

Bridal

Guide 2013



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What to know before popping the question

An engagement ring symbolizes your promise to love and cherish your partner forever, and shows the world your commitment to your fiancée. Many women dream about their engagement ring their entire lives, so choosing the right style is of utmost importance.

Here are some tips to ease the pressure of finding the ring and proposing:

It's Not Only About the Diamond

A ring's setting is as important as its diamond because the setting is what displays and secures the stone. Platinum provides an ideal setting as it is stronger than other precious metals, which means that you don't have to worry about losing the center stone with everyday wear.

Also, platinum is a naturally white metal, allowing the diamond to sparkle even brighter.

Did you know that a platinum engagement ring will last forever?

Since platinum is so durable and loses little metal over time, the ring will undoubtedly become a family heirloom that can be passed down for generations to follow. And platinum engagement rings are surprisingly affordable. Contrary to popular belief, they are available in



a wide range of price points, starting at around \$1,000 at BlueNile.com.

Know Her Style

Before you go to the jewelry store, know your future fiancée's style, personality lifestyle since there is a ring to suit her perfectly. For example, a woman with a hands-on job, like nursing, might prefer a simple band with a secure setting, while a woman who has a less

active job might want something more intricate. A woman with classic style will want a different band design than a trend-setting fashionista.

"A classic polished platinum band from Michael Barin will suit a girl with more traditional tastes, while a birth stone of colored diamonds on an embellished band like one from Suna Bros. will look bold and unique," says jewelry and style expert Michael O'Connor. "To figure out her ring size, press one of your girlfriend's rings in a bar of soap until it leaves a mark.

You can also put one of her rings on your own hand, mark where it falls on your finger and have the jeweler measure that area," suggests O'Connor.

How to Propose

Some women want a public proposal in front of friends and family, while others want something private and special. In either case, your fiancée will remember the day for the rest of her life. Think about what your fiancée likes, and where and how you met.

For more tips on proposing marriage or choosing an engagement ring, visit www.engagementguide.com or www.preciousplatinum.com. (NewsUSA)

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Pre-wedding beauty tips for the bride

Experts suggest starting your entire beauty regimen six months before the wedding. Here's a complete pre-wedding beauty checklist.

Lips: Get soft, kissable lips by brushing away flakes of dry skin with an infant toothbrush soaked in baking soda and water. Apply healing ointment, and in no time, your lips will be ready for that "kiss the bride" kiss.

Teeth: A cosmetic dentist can often correct an imperfect smile with veneers. But if spending painful hours in the dentist's chair getting your teeth ground down sounds like it would put a damper on all the joyful planning, here's good news: Lumineers (www.lumineers.com) are now used by thousands of dentists nationwide and can be applied in two short, pain-free appointments.

Unlike other veneer procedures, Lumineers are so strong and thin that they don't require removal of sensitive tooth structure. The procedure is quick, painless and even reversible.

Makeup: Women with warm skin tones look best in makeup with pink, coral, peach, amber, brown and red with yellow undertones. If you have a cool skin tone, choose pink, berry, lilac, mauve or red with blue undertones.

Skin: Make your face glow with a good cleansing program. Use a cleanser that's appropriate for your skin type in the morning, makeup



remover and cleanser at night and a daily moisturizer. Use a gentle facial scrub once a week.

Hair: If you're planning to change your hairstyle or color, experiment several months before the wedding so you have time to correct any mistakes.

Nails: If you're a nail-biter, get weekly manicures to keep your nails healthy. Plan your last manicure a couple of days before the big day. Choose a pretty pale pink or splurge on a French manicure, not just because it looks great, but because the chips won't show as much and are easy to fix. You'll have beautiful hands for the rehearsal dinner and any other festivities. (NewsUSA)

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Brides trim bill with destination weddings

Tying the knot isn't what it used to be. The wedding industry is as profitable as primetime football, celebrities compete for the shortest, most gimmicky marriages (72 days or less?) and the exotic appeal of a romantic getaway has led to the widespread popularity of destination weddings.

One in every 10 weddings features an exotic locale, or at least a location neither the bride nor groom calls home. While there's no absolute explanation as to why destination weddings have started a bridal takeover, the hefty price of typical weddings is reason enough for many -- especially if Daddy isn't footing the bill.

If done correctly, destination weddings can be a cheaper alternative for everyone. Guests don't have to buy expensive gifts, just a ticket. All the money spent on the wedding party, venues, refreshments, cake, reception and decor is significantly reduced if not cut altogether, explains Nini Pardo, wedding planner at Stay in Costa Rica, an accommodations and rental management company.

The author of "Destination Weddings for Dummies," Susan Breslow Sardone, says the traditional American wedding costs an average of \$28,082, whereas destination weddings average



around \$20,600. "Some of the cost difference is definitely a result of resorts and hotels capitalizing on the trend. Many now offer the full wedding package with wedding planners, musicians, photographers, etc. We employ full-time wedding coordinators, like myself, to craft intimate weddings at our Los Suenos Resort," Pardo adds. "We've found it really appealing to budget-conscious brides."

Budget-conscious brides have become a trend as well, according to Patricia MacArthur, executive director of WeddingStar.com -- a go-to authority on all things wedding-related. MacArthur says more brides are trimming expenses by

taking the DIY route for guest favors and some decorative elements.

For tropical weddings especially, many of the cheaper, DIY options are more easily packed into suitcases. For instance, colorful fabric is being used to replace flowers and native delicacies are replacing towering cakes.

