “When,” “Who,” “How” ...
- Your goal is to keep them talking with questions you're asking to control the direction of the conversation. After a few questions, you're ready to guide them to the action you want them to take (e.g., setting an initial consultation appointment).
- What if the caller/emailer keeps going back to price? **Respond with a general range of prices, and then go immediately to another open-ended question** about the trip plans.

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Tip # 5: Learn to control “price” conversations.

- Serious prospects will be relieved inside that you're taking charge, as a romance travel professional, and steering them to questions about the trip logistics (which are more fun to discuss than prices anyway!). With these callers and emailers, you can direct them to that consultation appointment and move forward.
- Price shoppers and tire kickers who aren't serious prospects will get huffy, they'll demand detailed price quotes on the spot, or they'll even hang up when you try to ask more questions! Again, that's a good thing, because you've just saved yourself a lot of heartache!



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Tip # 6: Don't write off “price shoppers” yet ...

- If you talk with a price-shopping prospect who doesn't finish the conversation or who's not ready to take that action you want (e.g., scheduling the initial consultation), **don't assume automatically that she was wasting your time.**
- Honestly, she may have been calling you from work, or she was in the car, or she got busy at the time and didn't go to the next step for innocent reasons like these ...
- If you captured her phone number or email address, **wait a few days and follow up with a warm, friendly call or email.** And, periodically, keep following up until she says she's not interested.



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Two final tips ...

- If you charge significant service fees, and/or you focus on customized wedding trips and wedding planning services on top of pre-packaged wedding trips, you may feel pressure at times to reduce your service fees and/or book lower-priced trips ... When you feel this pressure, **remember the true value of your time!** Prospects and clients who are constantly tire kicking - questioning your prices and your fees even after they've placed deposits! - don't always understand (a) what's included in their packages and (b) the extra work and value you've added to their trips. In many cases, this involves time - your time as a travel professional. So, even though it's hard at first, always **remember the value of your time!**
- Also, **it pays to know the “price matching” policies of your preferred suppliers ...**



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Millennials' Expectations and Habits

Millennials – who are they?

The generation born ...


- ... between 1979 and 2000 (Liene Stevens, ThinkSplendid.com)
- ... between 1982 and 2004 (William Strauss and Neil Howe)
- The largest generation alive today (33% larger than Baby Boomers)



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Millennial brides/couples

- Until 2007, most wedding couples were Gen Xers.
- Since then, Millennials have taken over - they now account for more than 60 percent of weddings in 2013. (Splendid Insights says 83%.)
- **Oldest are 34, youngest are 13 - they'll be wedding/honeymoon consumers for a long time**



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Millennial brides/couples

- 65% live together before they get married (40% grew up in broken homes)
- One in five millennial marriages are interracial
- More than 80% believe they'll get married just once
- They're not religious, but they're spiritual
- They feel a strong connection to nature (outdoor weddings)



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Millennial brides/couples

- The most educated generation alive (74% attended college)
- They live and breathe social media (wedding planning via Facebook and Pinterest, with friends and family all over the world)
- They like to research (reading 13.9 reviews on average before a purchase)



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Millennial values

- Authenticity (built-in BS detectors)
- Time over money
- Teamwork and peer connections, not individualism
- Worth measured by connections to others, not their assets
- Friends and family above all (40% grew up in broken homes)



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Millennial values

- They value marriage above careers and financial success
- They're not getting married later - they're getting married on their own terms.
- They're very accustomed to getting what they want, when they want it.
- They reject items they feel everyone else has - instead, they'll wait if it means getting exactly what they want.



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Millennial values

- They don't "keep up with the Joneses" - instead, they want something that's uniquely their own.
- "It's about custom. What their neighbors think about their engagement ring is less important than what they think of their engagement ring. That's the exact opposite of boomers, who wanted to outdo each other." (National Jeweler)



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Millennial values

- They want a ceremony that's distinctively theirs.
- "They want to make the experience meaningful for the guests and themselves." (Millie Martini Bratten, Brides)
- "Though it seems like today's couples are trumping tradition, they're really just reinventing it. They're taking the good parts - commitment and partnership - and expressing them in new ways." (Alison Rowe, wedding consultant)



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How do Millennials buy?

