DWHSA'S
DESTINATION WEDDINGS WORKFLOW

9 TO 12 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING DATE

- Collect information from the clients about their DW ideas. Create a "new client" questionnaire using the samples in DWHSAMembers.com and your own list of questions. Ask what they've researched so far. Try to get answers from both clients (as well as other key decision makers who may be paying part of all of the DW expenses).

- Schedule a consultation where you can discuss the DW plans with the couple (in person or via phone, Zoom, etc.). Ask follow-up questions based on what you've learned so far. Share with them an explanation of how DWs work. Get their best estimates for the budget level of the trip for them and their guests (economy to luxury). Ask also about the anticipated guest count, the preferred dates/times/types of wedding ceremony venues (e.g., beach gazebo, rooftop lounge), the type of ceremony they want (legal, symbolic, religious), and any potential decision makers besides the couple. Be ready to answer the couple's questions about what you do, how involved you'll be in the ceremony planning, how you get paid, whether you've visited the chosen destination/resort/ship, and how many DWs you've handled before.

- Give the couple your client agreement/plan-to-go agreement form and answer any questions about it. If you require a signed agreement before you begin work on the proposal, explain how that works. And, if you charge service/planning fees, explain those as well and work with the couple to collect those fees now.

- Begin researching DW trip options for the proposal/quote. Check the clients' desired dates and times with the suppliers (via their wedding coordinators or any online wedding date calendars such as WeddingOptimizer.com). Also, check any conflict with the destination's local/national holidays, the distance from the airports to the resorts or ports, weather patterns for that time of year, high/low tourism seasons, and desired resort/ship amenities.

- Prepare the proposal/quote (using tools such as Adobe Spark, MS Word or PowerPoint, TravelJoy, etc.). Include a mix of options (usually three choices) along with any pricing/deposit information and disclaimers. Try to include maps of the resorts, photos, room/cabin descriptions, and legal marriage requirements (if applicable), along with your contact information. Follow up with the couple to lock down the final choice.

- Decide which type of booking arrangement works better for the couple: (a) a contracted group room/cabin block or (b) a flexible group booking code. Request the group contract from the supplier and read it carefully. If the contract is between your agency and the supplier initially, sign and return it; then, take information from the contract to add to your own version between your agency and the couple and have them sign it (so that they'll shoulder the ultimate financial responsibility for the room/cabin block if they don't meet the minimum rooms/room nights required). If the contract is between the supplier and the couple, have them sign it and help them return it. Also, help them submit the required initial deposit to the supplier.

- At the same time, lock in the couple's wedding date, time, and venue with the supplier (as well as the desired wedding ceremony package), and help the couple complete any forms/contracts and pay any required deposits for the ceremony package. If you don't lock in the venue and ceremony details at this stage, confirm the supplier's deadlines for making these decisions. Check ceremony times against local weather patterns (e.g., does it usually rain at sunset in the destination at that time of the year?). Ask the supplier about "Plan B" options if issues arise with the couple's first choices (e.g., the beach gazebo gets damaged by bad weather weeks before your couple's arrival). Confirm whether the supplier pays commission on ceremony packages.

- Book the couple's travel first: lodging (including any requests for the location of their room/cabin) plus transfers (if you're ready to do so) and airline tickets (if you handle air for clients). Regarding air, check requested seat assignments, special inflight meals, checked and carry-on bag requirements, luggage fees, etc.

- Discuss and recommend travel insurance options for the clients (and wedding insurance if appropriate).

- Ask your clients if they'd like to do a "preview trip" - traveling to the resort/ship/destination now to inspect things and meet in person with the on-site wedding coordinator (WC).

- On paper or online, set up your master file/binder and "to do" timeline for the DW. Begin collecting completed forms and correspondence for the couple and each DW guest, the WC, other supplier staff, etc., all in one place.

3 TO 9 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING DATE

- Help the couple create a wedding registry if they wish (using tools such as HoneymoonWishes.com).

- Ask the couple to share a copy of the full guest list with contact information (phone numbers, email addresses) so you can follow up with guests once they receive the DW trip details. Ask about the guests' relationship with the couple (relatives, work friends, etc.) and any "family dynamics" you should know about (e.g., the bride's mom and dad are divorced and they may bring plus-ones who don't get along, so they need cabins far apart from each other on the ship).

- Before the DW trip details go out to guests, decide in advance how you'll handle tasks such as price matching requests, frequent name changes, frequent flier numbers and award ticket redemptions, seat assignment requests/upgrades, etc. Will you take incremental payments ("layaway") from guests? Also, decide if you'll charge guests any service fees (and be ready to explain what they cover). Finally, check on day passes (both the pricing and daily capacity limits) and charges to attend wedding events at the resort that may apply to guests who don't book within the couple's room block.