An extra tip from the experts, when considering the perfect setting to make your vows and possibly trash the dress: look at locations that are one flight away from you and most of your guests. Direct flights tend to be cheaper and less hassle. To learn more about saying "I do" in Costa Rica, visit www.stayincostarica.com. (NewsUSA)



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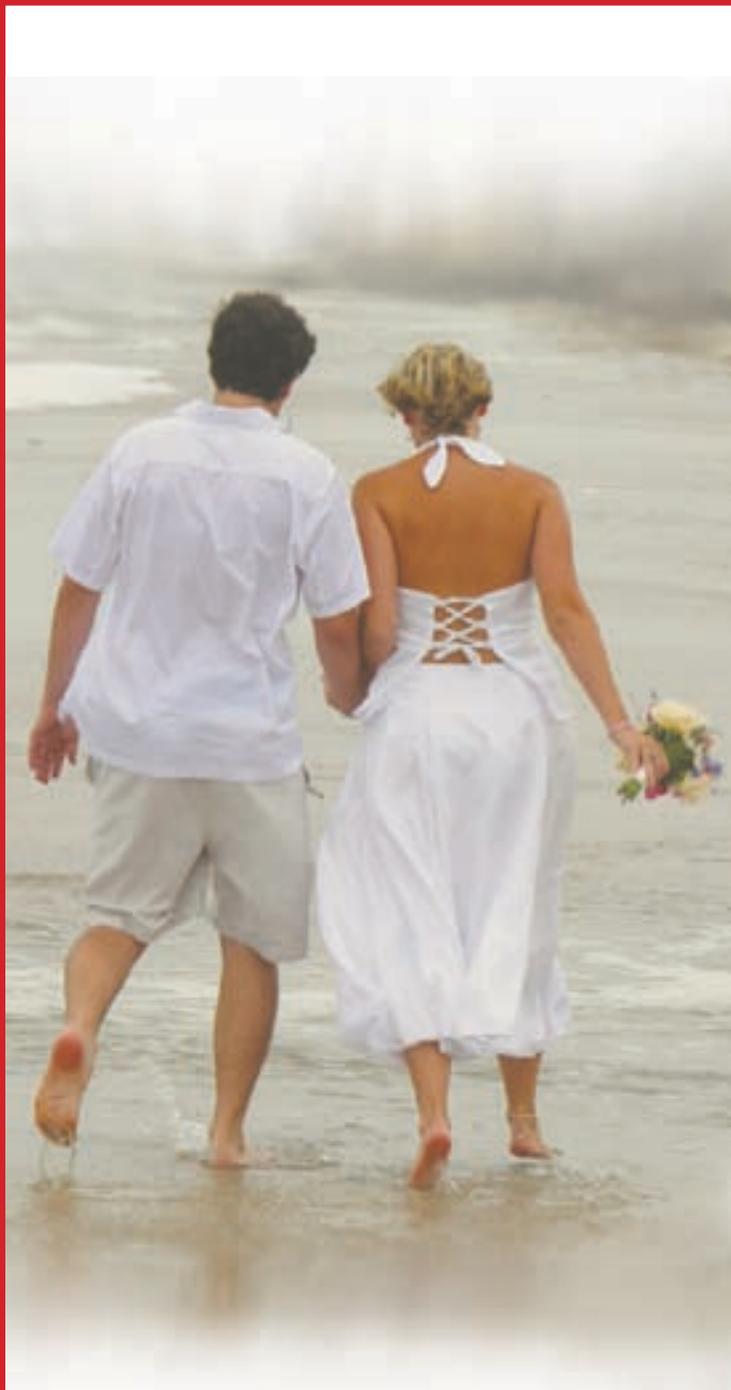
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How to choose the perfect honeymoon destination

So, you are engaged and ready to choose that romantic spot for your first getaway as husband and wife. But where should you go?

A lot of couples have difficulty finding the honeymoon destination that is "just right" for them. There are so many things to consider, like the season, accommodations and types of leisure activities available. But actually, making a decision can be simple once you know what you are looking for. The Villa Group - experts in matching clients with their ideal holiday destination - advise couples to consider the following, before they make their choice:

1. In what season are you traveling? Remember that every destination has its own weather pattern. You want to make sure that you choose a place where the weather suits your taste.

2. How many amenities are you getting for your money? Be sure to pick a destination that offers you the romance and relaxation you need after the wedding. How big is the room? Does the destination offer honeymooners special packages? Spas are always great for considering your every need. You could try a



mud bath for two or a couple's massage.

3. Are there enough activities to keep you busy? Consider what you would like to do. How about water sports and nightlife? Are there cultural aspects that you can explore?

Destinations that offer everything you could want and more include The Villa Group Resorts in Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta and Nuevo Vallarta. You don't have to go far from home to explore culture, adventure and relaxation all in one place. The Villa Group offers a variety of packages for honeymooners.

For instance, Villa del Palmar Flamingos, located in Vallarta Nayarit, north of Puerto Vallarta, has a 2007 Honeymoon Package that features a three-night stay per couple with upgrade to a one-bedroom suite. The package, which includes daily breakfast buffet, welcome fruit basket with truffles, moonlight couples massage, in-suite flowers, a bottle of sparkling wine and a certificate for a complimentary two-night stay on the first wedding anniversary starts at \$1,076. The property, which has beautiful views of Banderas Bay, offers an upscale European-style spa with fitness center, golf courses nearby, a freeform adults pool, three tennis courts (two lit for night play) and a themed dinner buffet.

For booking information, go to www.VillaGroup.com. (NewsUSA)

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Trend Spotter offers tips for a hip bridal shower

If you've been to a wedding shower recently, you've probably noticed the time-honored tradition is changing. "We monitor trends in both weddings and showers so we can incorporate the freshest and most modern themes in our cards," explains Gale Thomson, American Greetings trend spotter. Thomson offers these tips for planning some of today's top trendy bridal shower themes:

Wine tastings reflect a popular interest. The wine theme can influence the menu, party activities and gifts. Invite guests to bring two bottles of wine: one to serve at the party and a second to give the couple.