- They want experiences and things that make their lives better, not flashier.
- They respond to messages about family and community, not individuality.
- They want instant customer service - but, they'll troubleshoot online before they contact you.
- Even the richest Millennials comparison shop - but, it's not negative, they just like to research everything.



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How do they plan DWs and honeymoons?

- They want to collaborate - it's about creativity, not saving money. (They grew up on Martha Stewart, etc.)
- They're very "do it yourself" focused - so, "Don't DIY - leave it to me as the agent" doesn't work.
- They want everything custom - it's a need, not a luxury.
- They'll disagree with you on things, but they don't see that as disrespect - instead, it's "teamwork" with you.



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Where do they get their DW/H information?


- Pinterest (1 in 3 engaged couples use it for wedding planning - as do their moms)
- Online forums (TheKnot.com, etc.)
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blogs (61% read them, 1 in 3 on a weekly basis)
- Magazines (1 in 6 read them daily, 39% weekly)



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How do they find DW/H professionals?


- Millennials research EVERYTHING.
- Top sources: Internet search (57%), friends/family offline (56%), wedding pro referrals (38%), blog/website mentions (35%)
- What factors do they look for? Splendid Insights says the "Four Ps" - Portfolio, Personality, Promptness, and Peer Feedback.



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What about budgets?

- Surveys vary - one says Millennials pay 75% of their wedding costs on average, while another says 40% of Millennials pay for their own weddings
- If the parents are paying, Millennials want to stay on budget out of respect. But, if the Millennials are paying, they want to stay on budget for practical reasons.



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Millennials tip # 1

Don't market to the brides alone.

- Traditional wedding duties = sexist
- 65% of grooms take an active role in wedding planning (and, their input carries weight)
- 95% of grooms are actively involved in registries ("our" home)
- Don't say "brides" or use stereotypes ("it's the bride's big day," "grooms are just along for the ride")



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Millennials tip # 2

Forget the "leave it to us" marketing messages.

- Millennials want to be deeply involved in planning their DWs and honeymoons - not because they don't trust you, but because they want creative input and decision-making authority in how things turn out.
- Explain your process as a DW/honeymoon expert, to show Millennials that you are a creative professional.
- And, Millennials will shop around - so, get over it!



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Millennials tip # 3

Communicate the "FUN" in DW/honeymoon planning.

- Millennials want their weddings to be fun, so show what you can do that contributes to a fun atmosphere.
- Use lots of images in your marketing showing couples having fun on their trips.
- Recommend trip activities and add-ons that will be fun for them - and their guests.



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Millennials tip # 4

Live where the Millennials live – online.

- (More than 97% of TheKnot.com brides spend 5.1 hours a week on the site while they're at work!)
- Learn how to get your travel business onto social media (esp. Facebook and Pinterest).
- Make your web site look as fabulous as possible (and, make sure it's mobile friendly.) Web site content matters more than flashy design. Keep the site updated, with links working.
- And, try to reply to all phone calls and emails and social media messages within one to two hours, not 24..



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Millennials tip # 5

Be authentic – and, be yourself!

- Love what you're doing - and make sure it shows every time you interact with Millennials. They can pick up BS and feigned enthusiasm a mile away.
- And, be yourself! 49% of Millennials say the chance to become friends with their wedding professionals matters to them.



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Children

Children at the DW?


- **Many DW couples may ask your help in planning a kids-free trip,** because they want to keep the group size small and intimate or they simply don't want the distractions of children at the ceremony and the reception.
- However, **it's likely that many guests invited to the DW may have kids,** and they may want to bring their children on the trip (or, they may need to turn the DW trip into a family vacation to justify the time and expense involved).



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The # 1 question ...


- **Talk to your clients about whether they want children** attending their ceremony and reception (or even coming on the trip at all) – and, **follow their wishes.**
- So, the most important step with children at a DW is talking to your couples, as early and as frankly as possible, about whether they want to invite children on the trip.



