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# NEWLY ENGAGED?

READ THIS BEFORE BOOKING ANYTHING.

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*The insider truths no venue, vendor, or Google search will tell you —  
so your dream wedding stays a dream.*



**BOOK YOUR FREE DISCOVERY CALL**

[info@illusionzdestinationweddings.com](mailto:info@illusionzdestinationweddings.com) · (804) 767-0862

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## WELCOME

## Congratulations on Your Engagement!

*You said yes — and now the world is full of Pinterest boards, vendor emails, and well-meaning advice from everyone you know. Before you click 'Book Now' on anything, take a breath and read this guide.*

As a **Certified Wedding Planner, Romance Travel Specialist**, and destination wedding expert, I've helped couples navigate the beautiful — and sometimes complicated — world of destination celebrations. This guide gives you the insider knowledge that saves couples from costly missteps, stressful surprises, and missed opportunities.

Whether you're dreaming of barefoot vows on a Caribbean beach, a glamorous resort celebration in Mexico, or an intimate getaway in Europe — this is where your planning journey starts right.

### ◆ Your Guide Was Written By Shawndra Long

*Certified Wedding Planner · LGBTQ+ Romance Travel Specialist · IGLTA Member*

*BBB Accredited · DWHSA Member · Travel Planners International*

*Shawndra is a destination wedding and romance travel specialist based in Hampton Roads, Virginia, serving couples across the USA. With deep expertise in Caribbean, Mexico, and international destinations, she combines wedding coordination with full travel logistics so nothing falls through the cracks.*

*Learn more about Shawndra: [www.shawndralong.com](http://www.shawndralong.com)*

### ◆ What's Inside This Guide

*The 5 mistakes newly engaged couples make before calling a planner*

*What destination weddings actually cost (and what's often hidden)*

*The questions your venue won't answer unless you ask*

*Why travel insurance isn't optional — it's essential*

*How to choose the right destination for your guest list*

*Your next step: booking a free discovery call*

*This guide was created exclusively by **Shawndra Long** of **Illusionz Destination Weddings & Illusionz Travel, LLC** — proudly serving couples across the USA and destinations worldwide.*

## MEET YOUR PLANNER

## Hi, I'm Shawndra Long.

I'm the owner of **Illusionz Destination Weddings** and **Illusionz Travel, LLC** — a romance travel and destination wedding agency serving couples across the United States and beyond. I created this guide because I've watched too many newly engaged couples make expensive, stressful mistakes simply because no one gave them the full picture before they started booking.

My work sits at the intersection of two worlds: **expert wedding coordination** and **professional travel logistics**. That combination is rare — and it's exactly what destination weddings require. When your guests are flying in from across the country, someone needs to manage both the ceremony and the journey. That's what I do.

### *My Credentials & Affiliations*

◆ Certified Wedding Planner	◆ BBB Accredited Business
◆ LGBTQ+ Romance Travel Specialist	◆ DWHSA Member
◆ IGLTA Member	◆ Travel Planners International
◆ SAFe 6.0 Certified Product Owner/PM	◆ 25+ Years Professional Experience

### *My Background*

Before building Illusionz, I spent over 25 years in technology and banking — including a senior leadership role at City National Bank. That background gave me something most wedding planners don't have: a meticulous, systems-driven approach to managing complex, high-stakes projects. A destination wedding with 40 guests flying from five cities, a resort room block, a legal ceremony, and a three-day celebration is a logistics operation. I treat it like one.

I also own **Dominga Trendz**, a boutique jewelry and accessories brand — so I understand the full aesthetic of a beautiful, curated celebration down to the last detail.

#### ◆ **Want to Know More?**

*My authority hub at [shawndralong.com](http://shawndralong.com) is where I share in-depth guides, destination spotlights, industry insights, and the story behind Illusionz.*

*Visit [www.shawndralong.com](http://www.shawndralong.com) to learn more before your discovery call.*

## PART ONE

## 5 Mistakes to Avoid Before You Book Anything

### *Mistake #1: Booking a Venue Before Securing Your Guest List*

The most common — and expensive — error we see? Couples fall in love with a resort and sign a contract before they know how many guests are actually coming. Destination wedding venues require **room block minimums**. If your guests don't fill those rooms, *you* pay the difference.

Before you sign anything: send a casual save-the-date to gauge who can realistically travel, collect passport information from your VIP guests, and get a rough count within  $\pm 10$  guests. Then — and only then — start venue conversations.

### *Mistake #2: Assuming Your Wedding Planner & Travel Agent Are the Same Person*

Most resort wedding coordinators are *venue coordinators*. They manage the ceremony space, the décor timeline, and the catering. What they don't do: coordinate flights, negotiate room block contracts, handle travel insurance, or assist guests who miss connections.

A destination wedding specialist like Illusionz handles **both** — the romance travel logistics *and* the wedding coordination — so your guests have a single point of contact and nothing falls through the cracks.

#### ◆ The Illusionz Difference

*Wedding Planning + Group Travel Coordination + Guest Travel Support*

*One specialist. One point of contact. Zero chaos.*

### *Mistake #3: Skipping Travel Insurance*

A hurricane. A medical emergency. A global travel disruption. These are not hypotheticals — they happen every single season. Travel insurance protects your guests' flights, accommodations, and non-refundable deposits.

We require travel insurance conversations for every guest at every destination wedding we plan. It's not optional — it's the professional standard.

### *Mistake #4: Choosing a Destination Based on Price Alone*

All-inclusive resorts are not created equal, and 'affordable' can become very expensive once you factor in legal marriage requirements, wedding package restrictions, limited vendor access, and hidden resort fees.