Couples showers are a great way to include both the bride's and the groom's friends, and they tend to be cocktail, dinner or summer barbecue parties. Couples showers are a good option for smaller guest lists or as one of multiple showers. A note on the invitation could suggest gifts for future entertaining.

Kitchen showers have moved away from providing basic necessities and become more sophisticated, reflecting already-established brides and gourmet cooking trends. High-end stainless steel fondue pots, blenders and food processors are topping gift registries and wedding website wish



lists. Invite guests to bring their favorite recipe to share with the bride.

Personal gifts, indulgences the bride would never buy for herself or honeymoon trip items are also a fashionable shower theme option for second marriages or brides who are already established in their households. Spas are a great personal shower venue, and a gift certificate for spa services presented in a pretty card makes a wonderful gift. If you're planning a shower and want it to be the latest and greatest, try one of



these party concepts.

Wrap Like a Pro

When it comes to gifts, presentation is everything. Wrapping that incorporates details and added touches can magnify the perceived value of what's inside, so don't forget to wrap and tie with style. "For soft goods or items that do not easily fit in a box, use gift bags. They combine ➔

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convenience and style in all shapes and sizes," says Patty Flauto, American Greetings gift wrap design guru. There are even gift bags designed for specific items. And they keep getting better and



better looking, with fashionable details like ribbon handles, scalloped or cuffed "necklines," trendy colors and prints.

New gift wrap designs reflect today's elegant wedding fashions. Wrap featuring photos of trendy wedding flowers, like white roses and hydrangeas, and embellished with clear sparkling crystalline glitter are recommended for the well-dressed gift. Accessorize with ribbon, a bow and fun new package decorations, like a 10-karat "diamond ring" or a feather boa pompom.

Flauto suggests even ordinary household items can make a wrapped gift the star of the gift table. "The key is to pick a few accent colors to

complement your wrapping paper. For example, to dress up a gift wrapped in paper with black and white photo images, add a few pink, black and white accent items from sewing supplies. Layer two kinds of ribbons, sheer and satin or thick and thin, or two shades of yarn.

Use hot glue to add a flower cut from a greeting card or a key phrase, like 'I do,' and top it with a button or two or three. If you're wrapping a smaller gift box, you could pick up two of the same shower card, using the extra to decorate the entire top of the box."

Make Lasting Impressions

Every bride treasures her shower and wedding cards. Many lovingly store them in a special box or binder. Some even find crafty and creative ways to display them.

Keepsake cards today shine with satin, lace, ribbons, rhinestones, sequins and even embroidery -- three rhinestone "bubbles" hover over a line drawing of two champagne glasses, or the piece may feature fabric miniature attachments (a little ivory pillow carrying two tiny rings or a wedding cake made with layers of ribbon).

Even more treasured are the sender's handwritten wishes, especially when they reflect personal relationships with the bride and groom. These words will be remembered always.

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Delicious and affordable ways to say "I do"

Springtime ushers in the glitz and glamour of wedding season, which lasts into late fall. This year, economizing is foremost on everyone's minds, but betrothed couples want their weddings and the events leading up to them to be as special as ever. These wedding trends are how brides and grooms are turning bridal showers, couples' showers and, of course, the wedding itself into priceless yet affordable experiences for everyone involved.

- Revisiting food classics that are guaranteed to please the palate but don't break the bank, like the Sizzling Mini-Sliders featured.
- Choosing fresh and flavorful wines that present incredible value for the price but don't compromise a smidge on quality.
- Serving food in smaller portions, a restaurant trend, is a hit for guests and a boon for the budget.
- Conserving resources with 3L Premium Wine Casks, a convenient, no-waste way to serve a crowd.

Here are some stylish, budget-friendly food and wine options that allow happy couples to have their cupcakes and eat them too.

Bridal Shower

To create an elegant and festive party



atmosphere, decorate the event space with fresh flowers and set aside a table where gifts can be presented. A buffet table lets guests serve themselves and also provides a tableau for food and wine selections to be artfully displayed. Arrange an inviting layout of fresh seasonal salads



and bite-sized desserts, with a delectable angel hair pasta dish as the centerpiece. Pair with the delicious Angel Juice Pinot Grigio, quintessentially Californian with delicate peach notes and a refreshing finish.

Couples' Shower

A couples' shower is the ideal way to informally celebrate the upcoming marriage. Commonly known as a Jack and Jill party, the event can be a luncheon, a laid-back barbeque or a party at a local park. A couples' shower is a prime opportunity for everyone to take a break and enjoy spending time together. Mini-burgers, or gourmet sliders, have universal appeal and offer up a new twist on an old favorite. Paired with the vibrant Big House Red, a California blend bursting ➔



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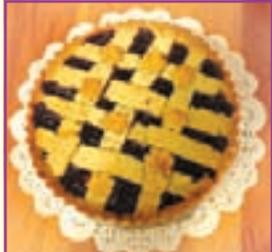
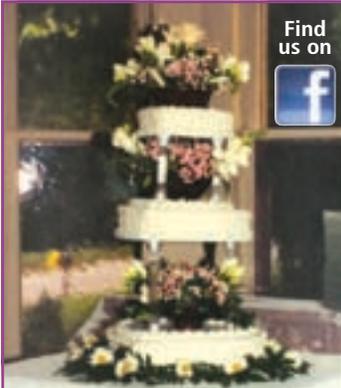
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Wedding Reception

As an alternative to the traditional wedding cake, a cupcake wedding tree is a sophisticated way to end the momentous occasion on the sweetest of notes. Paired with the luscious, food-friendly Cupcake Chardonnay from the prized Central Coast winegrowing region, this spectacular dessert and the creamy, fruit-forward wine are a match made in heaven.