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If they DO want to invite kids ...


- **You can help them locate kid-friendly ships and resorts** that offer both adult options and kid zones. And, remind them about kid-friendly issues such as picking direct flights.
- On the invitations and save-the-date cards, **they should be very clear about kids being invited** (e.g., include the children's names on the envelope).
- **They can request that children making the trip not attend the actual ceremony and reception.** Many ships and resorts offer babysitting or nanny services, or they have kids clubs where the children can go while the adults are at the wedding.



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If they DO want to invite kids ...

- If your clients insist on not having kids at the ceremony and reception, **urge them to consider covering the cost of the babysitting/ nanny services** or any extra kids club expenses - it's a nice touch.
- If they don't do that, **you should help them alert guests ahead of time about the ship's/resort's child care services** (including costs, the advance booking notice required, and other details).
- Another option is **setting up a separate party for the kids** while the adults are the wedding reception. Keep the kids party close to the reception so that parents can check on their children easily.



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If they DO want to invite kids ...

- If children are invited to the ceremony, **urge couples to try to incorporate them if possible** (standing by the guest book, greeting attendees, tossing flower petals, reading passages). And, at the reception, have kid-friendly food and drink items and a separate kids table.
- **Children attending the ceremony who're part of a blended family should definitely be included** in the ceremony (e.g., reference the children in the vows, have them help with the "sand jar").
- **Your couples can set age limits for children attending the DW trip**, but they should be consistent.



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If they DO NOT want to invite kids ...

- It sounds rude, but the safest course of action is **being very firm and clear upfront with invited guests about the adults-only nature of the invitation**. The couple should say "adults only" in the invitations (just above the RSVP details), and they should repeat this information on the wedding web site, in the travel information you distribute to guests, etc.
- **Remind the couple that they cannot make any exceptions to this rule**, if they want to avoid trouble. Nothing upsets DW guests with kids left at home more than seeing the bride's cousin Pam show up at the resort with her kids in tow, telling everyone, "Oh, it's OK - I'm family! The bride said it was OK to bring my kids." (The only exception may be kids who are in the actual wedding party or who will do things during the ceremony.)



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If they DO NOT want to invite kids ...

- **Encourage your couple or their surrogates to talk in advance** with wedding party members and guests who have kids, so that they can explain the thinking behind the "no kids" request and head off any negative gossip.
- **Help your couples think about what they'll do if kids do show up on the trip**. For example, does the resort offer babysitting services that the guests who've brought their kids anyway can use during the actual ceremony and reception?
- **Advise your couples to consider planning a reception for their return home**, so that DW guests with kids can plan to bring the children to that event to see the newlyweds and bring gifts if they wish.



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Gratuities

The truth about DW tips

- Gratuities ("tipping") can add up quickly for a couple planning a "hometown" wedding - but, in many instances, **they're already built into the costs of the DW/honeymoon package** or the basic all-inclusive stay.
- So, **you can help your clients in advance by confirming the tipping policies of the suppliers you've booked for their trips** (and, by sharing this information with their guests before departure, so that they're prepared when they arrive).

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All-inclusive resorts

- Generally, **the major all-inclusive resort companies promote the fact that gratuities are typically included** as part of the price your couples and their guests have paid for their stays.
- In fact, the workers at many all-inclusive properties may have been instructed that tipping by guests is prohibited.
- **The exceptions may be unique situations** such as "personal butlers" who serve your clients in upper-level room categories.

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Cruise lines

- With cruise weddings, **though, the usual cruise line gratuity policies that apply to sailings in general will apply.**
- And, **your clients may wish to build extra tip funds into their DW budgets** for any staffers involved in the actual ceremony (unless the cruise line makes it clear that such tips have been added into the wedding package prices already).



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Off-site activities

- **Gratuities may be needed for off-site activities, events, or vendors that are part of the couple's DW plans** (e.g., a bachelor's or bachelorette party set up at a downtown bar that's not connected to the resort complex), as well as special DW arrangements such as local clergy not affiliated with the resort who'll serve as officiants.



