



SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

**ALISON
HOTCHKISS**
Events Planner

WHAT SHE DOES Together with her talented team, Hotchkiss produces perfectly executed celebrations in locales both near and far.

WHERE TO FIND HER Alison Events, LLC, 2200 Broderick Street, San Francisco; alisonevents.com.

Do you see a lot of destination weddings in your business?

About half of the events we do are destination weddings. This past year, we've had fewer destination brides due to the recession, but I am already starting to feel things turn back around. People seem to be getting excited again, and they are back to being adventurous.

TOP TIP "Consider shipping certain items to your destination rather than getting them locally. I always send specialty linens and paper items. Most hotels offer the cookie-cutter linens like white, ivory, or some nautical color they've had since 1984. It's also nice to be able to control the look of your menu cards, welcome letters, and escort cards. They're really easy to box up, so it makes shipping a breeze."

Hotchkiss has always known that what she wanted to do in life was throw amazing parties. Right out of college, she worked in corporate event planning, which segued into wedding planning, which evolved into her own design firm that specializes in destination events.

time you booked the wedding to the actual event, or you negotiated a deal with the sales manager at the hotel, but there was miscommunication due to a language barrier. A good rule of thumb for all brides is to get everything in writing as much as you can.

What's the best way to deal with unforeseen problems that arise?

Your energy as the bride is going to influence the energy of your guests. If you are relaxed, your guests will be relaxed. Things might not go as planned, and if that happens, stay calm and carry on. The day of the wedding should be about you and your fiancé. When you are in a foreign country, you take the risk that your expectations might not be met. You may say you want the cake to be peach, but without showing them a color that is specifically peach to you, it might turn out orange. Just roll with it, because it's going to create a story in the end that I promise you will laugh about later.

How should couples pick the destination?

There are four factors. Weather: Make sure it's not hurricane season. Dates: Make sure it's not spring break, or flights will be astronomical, also be sure it's not when locals go on holiday—like August in Europe—or it will be a ghost town. Language: Are you okay if not everyone can speak English? Travel convenience: Is it just one direct flight, or connecting flights to a boat and then a bus ride? And visit the location beforehand; you'd hate to show up for your wedding only to find out the photo on the website didn't show the big construction site next to your reception.

What locales would you recommend?

I love Sayulita, Mexico. It's an old fishing village about 45 minutes from Puerto Vallarta, and it has both luxurious and affordable accommodations. I also love Harbour Island in the Bahamas (see a real wedding at this locale on page 96), which is quaint and easy to get to.

So you're definitely feeling a resurgence?

Yes, because people are realizing that a destination wedding can sometimes be less expensive than a hometown wedding, especially when it takes place in less-explored parts of Central America. Plus, rules tend to be more lenient abroad, so the party can keep going until 2 A.M. versus shutting down at 10 P.M. because of noise ordinances. It's also nice to have a neutral location—it's not her hometown or his hometown. And a destination wedding can help cut down the guest list: Most of the time, a 200-person wedding in a hometown will have 10 to 20 percent "no" replies, but if you do it far away, it can jump to 30 to 40 percent.

What are the disadvantages of having your big day far from where you live?

In tropical areas, there's a higher risk of hurricanes and other natural disasters. I also think it's more challenging to predict costs if you're not familiar with the location and culture. Let's say there is a change in management from the