Wine Planning Checklist for Parties

- Use 3L Premium Wine Casks for large groups, as each cask will serve up to 20 guests, each guest with a standard five-ounce glass.
- Guests at daytime parties usually drink less wine. Serve approximately one glass of wine per guest every 90 minutes.
- For evening parties, serve approximately one glass of wine per guest every hour.
- Chill white wine for at least three hours before guests arrive.
- Open and decant red wines about 30 minutes before guests arrive to allow the flavors to open up and breathe.
- Be a responsible host and offer special non-alcoholic beverages and plenty of water for thirsty guests.

Sizzling Mini-Sliders

Serves 4 Prep time: 30 minutes



- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/2 cup Big House Red
- 1 1/2 pounds ground chuck
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 12 3-inch dinner rolls
- Condiments
- Caramelized onions (saute in olive oil, very slowly, about 20 minutes)
- 1/2 cup loosely packed watercress

1/2 cup thinly shredded radicchio
 In medium bowl, combine onion powder, garlic, wine, beef, salt and pepper. Shape into twelve 1/2-inch-thick patties. Grill until browned, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Grill dinner rolls until slightly toasted. On bottom of each roll, place caramelized onions, patty, watercress and radicchio. Top with roll top.
 Pairing suggestion: Big House Red
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Fabulous ways to personalize your wedding

Whether planning an intimate brunch or a formal dinner reception, here are several delicious ways every bride and groom can add their own special touch to their wedding festivities.

Greeting Out-of-Town Guests

- For a sweet way to surprise visitors, have homemade cookies, a thermos of cold milk or hot cocoa and some Hugs and Kisses waiting for hotel guests.

- Make guests feel pampered by leaving a goodnight Hug and Kiss on their hotel room pillow.

Decorations and Favors With Flair

- Spread Hugs and Kisses across the place card, guest book and wedding cake tables to add a sophisticated silver and gold touch.

- Wrap several homemade sweets in colored cellophane or Hugs and Kisses in lace or tulle, and tie them with a satin bow to match your wedding colors.

Dessert Ideas for Wedding Festivities

- For a small wedding or rehearsal dinner, make your own Celebration Cake, and decorate it with a removable centerpiece made from Hugs and Kisses.

- For an extra dessert treat, set a silver bowl filled with Hugs and Kisses on the dessert buffet



next to the wedding cake.

- Host a post-wedding brunch for the bride and groom at the home of a family member or friend, and serve homemade coffeecakes, scones and crescents made with cinnamon chips.

Monogrammed Mini Chocolate Cakes

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter or margarine
1/2 cup water



3 tablespoons Hershey's Cocoa
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 egg

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1/3 cup dairy sour cream
 COCOA GLAZE (recipe follows)
 Decorating icing in tube, desired color

1. Heat oven to 350°F. Line 13x9x2-inch baking pan with parchment paper or waxed paper.

2. Combine butter, water and cocoa in small saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture boils; remove from heat. Stir together flour, sugar, baking soda and salt in medium bowl. Stir in hot cocoa mixture. Add egg and sour cream; beat on medium speed of mixer until well blended. Pour batter into prepared pan.

3. Bake 20 to 22 minutes or until wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes. Remove from pan to wire rack; carefully remove parchment or waxed paper. Cool completely.

4. Cut cake into small pieces, each about 2x1-3/4 inches. (Cake will be easier to cut if frozen for several hours or up to several days.) Place on cooling rack. Prepare COCOA GLAZE. Spoon over top of each piece of cake, allowing glaze to run down sides. Allow glaze to set. Garnish with monogram, using decorating icing. Place in foil cup, if desired. About 24 mini cakes.

COCOA GLAZE: Bring 1/2 cup water and 1/4 cup (1/2 stick) butter to boil in small saucepan. Stir in 1/2 cup Hershey's Cocoa. Remove from heat; cool slightly. Gradually add 3 cups powdered sugar, stirring with whisk until smooth. Stir in 2



teaspoons vanilla extract. About 1-1/2 cups glaze.

Easy Cinnamon Chips Brunch Crescents

2 cans (8 ounces each) refrigerated quick crescent dinner rolls

2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted

1-2/3 cups (10-ounce package) Hershey's Cinnamon Chips, divided

CINNAMON CHIPS DRIZZLE (recipe follows)

1. Heat oven to 375°F. Unroll dough; separate into 16 triangles.

2. Spread melted butter on each triangle.

Sprinkle 1 cup cinnamon chips evenly over triangles; gently press chips into dough. Roll from shortest side of triangle to opposite point. Place, point side down, on ungreased cookie sheet; curve into crescent shape.

3. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until golden brown. Drizzle with Cinnamon Chips Drizzle. Serve warm. 16 crescents.

CINNAMON CHIPS DRIZZLE: Place remaining 2/3 cup chips and 1-1/2 teaspoons shortening (do not use butter, margarine, spread or oil) in small microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at HIGH (100%) 1 minute; stir until chips are melted and mixture is smooth.

Tuxedo Brownie Hugs Cookies

60 Hershey's Hugs Chocolates

1 package (1 pound 6.5 ounces) original supreme brownie mix with syrup pouch

1/4 cup Hershey's Cocoa

1/4 cup water

1/4 cup vegetable oil

2 eggs

1. Remove wrappers from Hugs Chocolates. Heat oven to 350°F. Grease and flour cookie sheet or line with parchment paper.

2. Stir brownie mix, pouch of syrup, cocoa, water, oil and eggs in medium bowl until well blended. Drop by scant teaspoons onto prepared cookie sheet.

3. Bake 8 minutes or until set. Cool 1 to 2 minutes. Press a Hugs Chocolate into center of each cookie. Remove from cookie sheet to wire rack. Cool completely. About 5 dozen cookies.