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General tips about DW tipping

- At the end of the day, **your clients may wish to offer tips anyway**, even if they know gratuities were built into the package prices, for "above and beyond" service they receive. That's OK!
- As the agent, **you should always check group contracts and pricing details** to inform your clients whether tips are already included in the prices. (Remember: Some DW guests may not travel a lot!)
- **Here's a quick list of tip ranges for services that weren't included in the overall package prices:** coat/powder room attendants (\$1 or \$2 per guest), DJs or musicians who aren't part of the wedding package (\$20-\$30 each), spa attendants/makeup artists/hairstylists who offer extra services (15 percent of the bill), officiants who aren't connected to the resort (\$100-\$200) ...



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Out-Of-Country Vendors


Out-of-country vendors

- Many clients ultimately choose full-featured, pre-packaged romance travel trips offered by wholesalers, resort companies, and cruise lines. But, you will encounter clients who prefer to customize those packages heavily or even ask you to build their trips entirely from scratch.
- Or, you may expand your romance travel business beyond the usual regions - Mexico and the Caribbean - to serve areas such as Europe and Asia that may not offer a wide selection of packages.

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Out-of-country vendors

- When this happens, **you may find yourself searching for vendors and services not affiliated with the hotel or ship your clients have chosen:**
 - Officiants (especially those from specific faiths not usually requested)
 - Photographers or videographers
 - Musicians

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Out-of-country vendors

- **Start your search by securing recommendations from the on-site wedding coordinator helping your clients.** Depending on the volume of DW bookings that coordinator handles month in and month out, he/she will definitely have local contacts to recommend for any need you have.
- **And, having the coordinator as your contact with the outside vendor gives you some assurance** that (a) the resort has used that vendor before with success and (b) the coordinator can track down the vendor if things go wrong.
- **Ask for (and, honestly check out) references from the outside vendors, and confirm all service details in writing.** If you can get the resort or cruise line to contract with the vendor, so that in turn you're dealing directly with the resort or cruise line for this outside contract, you may also sleep a little better at night because you're working with a known entity.

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Out-of-country vendors

- **Have your clients pay by credit card if possible,** so that they may "charge back" any payments made if the outside vendor fails to follow through.
- Remember that **you may be able to add service charges** for securing these vendors for your clients!

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Site Visits By Clients

Site visits by clients

- **It's not unusual for some clients to ask you to set up a site visit for them** at the resort or on the ship they've picked for their DW trip or honeymoon.
- **And, some suppliers (e.g., Sandals, Karisma) now offer "test drive" or "dress rehearsal" trips for couples** - two- or three-night trips during which your clients can tour the resort or ship, see the ceremony venues and rooms/cabins, taste test the wedding cakes and other catering items, and get a feel for how their real weddings or honeymoons will proceed ...



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Site visits by clients

- **Don't feel threatened by this request!** These trips are more common for couples these days.
- **Prep your clients before they go on any site visit** - review the DW/honeymoon plans in detail, suggest questions they may ask while they're on site, and recommend that they take lots of notes and photos they can share later with their guests (e.g., on their wedding web sites).



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Site visits by clients

- **Touch base with the on-site coordinator before your clients arrive for their site visit.** Remind him/her to follow up with you if your clients have unusual questions or if they want to make big changes to the plans you've already confirmed for them.
- **Talk with or meet with your clients once they get home from the site visit** - review their plans and deal with any questions that arose while they were at the resort or on the ship.



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Fam Trips and Site Inspections


Best practices for fam trips and site inspections

- When you travel on a fam trip, you are representing not just your own travel business, but you're giving supplier and destination representatives **an image of romance travel specialists everywhere!**
- You don't have to acknowledge every generic fam trip invitation you receive - but, as your business grows, you will begin receiving invitations addressed to you specifically from business development managers and other supplier/destination reps. **You should reply to any personally addressed invitations, even if you're saying no.**
- **Don't accept a fam invitation unless the trip honestly fits your chosen niche(s).** If you sell romance travel exclusively, it's not appropriate to take a family travel fam to Disney unless you really feel you may sell more family travel in the future.

