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FIELD NOTES

Weddings for Days

Multiday wedding celebrations packed with events are becoming more popular as couples look to make up lost time with loved ones during the pandemic.



By Danielle Braff

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Amy Hernandez said a six-hour event would not be long enough to catch up with everyone at her wedding whom she hadn't seen during the pandemic.

So, with help from the team at North Carolina-based Rebecca Rose Events, she planned a celebration that lasted for four days instead.

"We hadn't seen most of these people in over two years, and it allowed us more time than the usual five minutes you have passing from table to table during the reception," said Ms.

Hernandez, 32, who lives in Philadelphia and is a partner and associate director of research at Sustainable Governance Partners, an advisory firm with a focus on corporate governance.

Her Sept. 11 marriage to Pete Slowik, 33, a vice president of investment banking at financial advisory firm Janney Montgomery Scott, at the Valley Rock Inn and Mountain Club in Sloatsburg, N.Y., was sandwiched between several other activities for the couple and their 34 guests that took place from Sept. 9 to 12. They included two prewedding dinners, a hike, welcome drinks and desserts, a late-night pizza and churro party that also featured a cigar bar and a poolside brunch the morning after the ceremony. (All attendees were required to be fully vaccinated.)

The multiday wedding is not new and, in some cultures, it is the norm; some Southeast Asian wedding celebrations, for instance, can traditionally include events that are spread over about three days.

Domestically, the concept predates the pandemic, but days-long wedding celebrations have grown more popular as some couples have been forced to postpone their events and others want to make up for lost time with the people they love. In 2017, 20 percent of American couples had multiday affairs, but by 2020, that number jumped to 37 percent, according to Anna Price Olson, the associate editorial director of Brides, citing data found, but not published, in the company's 2020 American Wedding Study.

Meena Lee, the owner of 5th Avenue Weddings in New York, said that because some people aren't comfortable with large gatherings, she has been suggesting that her clients hold multiday celebrations with a smaller guest list, like Ms. Hernandez's event, rather than invite lots of people to a single event.

Ms. Lee said that all of the couples she has worked with since the pandemic have chosen to have small multiday weddings with activities like shaving sessions for groomsmen, spa trips, bus tours, bowling nights, sunset cruises and brunches. (Before the pandemic, she said half of her clients held multiday celebrations.) Covid precautions for the multiday weddings she has worked on can vary as much as the activities, she said.

"Some have chosen to have all events outside, or gather proof of the vaccine prior to the wedding day, and others have chosen to hire an on-site rapid Covid testing company," Ms. Lee said.

These weddings really run the gamut depending on the couple's personalities and goals for the party.

Julianne Ponan, 32, the founder and chief executive of Creative Nature, an allergy-friendly snack company in England, and Matthew Ford, 34, an operations director, hosted 20 guests at their fall 2021 wedding at Blue Waters Hotel and Spa in Antigua.

The couple, who live in Surrey, England, held events from Oct. 17 to 22, including swimming with stingrays, snorkeling at the Pillars of Hercules, a private lunch on a secluded island and a rum tasting.

Ms. Ponan said she knew her wedding day would go by quickly, and she wanted to have time to enjoy her guests, who were limited to 20 people because of Covid precautions set by the hotel. She also wanted her guests to become acquainted before the ceremony.

“Some of our wedding party had never met each other, which is why the activities were so important, as they allowed them to get to know each other before the big day,” said Ms. Ponan, whose wedding was held on Oct. 20.

Ashley Smith, an event planner and the owner of Ashley Smith Events in San Francisco, said that 85 percent of the couples she has worked with since the start of the pandemic have hosted multiday affairs, compared to 50 percent before the pandemic. She added that they are most often destination weddings that require attendees to travel to a location where the couple does not live.

Caroline Cotto, 29, who lives in Oakland, Calif., said she attended five multiday destination weddings around the country from July through November. These events, which included dinners, picnics, tubing trips and brunches, offered a welcome change from her days spent locked down at home earlier in the pandemic, said Ms. Cotto, the founder and chief operating officer of Renewal Mill, a company that recycles food waste into pantry staples.

“My partner and I have really been enjoying these weddings because we haven’t taken a lot of vacation during the pandemic,” said Ms. Cotto, who added that at each wedding, she was required to show proof of vaccination and a negative Covid test before the first event.

The cost to attend these weddings, though, was not insignificant, she said. Ms. Cotto had to purchase flights to attend three of them and, for one, she was in charge of renting a house to sleep 14-plus people. She estimated that she also had to pay hundreds of dollars on Covid tests, in part because other guests tested positive for the virus during some of the multiday weddings she attended.

For a couple hosting a multiday celebration, costs can run the gamut, said Becca Atchison, the founder and creative director of Rebecca Rose Events. Ms. Atchison said that, per person, it is not uncommon to spend between \$40 and \$150 for a welcome party, between \$600 and \$1,200 for a rehearsal dinner, between \$1,500 and \$2,500 for a reception and between \$60 and \$250 for a brunch — in addition to the cost for any other activities.

Ms. Smith added that some couples hosting multiday weddings may also need to cover vendors’ travel costs in addition to their fees. In some cases, she said, couples will also cover a portion of their guests’ accommodations, too.

“Factoring all of these additional items on top of the main event often increases the budget by 30 to 70 percent,” Ms. Smith said.

New York-based event planner Samantha Goldberg, who specializes in multiday weddings (and whose own wedding took place over three days), said that some of her clients will cut their décor budget for a reception, or use the same floral arrangements at a ceremony and reception, in order to reallocate it toward other activities.

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“I personally have had clients cut back in areas such as design — this can be almost as expensive as the venue — so they can add more events,” Ms. Goldberg said.

Emily Gaikowski, the owner and founder of Los Angeles-based Heartthrob Weddings, said the concept of the multiday wedding really gained steam in the mid-2010s, when photo-sharing social media platforms like Instagram and Pinterest boomed just as the never-ending party culture of music festivals like Coachella and Lollapalooza grew more mainstream.

Today, though, she said the events have taken on a new significance, offering couples and their guests an opportunity to make up for time they could not spend together during the pandemic and create joyful memories together after experiencing so much loss and devastation.

“I think trauma bonding is real and it seems like my couples, their wedding parties and their guests are closer than ever after everyone experienced so much loss and devastation,” Ms. Gaikowski said. “Nobody wants to say goodbye at the end of the night.”