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Serena & Sean



BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Meet Serena and Sean Hillier – both from the UK. They travelled all the way to Sri Lanka to have their destination wedding in our beautiful island.

Serena's parents were both born in Sri Lanka but moved to England in their teens so she was born and raised in London, UK. She's currently an Account Manager for an event marketing agency in London. Sean is from Ealing, London and was an ex - pro footballer now turned General Manager at the family business. Here's what they had to say about their destination wedding experience.

HOW DID YOU MEET

SERENA - My best friends and Sean's friends had known each other for years but we'd never actually met. One evening in April 2011 we were both out with our friends in Mayfair. As soon as we met we spent the next 2 hours talking to each other!

SEAN - We met in Mayfair London through friends. I had known Serena's friends a few years before meeting her, as soon as she was out with them I introduced myself... And the rest is history.

WHY DID YOU WANT TO DO A DESTINATION WEDDING

SERENA - As soon as Sean proposed, we knew we would have to do the wedding abroad as we both loved the idea of a beach wedding. As Sean's mother is from Grenada and my parents from Sri Lanka, we wanted to choose between one of the two.

SEAN - We didn't really want the usual English church wedding and the idea of having it on the beach was much more inviting - Which would never have happened in the UK!

WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND PICKING SRI LANKA

SERENA - We chose Sri Lanka because



I personally felt more comfortable knowing that I had lots of family in SL, that I could call upon to help if needed. Also I had a strong connection with Mount Lavinia hotel having spent most of our family holidays there and my mum growing up in Mount Lavinia and dad growing up not too far in Sirimal Uyana, Ratmalana.

SEAN - Serena's family are from Sri Lanka and I had gone with them for Christmas and New Year's in 2012. It was the first time I had travelled to Asia and I loved it. It reminded me of the island of Grenada where my mum is from. We spent most of our time in Mount Lavinia and the hotel itself left a lasting impression on me.

WAS IT HARD DECIDING WHO GETS TO COME AND WHO DOESN'T

SERENA - No, it was great! We could invite everyone we wanted

to from the UK, even in SL we had all my parents' friends and family there. **SEAN** - It was not difficult at all. We invited everyone we wanted to be there although not all of them were able to attend due to the travelling and date.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU CAME TO SRI LANKA DID YOU GET MARRIED STRAIGHT AWAY OR DID YOU HAVE A LONGER STAY

SERENA - Two of our best friends were getting married on the Friday before our wedding so we only arrived in the country 6 days before our wedding day. We did stay on for another 8 days whilst all our family and friends were with us and then headed off to Thailand and Vietnam for a 5 week maxi moon.

SEAN - We legally had to be in Sri Lanka five days before the wedding day to be officially married. We both arrived 6 days before and our guests all arrived on different days within that week. Serena and I stayed in Sri Lanka just over a week after the wedding with some of our guests staying for a longer period. The idea was for everyone to enjoy a holiday and to make it a 2 week celebration with family and friends.

HOW WAS THE WEDDING

SERENA - The wedding day (forgive the cheese) was magical! Everything was absolutely perfect! Having a wedding planner was by far the best decision we made. We both were completely stress free in the run up and on the day, our only worry in the lead up was the weather as we chose to have our wedding mid-June during monsoon season. Charm and the Magical Moments team were very meticulous in everything they did so everything was perfectly planned and executed.

SEAN - It was perfect! The best and most memorable day of my life.

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE PART OF YOUR DESTINATION WEDDING

SERENA - I have two most memorable parts of the day. The first one was at Mount Lavinia beach, walking down the aisle to my future husband and the second was at the reception party having all our most favourite family and friends around us and having a great time and dancing to ball!

SEAN - For me it was waiting at the altar on the beach, seeing all my family and friends turn around as the music began to play, watching the groomsmen and bridesmaids walking towards me, then seeing my future wife walking with her dad looking flawless.

ANY ADVICE FOR SOMEONE PLANNING ON A DESTINATION WEDDING

SERENA - Yes! Get a wedding planner and one you can trust to go above and beyond to deliver your dream wedding. Magical Moments did exactly that for us! **SEAN** - Having a wedding planner who is living in the destination that you have chosen is a must. I know Serena was in touch with a UK based planner before finding Magical Moments but they couldn't do half the things we wanted!

PHOTOS COURTESY Studio U



MAGICAL MOMENTS DESTINATION WEDDING PLANNERS

With our deep blue ocean waters, small islands and friendly locals - Sri Lanka is the home to many destination weddings.

