



Virginia Beach is filled with spectacular locations for weddings, like this gorgeous outdoor ceremony at The Founders Inn and Spa.

## planner q&a

We talked to Emily Petersen of Emily Weddings, Inc. to get the scoop on planning a wedding in Virginia Beach. BY CARRIE CHAMBERS

### **Q** Tell us how you got into the wedding business?

“I have been coordinating weddings since 2000, but began my career in Hampton Roads in 2005. My experience with weddings dates back to my youth when I performed at numerous ceremonies as a singer. Over time, my passion for weddings caught up to my love for music, and I found myself balancing a singing/entertaining career at Walt Disney World with helping brides and grooms prepare music and programs for their ceremonies. Burdened by the frustration that I continually saw in the couples during their rehearsals, I began to assume the role as mistress of ceremonies. This led to professional training through the Association of Bridal Consultants and my present career as a wedding coordinator in Hampton Roads.”

### **Q** What’s your best advice for planning a destination wedding?

“In light of the economy, destination weddings can save money, but only if you plan well. A big mistake couples make is not to think things through, and before you know it, it would have been cheaper to have a big reception

back home. My advice to brides wanting a destination wedding is to hire a wedding planner. A wedding planner can help you keep a budget, find the best local vendors within your price point, and help you truly determine where the money would best be spent to fulfill your dream wedding. He or she can also assist you in finding the perfect officiant as well as helping in the details of obtaining a marriage license. All of these things are of huge assistance to the local bride and almost crucial for the destination bride."

### Q What seems to be the biggest draw for couples marrying in Virginia Beach?

"The beach allows couples to feel they are looking for without having to go too far from their home. I have had many brides drive or fly in for the weekend because it wasn't too far for them to travel, which helps when you want your guests to travel as well. Many couples are opting for a more intimate ceremony and reception in 2010 and 2011. This allows them to invite a few close friends and family without feeling obligated to lengthen the guest list just to avoid hurt feelings. If planned well, it can truly save the couple the money of having a large wedding and reception back home. Couples also like the idea of combining the wedding and honeymoon in one trip."

### Q What are some of your biggest challenges when planning weddings in the area?

"A big challenge is working around, or with, tourist season. The rates change depending on the season, which directly affects the budget for your wedding and your guests' travel expenses. The rates start to go up around the end of April and started heading back down in early October. I would recommend checking out the Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau website for events and information to help your guests truly have the full Virginia Beach experience."

[VBFun.com/visitors/events-and-entertainment](http://VBFun.com/visitors/events-and-entertainment)

### Q Okay, time to dish about your WORST planning experience.

"If everything went as planned on your wedding day then there really would be no need for a coordinator to be present. But let's be realistic: life happens! I have coordinated a wedding where the photographer was in a car accident on her way from the ceremony to the reception. If the bride had not had a coordinator then the photographer would have been calling her on her own wedding day to break some bad news. I was able to make the necessary last-minute changes while the photographer called her association and had a professional photographer at the wedding in 20 minutes. The remainder of the evening was flawless. I have also coordinated a wedding where a large, well-known hotel caught on fire. While the hotel staff and hotel coordinator had to take care of the obvious problem, I was able to continue working on the ballroom as well as managing the guests that were staying at the hotel and walking down 20 flights of stairs to make



**colorful combo** Go bold with your beach wedding flowers. Deep purple calla lilies up the drama of this flirty bouquet of roses, dahlias and hypericum berries.

it to the ceremony site. The Emily Weddings staff was able to get every one of the many guests on the rented buses and to the ceremony site for the wedding, and it began perfectly on time!"

### Q How are couples incorporating "local flavor" into their big day?

"There are several great caterers in the Virginia Beach area to work with for your wedding day! Most caterers can put together a menu based on your theme and desired taste. Seafood is a big request in Virginia Beach. Cathy Carter from East Beach Catering (757-480-3003) can design a menu around the desires of the bride and groom, but she also offers a particular menu called the "Taste of Virginia" that is very popular. This selection offers tastes from The Chesapeake Bay, Smithfield and the Old South. They are also having couples request small hors d'oeuvres to be served to their guests after a long night of dancing. Cuisine & Company (757-428-6700) says that many couples are asking for a specialty drink at the wedding. Some couples like raspberry limeade or a twist on tea, like a mango tea, to serve to their guests. If a specialty alcoholic drink is requested, the popular liquor to include is a choice of rum or vodka."

### Q What's your favorite thing about planning weddings in Virginia Beach?

"I love the diversity in weddings that we get to do. I love that we are a destination wedding location and at the same time a favorite for local brides. There are so many venues and amazing vendors to work with here in Hampton Roads. We love helping a bride create and form her style into a tangible concept, accomplishing anything a bride desires and envisions for a once-in-a-lifetime experience."



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