The best destination for your wedding isn't the cheapest one — it's the one that matches your **guest demographics**, your **aesthetic vision**, your **legal requirements**, and your **timeline**. We help you find that match.

### *Mistake #5: Waiting Too Long to Start Planning*

The best resort wedding dates book 12–18 months in advance. Popular destinations like Cancún, Punta Cana, and Jamaica fill up fast — especially during peak season (November through April). If you're planning a wedding within the next 12 months, your planning journey starts today.

#### ◆ Quick Timeline Guide

*12–18 months out: Choose destination, secure venue, send save-the-dates*

*9–12 months: Finalize guest list, open room block, begin legal research*

*6–9 months: Book vendors, confirm décor, finalize ceremony details*

*3–6 months: Guest flight coordination, RSVP final count, travel insurance*

*30–60 days: Final payments, itinerary distribution, rehearsal planning*

## PART TWO

## What Does a Destination Wedding Actually Cost?

We believe in complete transparency. Here's what most couples don't realize until it's too late:

EXPENSE CATEGORY	WHAT TO KNOW
<b>Resort Wedding Package</b>	Ranges from \$3,000–\$15,000+. Often includes ceremony support, basic décor, officiant, and a small reception.
<b>Room Block Minimums</b>	Most resorts require 10–30 rooms. Unused rooms may become your financial responsibility.
<b>Legal vs. Symbolic</b>	Legal marriages abroad require documents, fees & translations. Many couples opt for a legal ceremony at home + a symbolic ceremony at the destination.
<b>Guest Travel</b>	Flights + resort stays vary widely. Budget \$1,500–\$4,000 per guest depending on origin city and destination.
<b>Travel Insurance</b>	Average \$150–\$400 per guest. Non-negotiable.
<b>Vendor Fees</b>	Outside vendors (photographers, bands, florists) often incur resort access fees of \$300–\$800 per vendor.
<b>Planner Fee</b>	A destination wedding specialist saves you money by negotiating room blocks, vendor access, and packages.

## PART THREE

## Choosing the Right Destination for Your Guests

*The perfect destination isn't just about aesthetics — it's about access, safety, and experience for every person you love.*

### Ask these questions before choosing:

- ◆ Where are most of your guests flying from? (Multiple U.S. hubs vs. one region)
- ◆ Do your guests have valid passports? (Required for all international destinations)
- ◆ What time of year are you marrying? (Hurricane season runs June–November in the Caribbean)
- ◆ Does your destination have inclusive non-stop or direct flight options?
- ◆ Are there any guest accessibility needs that affect resort or venue choice?
- ◆ Is the destination safe and welcoming for *all* of your guests?

#### ◆ A Note on LGBTQ+ Inclusive Destinations

*We are proud IGLTA Members and LGBTQ+ Romance Travel Specialists.*

*Not all destinations are equally safe or legally welcoming for all couples.*

*We will always prioritize your safety, your rights, and your joy —*

*and we will never recommend a destination that puts you or your guests at risk.*

*Ask us specifically about LGBTQ+ affirming resorts and destinations.*

### Popular Destinations We Specialize In:

DESTINATION	BEST FOR	PEAK SEASON
Cancún / Riviera Maya	Large groups, luxury all-inclusive	Nov – Apr
Punta Cana, DR	Value + beautiful beaches	Nov – Apr
St. Lucia	Romance, luxury, small groups	Dec – May
Aruba	Outside hurricane belt, sunny year-round	Year-round
Nassau / Paradise Island	Easy U.S. access, iconic backdrop	Dec – Apr
Cabo San Lucas	West Coast couples, desert + beach	Oct – Jun
Negril, Jamaica*	Beach beauty — see LGBTQ+ note	Dec – Apr

*\* Jamaica is a beautiful destination. However, LGBTQ+ couples and guests should be aware of local laws and climate. We will discuss this openly during your discovery call.*

## PART FOUR

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# Our Wedding Planning Collections

At Illusionz Destination Weddings, every couple deserves a planning experience as beautiful as the wedding itself. Our four service collections are designed to meet you wherever you are in your journey:

### ❖ *ENCHANTED / Travel Coordination Only*

Perfect if you have your wedding planning covered but need expert travel logistics — flights, room blocks, guest travel support, and travel insurance — handled beautifully.

### ❖ *ETERNAL / Offsite Facilitation*

We coordinate your destination wedding planning from home base. You get full wedding coordination, timeline management, vendor communication, and travel logistics — without us being physically present at the destination.

### ❖ *ETHEREAL / Day-of Coordination*

Your wedding weekend covered. We arrive at your destination to manage your ceremony day from start to finish — so you can be fully present as a couple.

### ❖ *EVERLASTING / Full Onsite Coordination*

The complete experience. From your first inquiry through your honeymoon departure, we are with you every step — planning, traveling, and celebrating alongside you.

Not sure which collection fits your vision? That's exactly what your **free discovery call** is for.

## YOUR NEXT STEP

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# You've Done the Reading. Now Let's Plan the Wedding.

*Your free discovery call is a no-pressure, no-obligation conversation where we learn about your vision, your guests, your destination dreams — and where you learn exactly how we can make it all happen.*

### *On your discovery call, we'll cover:*

- ◆ Your destination vision and top destination options
- ◆ Your estimated guest count and travel origins
- ◆ Realistic budget ranges for your dream wedding
- ◆ Which Illusionz service collection fits your needs
- ◆ Your next three action steps — no overwhelm, just clarity

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