For more recipes and craft ideas, visit www.hersheykitchens.com (Family Features)



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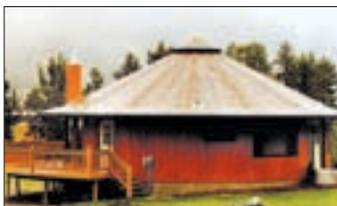


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A toast to the bride

Tips and sips for the perfect bridal celebration

Whether it's an engagement party, bridal shower, the reception or post-wedding brunch, professional event planner Alison Hotchkiss knows a thing or two about creating memorable bridal celebrations. As the founder-owner of Alison Events, and author of "The Destination Wedding Planner: The Ultimate Guide to Planning a Wedding From Afar" (Chronicle Books), she's produced stunning weddings all over the world. Whether you enlist the help of a planner or do it yourself, Alison's tips on entertaining will help you make your bridal celebration picture perfect.



- Bubbles add a festive, celebratory note to any bridal celebration. I love Cupcake Prosecco sparkling wine from Italy. It's crisp and refreshing - an affordable alternative to pricey French champagne yet equally delicious.

- Food doesn't have to be complicated to be remarkable. The finger foods here are varied and flavorful - but they're not hard to make. To satisfy all guest preferences, I always recommend 3 to 5 appetizers including chicken, beef and fish plus two veggie options (ideally one being vegan or dairy free).

- A signature drink is a fun way to welcome guests and get the party off to a great start. The Prosecco Ginger Cocktail is delicious and memorable. I like to serve it in unconventional glassware and garnish with Persian cucumber "swizzle sticks" for even more impact.

- A popular alternative to the traditional sit down meal at engagement parties or showers: food stations with a range of different foods offered at each. Pair a different wine with each station to create maximum variety and enjoyment as guests taste and mingle.

- Factor in overall ambiance and the vibe you want for your wedding or event. Lighting is key. And when it comes to candles, more is more.

- Flavored vodka is another big trend I'm seeing right now. Look for vodkas infused with such exotic flavors as vanilla frosting, devil's food cake and more. And don't be afraid to mix spirits with wine: One of my favorite concoctions is a blend of lemony Cupcake Chiffon Vodka with muddled blackberries, fresh mint, sparkling grapefruit water and a splash of Cabernet Sauvignon.

- It's not only more fun to serve bite-sized cupcakes at your wedding but they offer more variety and unexpected flavor combinations than a traditional cake.

- Be sure to have a good assortment of non-alcoholic beverages on hand as well such as bottled water, soft drinks and more to prevent dehydration and ensure that guests drink responsibly.

For more tips from Alison for creating a bridal event to remember, visit www.cupcakevineyards.com. (Family Features)



Honeymoon tips for lasting memories and relaxation

The headache you've had for the past year planning your wedding, inviting all the guests and meticulously checking to ensure your big day runs smoothly is finally over. And, just around the corner, you can see your honeymoon in sight. The last things on your mind are planning, thinking and otherwise doing anything but relaxing, right?

To ease your mind after the chaos, the ultimate Mexican getaways are offered by The Villa Group Resorts, complete with Hacienda-style villas, exotic spa treatments and palm tree-framed views of the Pacific Ocean. You'll finally be able to unwind, comfortable knowing everything you could need or want is at your fingertips.

With seven different locations in four unique destinations including Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta, Nuevo Vallarta and the Sierra Madre Mountains, The Villa Group caters to a variety of interests. Each location offers unique scenery, activities and accommodations that can make your honeymoon exactly the way you've envisioned it.

The myriad vacation options available to newlyweds are overwhelming, but noting a few key things will keep that headache at bay and your relaxation level high:

- Pick a location that appeals to both of you. Where do you see you two having the most fun? Secluded beaches, tranquil mountains or cobblestone streets lined with shopping?
- Decide how you want to spend your days. Will you lounge poolside, taking in lagoons and waterfalls, or do you want to explore the surrounding area by horseback, canoe or bike?
- Scope out the options in his-and-her spa treatments, such as hydrotherapy sessions, mud baths and massages. Some resorts offer ultra-relaxing themes, while others focus more on invigorating treatments.
- How will you spend your evenings? Resorts often provide nighttime festivities, complete with themed dining events mere feet from your room. Or, would you rather be near a town where you can explore both the area's attractions and what the resort provides?

Whatever type of honeymoon you and your new spouse want, The Villa Group Resorts offers honeymoon packages prepared to make your matrimony celebration a once-in-a-lifetime experience. And, with packages geared toward wedding anniversaries, you can go back and have that once-in-life-time vacation all over again.

For more information, visit www.villagroupresorts.com. (NewsUSA)

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Beautiful Beginnings...





Find wedding bliss this coming fall

Caterers, event halls and wedding planners are gearing up for fall wedding season, one of the busiest times of the year for hopeful couples. Fall guarantees exquisite photo opportunities without the heat of summer -- and the wealth of in-season decorations are beautiful and affordable.

In fact, September and October are the most popular and third most popular months for weddings, respectively. If you're planning a fall wedding this season, read on for some helpful tips:

1. Keep warm. Since outdoor fall weddings have the potential to get chilly, keeping your guests warm is a must. Offer hot cocoa and homey baskets of soft blankets or cozy shawls. Set up fire pits or outdoor heating stations where guests can shake of the chill.

2. Location, location, location. Select a locale that is known for its fall scenery. For example, as much as it's known for history, Valley Forge and Montgomery County, Pa. is celebrated for its brilliant autumnal hues and stunning landscape -- a picture-perfect place for memorable fall nuptials in a historic area of southeastern Pennsylvania. Named among



the top 10 national parks for fall foliage, the 3,500-acre Valley Forge National Historical Park offers a perfect fall backdrop. Learn more at www.valleyforge.org.

