

SUPPLIER SELECTION CHECKLIST

Choosing which companies and suppliers to work with is probably the most important decision you'll make. Therefore, it's absolutely critical that you do your research properly and don't rush in too quickly. I highly recommend taking your time and weighing up all your options.

Below I have put together some guidelines to help you evaluate and select your wedding abroad suppliers.



INITIAL RESEARCH

Do your initial research and spend some time identifying as many suppliers as you can that operate in the country and specific location where you plan to get married. The internet is generally the best tool for this.

- Evaluate how each supplier presents themselves.
- How do you rate the quality of their brochures or their website?
- What type of information do they supply you with, what do you think of their written voice, do they sound warm and friendly or formal and corporate, which style appeals to you the most?
- Do they provide testimonials in their brochures or on their websites? (Please remember that while testimonials are incredibly valuable and important, every couple has different criteria for their wedding day, so a company that may be perfect for one couple may not necessarily be perfect for another).
- As a small caveat, although I personally think good presentation is a must, in order to fully evaluate a supplier you will need to look beyond their brochures and websites and get to know the real people behind them.

Create a short list of suppliers to contact. I would recommend contacting a minimum of five.

FIRST CONTACT

Contact each supplier on your shortlist.

- If you are planning on using a Tour Operator, I believe the best method, unless they are solely internet based, is a face-to-face visit. If you are planning on using a Wedding Planner I would first suggest sending them an email or completing their online enquiry form and then follow this up with a telephone call.
- To make the most of your enquiry and to save you time, I would ask each supplier the same questions and provide them with as much information as you can about your requirements and the vision you have for your wedding day.
- Use the Wedding Planning Forms as a guideline of the type of information you should provide to prospective wedding abroad suppliers.

Be upfront and honest with suppliers, if after your initial enquiry you do not plan to use them, be courteous and tell them, don't use them for an information source only, they too need time to be doing their real work, planning weddings!

INITIAL EVALUATION OF EACH SUPPLIER

Evaluate how quickly each supplier responded to your request for information. Unless there are extenuating circumstances which were explained, I would expect to receive a reply within one working day. I believe response time is important as it may set the foundation for the speed of future correspondence. (As a side note, if you are contacting wedding planners in the height of the wedding season or over the weekend they may take a few more days to respond to you).

- How did they respond to you?
 - Did they come across as professional?
 - Did you receive a generic reply (of course to some extent this will be expected for an initial enquiry) or did they personalise their response to you?
 - Did they answer all of your specific questions?
- Did they ask you any questions? Did they want to find out any further information about you and learn more about your plans for your wedding?
- Did they seem enthusiastic and willing to take on the planning of your wedding?
- What was your initial feeling about them – did you feel positive?

NARROWING DOWN YOUR LIST

Once you have received all your replies or visited all your suppliers it's time to narrow down your selection. This can be done by a number of different criteria.

- Dates – is the supplier available on your preferred dates?
- Call them – if you are planning on using a wedding planner pick up the phone and call them or ask them to call you. Email is fantastic but there is nothing better than having an actual conversation – you should really be able to get a feel for them, hear their enthusiasm (or lack of it) and obtain a lot more information than you would through written communication. Even if you are using a Tour Operator, ask if you could phone the actual planner that will be organising your wedding on the day, these are the people who will actually make it happen and you need to ensure that you have absolute faith in them.
- Price – make sure that you compare apples with apples. Fully understand what will be included in your package and most importantly what is not included – don't make any assumptions, find out if there are any extras and don't take the initial price on face value. If you are using a wedding planner, understand what is included in their service fee and if they charge for additional extras, such as travel costs or arranging additional activities.
- Don't be afraid to negotiate and see how flexible suppliers are, particularly if you like someone and they seem slightly out of your price range.
- Find out what their cancellation policy is. Will you have to pay anything or lose any deposits if you cancel your wedding or decide not to use their services? Check what your legal rights are here as in most circumstances under the Unfair Terms and Conditions Act they must refund you your deposit in full.
- Ask to view their Terms and Conditions – ensure you understand what is included in their fee and determine if there is anything that is outside of their fee that will be an extra expense to you e.g.
 - Their expenses
 - Phone calls
 - Mileage
 - Additional fees for doing paperwork
 - Unforeseen expenses – do they require you give them a lump sum of money with the caveat that it will be returned if nothing goes wrong?
 - Check if they receive a commission if they book your guests accommodation – any discount or commission should be passed onto your guests and not kept by the planner.



CHOOSING YOUR SUPPLIERS

Once you have made a decision, ensure that you get absolutely everything in writing. Make sure that you keep a paper trail, so that you always have everything backed up. Even if you have a telephone conversation, ensure that you then sit down and summarise it in an email and send it to your supplier, that way you can ensure that everything you spoke about was clear and will be followed up to your specification.

Best of luck with choosing your wedding suppliers, I hope the above helps to make your selection process a little easier.

If from your own experiences, you have any advice you feel should be added to this list, I would really love to hear from you as it will definitely help other couples who are planning a wedding abroad and are in the process of selecting their wedding abroad suppliers.