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Best practices for fam trips and site inspections

- **Don't RSVP positively for a fam unless you're sure you can make the trip.** And, if the worst happens and you can't make it, try to find another agent who can take your spot on the fam.
- **Don't ask to bring companions on the fam trip unless the host specifically invites you to do so.**
- **You should plan on participating in all of the activities shown on the fam's daily schedule** - when you skip parts of the schedule, the hosts will obviously notice. Also, you must be on time (even a few minutes early) throughout the fam.

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Best practices for fam trips and site inspections

- **Bring plenty of business cards and network with your fellow agents**, as well as all of the suppliers and supporters who are involved in the fam itself.
- **Follow up after the fam with personalized, handwritten thank-you notes.**


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What you should ask about on the fam ...

Before you depart for the fam, **you can do your advance homework on the specific hotels and resorts included in the fam** by visiting their web sites. You may find it helpful to start writing up a report on each property using the web site details (phone/fax/email, meal plans, number/types of rooms, types of dining venues and bars, other on-site activities offered, in-room amenities, kids services).


Then, **print that information to bring with you, or bring along notepads to ask more specific questions on site:**

- Details about the wedding packages offered
- Details about the honeymoon packages offered
- Busy and slow times of the year for weddings and honeymoons

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What you should ask about on the fam ...


- Maximum number of wedding ceremonies performed daily, as well as the specific ceremony venues
- The general manager's name, phone number, and email address
- The chief wedding coordinator's name, phone number, and email address
- The property's location (proximity to the nearest airport, local shops, attractions)
- Airport shuttle (schedule and cost)
- The age of the property (plus the timing of the most recent renovations and any refurbishments that may already be scheduled for the near future)


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What you should ask about on the fam ...

Don't forget to take tons of photos - especially shots that can't be found on the property's web site (e.g., specific suites for wedding couples and honeymooners, spa rooms where brides typically get ready for the ceremony, wedding ceremony venues)

Also, **think about short video clips** (15 to 30 seconds) you can take with your smartphone or tablet computer. Focus more on video clips featuring you talking about different aspects of the resort or ship (you can ask another agent to tape you), rather than panoramic shots that you can always get from the resort or cruise line later.

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Weather Issues

You can't control the weather, but ...

Weather worries for romance travel clients go beyond the usual concerns about scheduling destination weddings during the height of the fall hurricane season. **The more common issues are the destination's climate patterns** and their effects on (a) younger or older guests dealing with high heat/humidity levels and (b) ceremony venue choices (e.g., outside ceremonies scheduled at a time when rainstorms pop up frequently in the afternoons).

Though you may be a talented travel agent, you can't control the weather! However, **you can give your clients good advice on anticipating weather issues** and avoiding problems where they can.

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Best practices for dealing with weather concerns

- **Share the most accurate weather information you can with your clients**, starting from the initial consultation and going forward. Use sites like weather.com to research temperature and precipitation patterns for the clients' chosen destinations and the time of year they wish to travel. (We're also adding links to this lesson page that will take you to resources that will give you weather/climate information for specific romance travel destinations.)
- If the weather worries are severe, **advise your clients in writing about your concerns** - and, make sure they sign your client agreement that includes a clause discussing the weather issues and they buy (or sign the waiver declining) travel insurance.



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Best practices for dealing with weather concerns

- Also, **make sure you've talked with the suppliers** (especially the resort's on-site coordinators or the cruise line's wedding department) **about "Plan B" options**. You must understand what the backup options are if bad weather forces a ceremony move, delay, or cancellation (or, with ships, the skipping of a port of call where the ceremony was scheduled). Find out generally how much notice the couple might be given (e.g., will the resort coordinator make a decision the day before, or the morning of, the ceremony?).
- **Include weather (and dress code) tips** in your clients' wedding website, in the travel information you send out for booking, in the confirmation materials you send, etc.



