

FOR

BY LEO BEAR

When I look back on my mid-30s and that heady period I like to call 'wedding dominoes', I have to confess I get a few of my friends' weddings mixed up. The wisteria-clad country house hotel. The faintly damp marquee. The left-handed jazz band. Who was it again, darling?

It's only now, over a decade later, that I am profoundly grateful my husband and I chose to have a destination wedding. We invited 90 of our closest friends and family to an isolated village in the heart of France – in December. Our budget wasn't huge and there were plenty of mishaps (power cut, rogue firework explosion, maid-of-honour cracked a tooth on the croque-en-bouche), but there's one thing that did go right: our big day was a memorable one. Our chosen venue, an 18th-century manor cloaked in frozen mist, brought with it an air of mystery; a touch of *Poirot*. We hired a French opera singer and feasted on foie gras and wild game – specialties of the region. According to one guest, it was the best wedding he'd ever been to, and he worked for a bridal magazine...

Tying the knot abroad can involve a bit of additional red tape, and clocking up airmiles goes without saying, but the biggest challenge, let's face it, is a destination wedding asks a lot from your guests. There are flights to consider, hotel rooms to book, multiple outfit changes for a mix of day and evening events – it's a big ask. Huge. But herein lies the beauty of the destination wedding. People invest in them. They invest so much, they're determined to have a good time. They'll cut loose. They'll stay up late. They'll dig out dance moves that haven't seen light since, well, probably the last destination wedding they went to. A quick poll of my friends revealed all sorts of shenanigans taking place: kissing atop the turret of an Italian castello, a moonlit dip at a Mallorcan finca, a roll in the sand under a star-filled sky in the Agafay desert... What can I say, it's the journey not the destination. Or is it the other way round?

One thing's for sure. Post-Covid, destination weddings are on the rise. The global market has gone from \$21.31 billion in 2022 to \$28.31 billion in 2023 and is expected to reach a heady \$78.89 billion by 2027. Cynics might put this down to social media (hello, #BarbadosLoveBubble) but I'm not so sure. I like to think it's something more profound. Deeper. A newfound sense of carpe diem, perhaps. A heightened desire for shared experiences – a means of connecting people through place.

After all, what better reason is there to dust off your passport than to celebrate two people in love?

"I AM PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL MY HUSBAND AND I CHOSE TO HAVE A DESTINATION WEDDING. WE INVITED 90 OF OUR CLOSEST FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO AN ISOLATED VILLAGE IN THE HEART OF FRANCE"

AGAINST

BY PENELOPE BENNETT

Is it just me, or do our friends sometimes ask too much of us? Quite apart from putting up with the grind and formalities of life, apparently we must humour our loved ones when they invite us to their nuptials in a land far, far away. Ugh, no.

I love you, friend; but please do not make me shoehorn your destination wedding into my chaotic calendar, fly to a place I wouldn't otherwise spend time in, shack up in a hotel convenient for the venue but which Amex concierge doesn't recognise – oh, and find childcare.

I get the novelty and thrill of it all. I do. But I've been to weddings where none of us spoke the local tongue, the flower arrangements were the exact opposite of what the bride wanted, and there was a distinct, sinister feel to our minibreak in the bucolic hamlet our rowdy crowd had descended on for the weekend. I don't think we were welcome. Maybe I'm projecting. Maybe I'm right. I've grown weary. Group dynamics abroad, *gracias*, no. *Arrivederci*, illusory fun.

Life is short. And it's too short to try to please even your besties. If your bestie is manifesting saying 'I do' on a remote island that she and her partner have zero connection to, do your utmost to convince her to donate to a charity rehousing the inhabitants of said island once climate change drowns it. And accompany her to check out the five-star hotels nearest her pad instead. They're all desperate for the business and they're unlikely to disappoint.

For some, the farther away you get hitched, the fewer people you're forced to have. Phew, we needn't invite aunt Beth and uncle Norman because they can't take the altitude where we're going, or the donkey ride to get up there. Fair enough, but why do the rest of us have to endure it?

Elsewhere, the away option is a barrier to entry and rather mean to those who genuinely would like to participate but cannot take the time off or don't have the means and feel shame to admit it (a frankly torturous battle we can all do without).

What's so bad about keeping your friends in attendance sane? They'll be happy enough, and present in every way, for that moment when you say your vows. Assuming that's what matters to you in the first place. ■

"I LOVE YOU FRIEND, BUT PLEASE DO NOT MAKE ME SHOEHORN YOUR DESTINATION WEDDING INTO MY CHAOTIC CALENDAR, FLY TO A PLACE I WOULDN'T OTHERWISE SPEND TIME IN – OH, AND FIND CHILDCARE"

DESTINATION: WEDDING

To wed abroad or get hitched at home, that is the question...

PHOTO BY FOTO PÉTINE