3. Incorporate fall colors into the wedding party wardrobe. Chocolate brown complements a variety of fall color schemes, and it's flattering for most women. But if brown doesn't suit the plans, burgundy is another great fall shade that makes the bridal white pop.

4. Select in-season flowers and decorations. Unless the bride has her heart set on lily of the valley or orchids, there are beautiful in-season flowers to choose from. Dahlias, chrysanthemums, asters, roses, zinnias and sunflowers all create elegant bouquets and floral displays with a lovely hint of fall. Add some crab apples for a playful, non-floral element.

5. Mix and match gourds, pumpkins and squash. Pumpkins can be tacky or a little too reminiscent of Halloween, so class them up by serving pumpkin soup, pumpkin cocktails or tiers of mini pumpkins. Gourds also make eye-catching vases, and all three can be arranged as charming centerpieces. (NewsUSA)

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A guy's guide to selecting the perfect engagement ring

Getting engaged is a very personal and intimate experience for a couple. But for many guys, the purchase of the engagement ring can be a bit overwhelming.

Color, clarity, cut, carat weight; there's a lot to consider. But by understanding the basics of diamonds and keeping the future bride in mind, guys can find the process of selecting a ring much less daunting.

Philadelphia-based jewelry designer Craiger Drake of Craiger Drake Designs offers the following tips to help men select a ring that their bride will love:

Know the 4Cs. Men should always consider the color, clarity, cut and carat weight of a diamond. Color and clarity, less commonly understood, are critical to the quality of the stone.

Choose a diamond valued higher on both the color and clarity grading scales to limit the presence of color and unwanted inclusions. Carat and cut, on the other hand, are personal



preferences. Keep the bride's personality in mind to select a size and a shape that will complement her style.

Get certified. To guarantee the diamond's authenticity and quality, be sure to purchase a diamond that is certified from the Gemological Institute of America. The diamond's certificate outlines all the individual characteristics of the stone, including the 4Cs, serving as proof of the

diamond's identity and value.

Be unique. For many women, an engagement ring is their most treasured piece of jewelry, so it's important that it is special and unique. A rose gold band or colored side stones, for example, can accent a traditional ring with a touch of color. To personalize the piece further, consider custom designing a one-of-a-kind ring tailored to the bride's individual style.

A final piece of advice: Remember what the ring signifies. "With so much to bear in mind, it can be easy to lose the romance of selecting an engagement ring," said Drake. "Although it is valuable to know the basics of a diamond, what's most important is for men to remember the reason they're buying it."

For more information on Craiger Drake Designs' jewelry collection, including engagement rings, please visit www.craigerdrake.com. (NewsUSA)

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Engaged? Start planning now! A to-do list for brides-to-be

Preparing for the big day means planning a multitude of details; everything from the flower arrangements to that something blue must be decided upon well in advance of the ceremony. Here are some tips to help ensure your big day goes off without a hitch.

The Big Decisions

The decision to get married is the first of many big decisions you will be making in the weeks and months to come. Here are some things to consider right away:

- Pick a date. Talk with your fiancé and family (and your fiancé's family) about potential wedding dates to ensure the important people in both your lives will be able to take part. Select your guests. The number of guests you invite will directly influence the cost of your wedding.
- Set a budget. Budgeting for your wedding is crucial, as this will have a great impact on every other aspect of your day, as well as your honeymoon. Plan for a little wiggle room for unexpected expenses.
- Choose a location. Because most popular bridal spots are just that - popular - you may want to start searching for a location quickly.
- Organize the bridal party. Make careful decisions about who you want supporting you leading up to the big day, and who will be displayed in



front of everyone in your life.

- Pick a style. Many brides choose wedding styles that are reflected in their save-the-dates, invitations, ceremonies, receptions and thank-you cards. Choosing a theme and color scheme in the

beginning will help narrow down options later.

- Hire a caterer. Take into account the dietary needs of your guests by offering a variety of menu options, including a vegetarian dish.
- Order the cake. Whether you choose a large multi-tiered cake or cupcakes, remember to keep your budget in mind-and pick flavors you and your fiancé truly enjoy.
- Make the announcement. Decide how you want to let the community know of your planned nuptials. Do you want to take professional engagement photos? Do you plan to contact your local paper? Will you include a link to a wedding day website on your save-the-date or your wedding invitations?
- Get the gown. On your wedding day, everyone will be awaiting a glimpse of your gown. Listen to your instincts and choose a gown that "feels right" and reflects your personality and style.
- Dress your party. Once you have chosen the wedding dress of your dreams, speak with your fiancé about his wishes for his suit, as well as the bridal party attire.
- Hire a photographer. Choose your professional photographer wisely. With a walk down the aisle, father/daughter dance and toast, your father is sure to get photographed, but your mother might get overlooked. Make sure to ask ➔



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the photographer to get shots of your mother throughout the day as well.

- Choose your flowers. Once you set the date, discuss with your florists which flowers are in season to help narrow down your selection. You may love tulips, but if you have a winter wedding, they may be hard to come by, and may be more expensive.

- Book the entertainment. Do you want a DJ or a live band? Talk with your fiancé about your music preferences, as well as the types of tunes you want played at your reception to keep your guests on the dance floor.

Before the Big Day

- Create a website for your wedding to keep guests informed of events and for easy access to registry information. Provide accommodation information for those guests traveling from out of town.

- Insure your engagement and wedding rings against loss, damage, theft or mysterious disappearance. According to a survey conducted by Jewelers Mutual Insurance Company, 44 percent of married women either don't insure their engagement ring, or don't know for certain whether their engagement and wedding rings are insured. For a free, no-obligation jewelry insurance quote, visit www.insureyourjewelry.com.

