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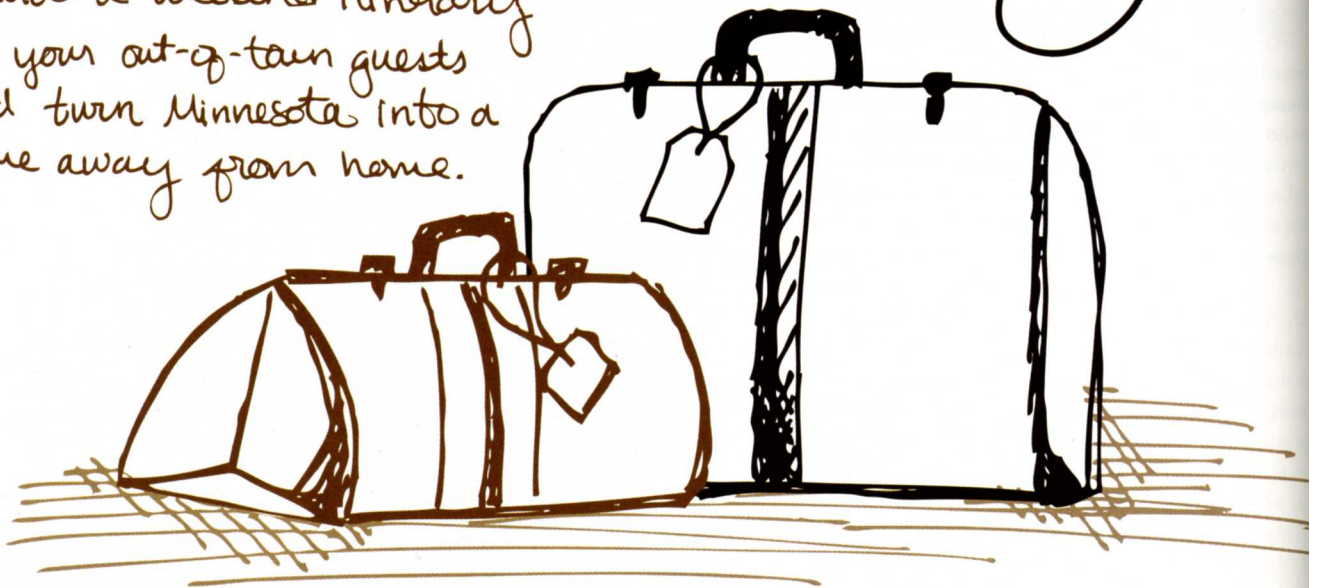


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Beyond the Wedding

Provide a weekend itinerary for your out-of-town guests and turn Minnesota into a home away from home.



By Sarah Barker
Illustrated by
Kelsey Durigan

Twenty-seven dresses? That's nothing.

Try twenty-seven plane tickets and hotel rooms. Now we're talking weddings, mobile-style. More often than not, wedding guests will hit the road to attend a couple's nuptials. And when in Rome ... what exactly do the Romans do? "I've traveled to weddings in cities I wasn't familiar with for the whole weekend, and I had no idea what to do. I just kind of hung around," recent bride Abby Johnson recalls. "I didn't want that to happen with my guests."

Married at Spirit Mountain in Duluth in July, Johnson and her husband, Jeremy, included a host of activities, restaurants and nightlife in their wedding invitation with special reference to the Reef bar. "It's a hole in the wall, but it meant something to us since we met there," she says. "Duluth is really close to my heart; I wanted to show people what's so special about it." Pointing out such area icons as Canal Park, Glensheen Mansion, Tweed Art Museum, Gooseberry Falls and Split Rock Lighthouse helped turn the wedding weekend into a mini vacation for their guests.

Johnson had the help of Laura Mullen, owner of Laura Mullen Event Design and a recent bride herself. "I recommend the bride and groom write down a list of their favorite places—maybe where they met, where they got engaged, things they like to do. I'll plot them out on a

map to be slipped into welcome baskets," she says. "It not only makes the wedding more of a destination for guests, but it feels personal when the couple shows them the little gems of their city."

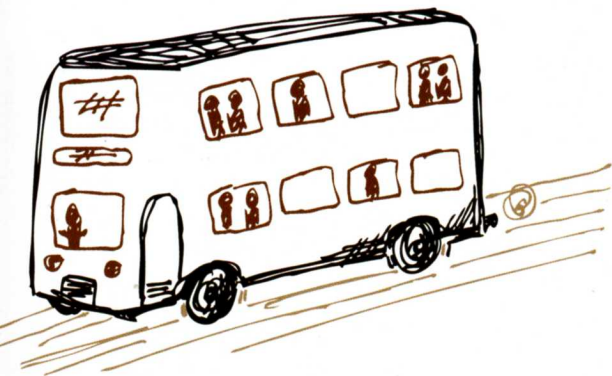
TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

Although a list of things to do and see is probably most useful for out-of-town guests, Mullen also suggests planning for "loose end" times for all guests, such as when there is a significant gap between the ceremony and the reception, for those not attending the rehearsal dinner, a post-reception after-party or next-day brunch. She had Classic Limo's double-decker red bus take a Minneapolis wedding's guests on a city tour, complete with guide and champagne, while photography took place between the

ceremony and reception. "If a time gap is unavoidable, I try to arrange something fun, like the city tour, to keep the guests together," she says. "Left to their own devices, they may get lost, eat too much or drink too much, none of which is a good thing."