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Best practices for dealing with weather concerns

- **Build in extra arrival time if your clients are traveling during inclement seasons**. For Caribbean weddings planned during hurricane season, for example, encourage your clients to depart a day early to allow plenty of time to get to the resort (and to talk in person with the on-site coordinator if plans must change).
- At the end of the day, **make peace with the fact that clients are going to do what they want to do**, regardless of your weather warnings. It's ultimately their decision. (Just make sure you've warned them about the risks in advance.)
- Finally, **remind your clients and their guests that you really shine when things go wrong** (whether it's bad weather or other travel mishaps). You'll be there to help them put "Plan B" options in place if they need you!



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“Disappearing” Clients


Why do clients “disappear?”

You’ve worked with a new couple for several weeks - starting with the initial consultation, then answering questions, and then delivering a final proposal with three options for their honeymoon.

And, then, suddenly and without warning, they drop off the face of the earth. They won’t return email or phone calls ...

Or, you need the clients to make a final payment, you’re up against the supplier’s deadline, but you can’t get hold of anyone ...

These days, unfortunately, **that’s the new norm for clients** (despite social media and cell phones everywhere).



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Tip # 1: Don’t take it personally.

DWHSA members report that **disappearing clients are on the rise** - they’re the “new normal,” particularly with Millennials who want to research everything you’ve told them and question all of your plans.

Sometimes, the clients just get busy with work and family and personal issues, and they assume they can get back to you later.

Other times, the clients may actually be trying to do things on their own, until they realize how much work is involved.

Or, they feel paralyzed because they can’t respond to you unless they take time to jump back into “wedding/honeymoon planning mode,” and they’re not yet ready to do that ...



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Tip # 2: If you have their OK, keep communicating.

Even if the communication has stopped on one side of the bridge, that doesn't mean the flow should cease from your side, too.

The key question is this: Do you feel you have their permission to communicate with them? If you've talked extensively with the clients, gone through an initial consultation, or prepared a proposal/quote for them, the answer is "Yes." (If they called you once and that's it, though, it may be time to put them in your prospect list and move on.)

With the clients you have permission to work with, **keep the communications open and flowing from your side**, even if you're getting no response. With these clients, you're never really bugging them - in the end, they usually understand that, due to the complexity of these trips, it's your job to keep them informed and to follow up with them.



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Tip # 3: Document your efforts.

When hard-and-fast deadlines approach (e.g., final payments), **alert the clients and request their decisions/payments** - but, **copy in other decision makers**, and **always keep that paper trail** showing the efforts you've made in contacting everyone.



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Other follow-up tips

It can take multiple follow-up contacts to get answers, decisions, and payments from clients!

- 48% of salespeople never follow up at all
- 25% make a second contact and stop

- 2% of sales are made on the first contact
- 3% are made on the second contact
- 80% are made on the fifth to 12th contact




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Other follow-up tips

Always follow up as fast as you can!

- If there are delays involved, it's better if the delay rests with your clients, not with you.
- Stephanie Padovani (BookMoreBrides.com) reports that waiting even an hour after a client emails you with a question or concern decreases your likelihood of contacting him or her by 21 times.




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Other follow-up tips

Vary the methods you use to follow up!

- Start with your clients' preferred contact methods - but, **don't be afraid to follow up later** with snail mail, calls, and other means to break through the logjam.




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Other follow-up tips

Make your communications stand out in the crowd!

- Studies show the average cell phone user checks her/his device 150 times every day - and, the average email user receives 147 messages every day! You're competing in the crowd with your follow-up efforts.
- So, **find ways to catch the clients' attention** - unique subject lines, for example, or a call to action that stands out.
- Also, **use the 4:1 ratio of providing helpful information** every time you contact a client versus asking them to do something. When you follow up with a couple about a final payment that's due, for example, include in the email an update on the weather patterns for the destination they've picked or a packing list along with the payment details.