- Make sure your marriage license, travel documentation and insurance information are



ready to go and stored in a safe place in advance of the wedding day.

- Practice reciting your vows and speeches until you feel comfortable.
- Wear your wedding heels around the house to "break them in." Pack a back-up pair of flats to wear during the reception.
- Remember to ask for help. Designate members of your family or close friends to specific assignments.

Wedding Day Details

- Provide bottled water for your wedding party. To ensure no one gets over-heated, hide water near your bridal party during the ceremony

for emergencies.

- Choose meaningful gifts for your wedding party. Necklaces, earrings or bracelets are great for bridesmaids; cufflinks are perfect for groomsmen.

- Create individual envelopes for tipping drivers, caterers, musicians, etc. Separate envelopes will help ensure you don't forget anyone.

Plan for weather

- In case of rain - Order a tent or choose a venue with indoor space for last-minute protection from the elements. Offer extra umbrellas to usher people from their vehicles to the venue.

- In case of heat - Place fans throughout the venue and provide plenty of water for guests.

- In case of cold - Space heaters can be placed throughout the space to warm up the room in advance of the event.

- Over-estimate the amount of parking needed for guests.

Following the Honeymoon

- Open wedding gifts and keep an accurate list of each guest in correspondence with their gift.

- Write thoughtful, personalized hand-written thank you cards.

Photos courtesy of Getty Images, Source: Jewelers Mutual, (Family Features)



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Pamper yourself with a winter wonderland vacation

Spring is still a long way off, but don't let the lingering winter force you inside. Instead, use the winter months as the perfect opportunity to take a winter wonderland vacation.

For your next winter wonderland escape, make certain you pamper yourself well. Book your getaway at The American Club Resort in Kohler, Wis., which is one of the few Forbes Five Star, AAA-Five Diamond rated hotels in the world.

Spend your days skiing, snowshoeing, skating, ice fishing and even clay and trap shooting. Or take an open-air, horse-drawn carriage ride through the winding streets of Kohler Village, breathing in the cool, crisp, fresh air.

If your muscles feel a little sore from all the exertions, the Forbes Five-Star Kohler Waters Spa is known for its healing hydrotherapy water services and innovative treatments, including the WaveMotion Body Treatment, which will have you feeling pampered and relaxed in no time at all. And just imagine lounging back in the rooftop whirlpool, the steam of the water enveloping you in a snow globe setting with snow gently falling all around you.





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Wedding reception to remember

Whether it's set in the great outdoors, a lavish ballroom, the couple's favorite restaurant or at home, the wedding reception is a special time for newlyweds to celebrate with family and friends.

The signature dessert - cake - is usually the centerpiece for this occasion, a continuing reflection of the wedding theme and colors. An assortment of cupcakes or a tower of layers allows today's cakes to take almost any form - from square to round, even pillow or heart-shaped. This stunning all-white creation from the wedding experts at Wilton is both simple yet elegant. Cake layers are covered in pure white fondant, while additional bands of fondant glistening with white sparkling sugar decorate the bottom of each tier. Dots of sugar pearl sprinkles, resembling perfect pearls add a hint of texture, while a gem-studded monogram topper adds the finishing touch.

This unique do-it-yourself wedding topper kit can easily be customized...with one initial, two or a trio. Self-adhesive crystal-like gems are used to trace the initials onto the clear disc. Gems can also be used to create a border or other complementary design. After the reception, it makes a perfect keepsake for the couple that will be treasured for years to come.

Guests will want to raise a glass in honor of the newlyweds with the timeless custom of a champagne toast. Decorated flutes for the bride and groom create a long-lasting memory of this special tradition.

Individual boxes are ideal for truffles or other candies to send home with guests. Tie with ribbons reflecting the color theme of the wedding. Another fun memento is a mini champagne bottle favor that can be filled with small candies. Attach a label with a personalized message. Make it elegant or simple...and always make it meaningful and memorable.

For more do-it-yourself wedding ideas, favors and accessories, visit www.wilton.com. Source: Wilton Products. (Family Features)

'Green' ideas for winter-white weddings

If your vision of the perfect wedding marries eco-friendly green with winter white, here are some tips and ideas to help you turn your vision into reality:

*Wedding favors are a way of thanking guests for sharing in your special day, but many popular items are made from less-than-eco-friendly materials. To green your wedding, consider favors that are useful and organic, such as organic baking mixes or spice mixes. You can find a plethora of these great-tasting, green-minded options from purveyors like Simply Organic. They even have holiday-appropriate varieties like Cranberry Bread and Pumpkin Cake at www.simplyorganic.com. Dress up favors with decorative netting and ribbons, and you have a unique favor that's good for guests and the environment, too.

*When you're planning your menu, keep in mind how the foods you choose may impact the environment. A dish's environmental impact depends on several factors, including how the product was raised and harvested, how it was transported and how far it had to travel from point of origin to plate. By choosing locally grown products or those grown and harvested using sustainable practices, you can reduce your wedding feast's impact on the environment. (BPT)



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Falling in love with platinum this year

Every year, Valentine's Day is looked at as one of the biggest gift-giving holidays of the year. Additionally, many use the holiday to drop down on one knee and pop the big question. Last year, 250,000 couples became engaged on Valentine's Day; a testament to how important the day is to thousands of love-struck Americans.

If you're looking for a unique, stylish and heirloom-quality accessory to give your special someone this year, you aren't alone. According to jewelry and style expert Michael

O'Connor, Platinum jewelry is one of this year's best bets for a Valentine's Day gift.

"Giving a gift of love on Valentine's Day is about emotion and being sure you will be remembered," O'Connor said. "Platinum jewelry is the perfect choice because its purity and rarity underscore the emotional reasons why you're giving the gift, while its durability means that it won't wear down like other metals and will last a lifetime."