Mullen employed her own advice at her fall 2008 wedding, held on a Friday evening on the Brule River in Wisconsin, but she used a light hand. "I've been to weddings with jam-packed itineraries where every second was planned. Ours wasn't like that." A Saturday brunch, canoe trip and barbecue were offered to highlight the area's outdoor appeal, and guests who wanted to relax and absorb the northwoods atmosphere were free to do so. On Sunday, a second artsy cocktail reception was held back in the Twin Cities for guests who couldn't make the drive to Wisconsin.

Gretchen Culver with Bellagala seconded the transportation motion, saying she's had several clients who've provided mini-coach transportation for guests throughout the weekend. "They're more likely to participate in events, and since they don't have to hire cabs or rent a car, they feel more welcome and more appreciated," she added.



SOCIAL BUTTERFLIES

Nicolle Sellers, lead planner and co-owner of Mother of the Bride Wedding Design and Coordinator Services, likes to give guests maximum face time with the bride and groom. "People spend money traveling to be with the new couple and help them celebrate," she says. "For that reason, I encourage group activities rather than just telling guests what's available and letting them go their own way." Some couples schedule a welcome party in the hotel bar so they can personally meet, greet and introduce guests to each other. While Sellers helps the bride and groom make a list of museums, restaurants and shops guests can visit, she has also scheduled Mississippi River and Lake Minnetonka cruises, golf outings and baseball games—activities that play the dual role of helping guests get to know each other and showcasing the couple's memories of life in Minnesota.

"These activities needn't be expensive," says Sellers. "Depending on the couple's budget, they may host the event, but it's not an obligation. And there are plenty of fun things to do that are free. Like kickball." She was referring to Marcee and Jon Schwartz's wedding, where they and their guests spent the morning of the

wedding playing kickball in Minneapolis' Kenwood Park. Family friends rented the adjacent community center and served a catered brunch.

That was just one activity of a long weekend lineup that was designed to be fun, inclusive and easily accessible from the base hotels in downtown Minneapolis.

The couple's bachelor and bachelorette parties occurred on Thursday evening with exclusive seating and snacks at a very atmospheric St. Paul Saints game. Alternately, fans of fabulous food and great conversation could attend a casual dinner. Guests finished the weekend with a Sunday brunch hosted by the bride's family at the downtown Chambers Hotel.

"It was summer. The weather was beautiful. Marcee and Jon just wanted people to have a fun summer-in-Minnesota experience," says the bride's mother, Judy Harris. Additional uniquely Twin Cities experiences they suggested were the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, and the Uptown and Loring Park art fairs.

DOWNSIZING THE REHEARSAL DINNER

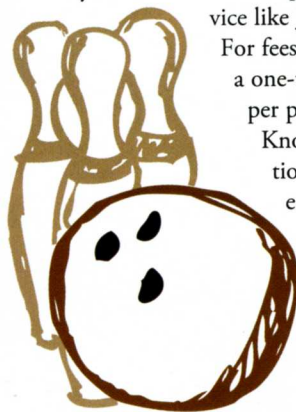
Sellers noted another aspect of the wedding-as-destination trend: The itinerary is for everyone, not just the wedding party. "There's been a reduction in the size and scale of the rehearsal dinner," she says. "Rather than spending a ton of money on a lavish event for certain guests, couples will have a smaller, more casual rehearsal dinner and meet up for drinks and an evening enjoying the downtown scene."

Culver has seen that trend go even further, with the rehearsal dinner completely replaced by a casual, everyone-attends "pre-party," like a picnic at a park or bowling and burgers. "One caveat," she mentioned: "Be as detailed as possible so guests know what to expect. 'Let's meet at

Brit's Pub at 8 o'clock,' means guests will be responsible for their own food and drink. 'Be our guest for brunch and mimosas' implies the event is hosted."



Planning a wedding and reception is a major project, as any couple can attest. Factoring in logistics for out-of-towners over the course of a weekend is more than many betrothed are willing to take on. Wedding planners can assume varying levels of handholding, from suggesting possibilities to actually taking the river tour with everyone else. Another option is a concierge service like Jennifer Knoch's Radar.



For fees ranging from \$15 for a one-time arrangement to \$7 per person for group logistics, Knoch can make suggestions for shopping, dining, entertainment or sightseeing, secure reservations or tickets, and arrange transportation. She can also be on call during the weekend for guests with questions. *

Weekend Plans

Wedding planner Laura Mullen is full of ideas for guest itineraries.

TAKE THIS FOODIE FORAY...

- Veg out at the Minneapolis Farmer's Market, mid-April through mid-November; free! mplsfarmersmarket.com
- Chop, sauté, wine and dine at Cooks of Crocus Hill; \$800 for up to 20 people. cooksofcrocushill.com
- Tour and taste at Alexis Bailly Vineyard; \$7 per person. abvwines.com
- Hop on a tour of Surly Brewing Company in Brooklyn Center or Summit Brewing Company in St. Paul; free! surlybrewing.com; summitbrewing.com
- Say "fromage" at Premier Cheese Market in Minneapolis; free! premiercheesemarket.com
- Add some variety to life at Penzeys Spices in Minneapolis, Lakeville and St. Paul; free! penzeys.com

OR IN ST. PAUL FOR FAMILIES...

- Go wild inside and out at the Como Zoo and Conservatory; \$1 to \$2 recommended donation. comozooconservatory.org
- Get wet and shoot hoops at the newly renovated Great River Water Park and Jimmy Lee Recreation Center; \$4.50 to \$6.50 per person. 651.642.0650.
- Window-shop along Grand Avenue; free! grandave.com
- Dinosaurs, dynamics and much more abound at the Science Museum of Minnesota; \$8.50 to \$11. simm.org
- Enjoy an Italian feast cafeteria-style at Cossetta Italian Market; about \$7 to \$15 per person. 651.222.3476.