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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Clients

The legal environment

- In the United States, **37 states currently recognize same-sex marriage**: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington (plus, Washington, D.C.).
- Generally speaking, destination weddings conducted lawfully in another country may be registered locally in the 37 states (plus D.C.) that offer same-sex marriage, and they may qualify for civil union status. But, **the key is checking with the local court house where the couple resides!**
- In July 2005, **Canada became the first country outside Europe to allow same-sex marriage nationwide**. Generally, couples may register their lawfully conducted destination weddings in their province when they return home.

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Where do same-sex couples go for DWs/honeymoons?

- **Popular GLBT wedding/honeymoon destinations**: Hawaii, Mexico, Caribbean islands with U.S. influences (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands), islands with French influences (Tahiti, Saint Martin)
- **Challenging destinations for GLBT couples**: Caribbean islands with religious or cultural objections to homosexuality (Jamaica, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Bermuda, Barbados)

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Same-sex weddings: What's different?

- Same-sex couples are less likely to have a formal proposal (58 percent, vs. 91 percent of straight couples). They're also less likely to seek permission from family before the proposal (19 percent vs. 67 percent).
- They're more likely than straight couples to split wedding planning duties equally (53 percent vs. 19 percent), and they're more likely to pay for most of the wedding expenses themselves (86 percent vs. 40 percent).
- They're probably more casual and less traditional in their wedding plans (40 percent calling their wedding style casual, vs. 16 percent of straight couples).



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Same-sex weddings: What's different?

- About half of the same-sex couples have a bridal party (48 percent, vs. 87 percent of straight couples).
- Straight couples are more likely to have pre-wedding events (22 percent had a wedding shower and 25 percent had a bachelor or bachelorette party, vs. 8 percent and 13 percent for same-sex couples).
- However, same-sex couples are more likely to plan post-wedding events (19 percent had an "after party" and 13 percent a "morning after brunch," vs. 6 percent and 10 percent for straight couples).



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Same-sex weddings: What's different?

- Straight couples are more likely to be escorted by a family member down the aisle (74 percent vs. 35 percent for same-sex couples). Many same-sex couples (37 percent) actually walk down the aisle together.
- Same-sex couples are more likely to write their own vows (45 percent do).
- In straight couples, brides usually change their names to the husband's last name (76 percent), while same-sex couples tend to keep their given names (62 percent).



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Same-sex weddings: What's different?

- Surprisingly, same-sex couples may be less likely to go on a honeymoon (63 percent vs. 84 percent of straight couples), and they tend to remain in North America for honeymoon trips (only 10 percent will go to the Caribbean, for example).
- Lesbian couples are more likely to follow wedding traditions, such as formal proposals and one partner's name being taken by both.

(Source: Same Sex Wedding Survey, June 2013-2015 - TheKnot.com/The Advocate)



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Same-sex weddings: What's different?

More same-sex wedding data:

- 67 percent of same-sex couples pay for their weddings themselves.
- 63 percent have the emotional support of their parents (only 16 percent have none).
- 64 percent have wedding attendants.
- 92 percent do not get married in a place of worship.



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Same-sex weddings: What's different?

- 98 percent of gay male couples and 91 percent of lesbian couples get ready together before the ceremony.
- 42 percent of lesbian couples wear wedding gowns each, 12 percent wear suits each, and 46 percent wear one gown and one suit.
- The main ways same-sex couples find wedding vendors: Internet searches, word of mouth, and GLBT wedding directories

(Source: GayWeddingInstitute.com)



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Tips for working with same-sex couples

- Avoid gender-specific terms such as "bride" - say "couples" or "partners" instead.
- Don't make assumptions based on traditional wedding or gender roles (e.g., ask "How do you refer to each other?" instead of "Who's the husband and who's the wife?").
- Be careful not to go overboard in trying to be supportive (e.g., "Some of my best friends are gay!"), because you may come across as patronizing.



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Tips for working with same-sex couples

- Review your marketing materials - avoid using photos of heterosexual couples exclusively, for example.
- In this market, referrals are critical! Once you've planned a great DW or honeymoon for a same-sex couple, they'll spread the word quickly ...



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