Charm De Silva, director of Magical Moments - an event planning company, has been the force behind quite a few successful destination weddings that took place in our little island. 3 years into the business, planning destination weddings has become the main core of Magical Moments.

In our interview with Charm, she gives us a behind the scenes look at how they plan destination weddings.



is set we would work on the décor and contact the vendors and plan out the wedding week. I would be their eyes and ears in their wedding.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A DESTINATION WEDDING

It's where people from foreign countries come to Sri Lanka to have their wedding celebrations. They would have their wedding and their reception in Sri Lanka with a small group of friends and family.

HOW DOES A COUPLE KNOW THAT A DESTINATION WEDDING IS THE RIGHT KIND OF WEDDING FOR THEM

Well, it actually depends on what you want. Destination weddings are ideal for people who want something simple and intimate. If you're looking for something extraordinary, having a destination wedding is something to think about.

WHEN SOMEONE HIRES YOU AS A PLANNER, HOW DOES IT WORK

Most people hear of us through word of mouth so they would contact me and we would discuss the details. First thing we do is to look for a venue. So I would give them a few options. Most couples go for intimate places like beach fronts and villas. Once the location

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHICH LOCATION IS THE RIGHT LOCATION FOR THE WEDDING

There are a lot of factors that counts when it comes to location. It's not just about a pretty place. You need to consider the infrastructure and the distance. So when you're finding the right location think about the little things like how long you want to travel. We take a lot of time to understand our clients and their needs. Some people want good food and venue while some want great décor. You understand what's important to the client and then find the venue.

IS IT IDEAL TO HIRE A PLANNER IN YOUR OWN COUNTRY TO PLAN A DESTINATION WEDDING OR IS IT BETTER TO HIRE SOMEONE FROM THE COUNTRY YOU WISH TO HAVE THE WEDDING AT

Ideally, get a planner who knows the country. It can even be someone from your country as long as they know the country you decided on very well and has the right contacts.

Whatever it is, when you find a planner make sure that person knows that country very well.

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST ADVICE FOR SOMEONE PLANNING A DESTINATION WEDDING

Do your research and find a planner. Have someone who's skilled. Someone who can deliver to your expectation whilst staying within the budget. They need to have the right contacts and good negotiating skills. Not everyone can service to the foreign clientele so if you are planning a destination wedding make sure to get a planner who's experienced.



THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF A DESTINATION WEDDING

DO'S

✓ MAKE SURE YOUR RIGHT PLACE IS ALSO THE SMART PLACE - as tempting as it is to just see a picture and say that's it. That's the place I want to get married in! - planning a destination wedding is beyond the whimsical thought or two. When you find the place you love, you need to research. How much would it cost to get there? Where exactly would you get married? How long do you need to travel? How's the weather? Where would everyone stay?

✓ HIRE A PLANNER - Do not assume you can figure it out on your own. It's not as easy as planning a wedding in your own country. A foreign country is a whole new set of customs, rules and red tape. So hire a planner (preferably from that country) to sort out everything for you! Not only would they know the best venues, they would also have the right contacts for the vendors and they would be your eyes into your wedding.

✓ BUDGETING IS EVERYTHING - Factor in your costs! From the air plane tickets to the hotel stay - find out how much cash you would be spending. Getting married abroad doesn't always mean it's cheaper! Make sure to consider the exchange rate when you are budgeting! Also make room for any photographers or make up artists you would be bringing along with you!

✓ KNOW THE LAWS - Every country has their own set of rules and laws for marriage. So make sure to do your research and find out what are the requirements you need and get the legal work done before you get there!

DON'TS

✗ NOT HAVING A BACKUP PLAN - is a terrible idea! If you're getting married at the beach front, or in a garden or anywhere that doesn't have a roof over your head - have a backup plan! The weather is unpredictable so the last thing you need is a little bit of rain and thunder ruining a wedding you flew a couple of hundred miles for.

✗ BANKRUPTING YOUR GUESTS - Must likely that your guests will be paying the airfare themselves to come to your wedding so the least you can do is to help out down costs as much as possible. Talk to the hotel you'll be staying and ask for group discounts or pay for their transport from the airport to the location. Make sure your guests can have fun and not stress about how much this trip is costing them.

✗ WAITING FOR THE LAST MINUTE - Don't plan a wedding just 2 months before and definitely don't wait to tell your guests a month before the wedding. They should get at least 3 months' notice to book flights, figure out accommodation and get pardon for work. So try to plan your wedding as early as your possibly can! The more time you have, the less stressed out you will be.

SOURCE: INTERNET