- Help the couple set up their wedding web site with one page set aside for the travel plans. You'll provide them the details for that page, including an itinerary, pricing, your contact information, and links to any online reservation forms you'll use. (Make sure your online res forms are PCI compliant and secure if you plan to collect credit/debit card details for suppliers or even process payments such as service fees yourself.)

- Help the couple create/order their "save the date" notifications (digital, print, or both) with the basic wedding details (date, time, location), the wedding web site address (with your travel plan details and booking link on the site), and registry link. (You may help them with invitations as well if they ask.)

- Begin processing reservations from individual DW guests as they contact you or fill out your online form. Take initial deposits and send receipts/confirmations to the guests. Give them the due dates for remaining payments (and "pad" those dates by a few weeks in case a guest's credit card isn't working then). As part of processing these reservations, give guests your client agreement, ask them to sign and return it, and send them back a copy of the signed agreement for their records. Also, send them the DW itinerary, any disclosure/disclaimer notices you use, a checklist of trip tips such as passport validity dates, the need for correct name spelling on government IDs and reservations, COVID-19 issues, cancellation policies, etc. Verify their passports and visas. Recommend travel insurance (and collect signed waivers if they decline insurance). And, enter these new clients into your CRM/database right away.

- Note the confirmed guests' due dates for interim and final payments on your calendar so you can invoice them or follow up as needed.

- Introduce the couple to the on-site WC. If you usually help plan the DW ceremonies for clients, stay in touch with the couple and WC as they discuss ceremony details. If you do not get involved with ceremony planning, ask the couple to keep you posted on the discussions with the WC (especially if they have trouble communicating). If your clients want to use outside/off-site vendors or they wish to bring vendors to the destination (e.g., officiants, photographers), ask the supplier about its rules and fees for off-site vendors and communicate those to your clients.

- If your clients want a lawfully binding ceremony in the destination, help the couple confirm those rules (e.g., ask the tourism office for the current rules and share them with the couple). Help them make any arrangements that are required (e.g., blood tests, marriage license fees), but make sure you confirm with them that it's primarily their responsibility to satisfy any legal ceremony requirements.

- Send the couple regular reports on the guest list compared to the deposited rooming list - who's booked the trip so far and who hasn't - so they can follow up as needed to nudge guests onto the trip if they wish (and so they know the progress they're making toward meeting room/cabin block minimums and earning perks).

THE FINAL 90 DAYS BEFORE THE WEDDING DATE

- Stay in contact with the DW guests on a regular basis. Send emails once every two to four weeks with trip updates, packing tips, photos of the destination/resort/ship, etc. - anything to touch base with them regularly so they're not tempted to start looking around online! Consider setting up a Facebook Group and conducting Zoom or FB Live sessions to keep the guests informed and engaged.

- With the guests, confirm any special needs requests (e.g., diet restrictions, mobility challenges) they've made with the supplier.

- Do final follow-ups with guests who haven't RSVP'd and booked yet as the room/cabin block deadline approaches.

- Collect final payment details from the guests and confirm that everyone is fully paid. Send the guests receipts/confirmations for those final payments.

- Prepare a final rooming list for the supplier (copying the couple) and release all unclaimed rooms by the attrition deadline in the group contract.

- Deliver final travel documents to the confirmed guests.

- Confirm with the supplier any group amenities, perks, and bonus refunds.

- Discuss with the couple any excursions, group activities, and special on- or off-site events and meals planned for the DW trip. (Book those ahead of time so you can earn commission wherever possible.)

- Finalize ceremony and reception plans (e.g., menus). Reconfirm any off-site vendors. Schedule a meeting on site (after the couple's arrival) between the couple and the WC.

- Help the couple make arrangements for any desired welcome gifts (e.g., for the wedding party) delivered on site.

- Share tips with the couple on how they should pack and transport their wedding clothes (e.g., the bride's gown).

- Send the couple's air and travel schedule with the WC.

- Send final emails to appropriate on-site staff for any special requests or needs.

- Confirm any beauty/hair/spa/makeup appointments, especially "day of" arrangements.

- Review the "day of" schedule with the couple before the departure date to answer last-minute questions.

- Share with the couple and the guests your emergency contact information to use while they're traveling. (Make sure you're available to answer calls and emails on those days!) Confirm the couple's arrival on site with the transfer company, the WC, or the resort/cruise line staff.

AFTER THE TRIP

- Send the couple a "welcome home" email, letter, or gift to greet them after the trip. Then, follow up with them personally to see how things went. And, ask them to share their story by giving you a copy of their favorite photo from the trip and a few sentences about it (instead of "asking for a testimonial").

- Write and send any other "thank you" notes you should do.

- Check with the WC to see how things went.

- Help the couple confirm and track any marriage licenses or certificates (symbolic or legal) they're expecting after they return home.

- Follow up on your commissions.