The following jewelry ideas, compiled by O'Connor, will help you pick out the hottest jew-



elry this Valentine's Day:

Engagement ring. If you're looking to propose to your significant other this Valentine's Day, look beyond the four Cs and seriously consider the setting. With an engagement diamond purchase, a premium is paid for a quality diamond, and you won't want to diminish that investment with a metal that won't complement the beauty and longevity of the stone.

Platinum will hold your diamond more

securely, and since it's naturally a white metal, it will maximize the diamond's sparkle. Designs that range from modern styles by Martin Flyer to vintage-inspired looks from

Tacori can accommodate all types of diamond cuts.

Gifts for him. One of the most popular Valentine's Day gifts for men; stylish watches from companies like Franck Muller, Vacheron Constantin and Jacob & Co.; pair masculinity with durability in Platinum looks that are perfect for dressing up or down. If you're looking for a different approach, Platinum cuff links also make a good choice for that businessman with a sense of panache.

Platinum pendants. From the runway to Hollywood's A-list, it's all about layering this season. Look to layering Platinum pendants in oval, heart and square shapes for a distinct flair this year.

For more information on jewelry trends for Valentine's Day, visit www.preciousplatinum.com. (NewsUSA)

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Always the bridesmaid? You can wear the dresses again

"And you'll be able to wear it again!" is a phrase often used around bridesmaids' dresses. Because a ridiculously expensive lime-green taffeta shepherdess gown is appropriate for almost any occasion, and the Peter Pan collar is poised to make a comeback any century now. If you're one of the many women who has piles of Pepto-Bismol-colored ruffles stuffed in the back of her closet, never fear, you will be able to wear that dress again. Host an old bridesmaids' dress party, and the good times may even blot out the embarrassment of having had to wear that dress in the first place.

Where to start? The concept is simple -- invite all of your girlfriends over, and tell them to wear their most hideous bridesmaid dress. Not only will you get to rewear the bridesmaids' dresses of weddings past, you'll also get to laugh at some of the more hideous outfits. Note: if you were a bridesmaid at a friend's wedding, either don't invite her or try not to wear the dress she chose, even if it does include a tutu and puffed sleeves.

Adding an inexpensive spin to classic elegance is the way to go. Skip the chips and dip in favor of a fruit-and-cheese platter. For a refreshing twist on champagne, the traditional wedding libation, pick up a few bottles of a fruit-flavored sparkling wine. Arbor Mist (arbormist.com), which is known for fruit and wine combinations like Strawberry White Zinfandel and Blackberry Merlot, has recently released a line of sparkling wines. Both the Peach Sparkle and the Raspberry Sparkle combine light and crisp sparkling wine with natural fruit, creating the perfect refreshment for a get-together with your girlfriends.

For entertainment, ask each woman to tell the story behind her bridesmaid dress.

You can also have fun playing a wedding-themed round of Pictionary or charades. You can also hold a vote to find out, for once and for all, which one of you had to endure the wearing the worst bridesmaid dress.

For more information about Arbor Mist wines, visit www.arbormist.com. (NewsUSA)



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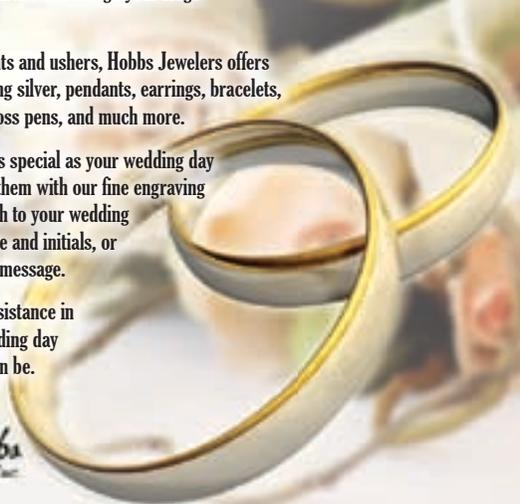
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Bright ideas for a festive engagement party

When the weather is nice, many people get the urge to entertain just a little more frequently. Interior design expert and TV personality Genevieve Gorder says the best approach to warm-weather entertaining is to make your space shine with a comfortable, approachable style.

Genevieve has partnered with Mirassou Winery® to help brighten up entertaining spaces for sharing good times and making good memories. Try one of her easy entertaining ideas to make your home feel warm and welcoming - putting your guests at ease as they raise a glass to your hosting skills:

- Create a home bar on any surface of your home. Arrange beautiful wine bottles on a vintage silver or brass tray, add wine glasses and two taper candle holders. With a bit of mood lighting, glassware and beverages, a bar is just that simple and guests know they can pour their own wine.

- Put every surface to use when entertaining large groups, such as stacking coasters on the mantle to expand your typical entertaining space.

Add a pop of color, such as the bright yellow sun on a bottle of Mirassou wine, so guests know they can use the mantle as a gathering place.



- The next time you have guests over for wine and cheese, create a buffet table that works your guests along the line visually. Start at the highest point with flatware and rolled linen napkins in tall vessels, then use cake tiers for flatbreads and crackers, followed by cutting boards for cheeses and accompaniments at the lowest point in the middle. Move the eye line back up again at the finish with vases of nuts and bottles of wine.

- Don't be afraid to mix elements on your dining table to make your presentation really shine. Think about mixing metals like brass and silver with white glass to create a powerful triad. Then use mismatched plates and chairs to bring a homey and casual feeling to a gathering.

- A fun activity is hosting an at-home wine tasting. Ask guests to bring a bottle of wine from the same region - such as California - and then spend the evening trying different wines and learning which you like best.

For more entertaining tips and to download materials to help with hosting an at-home wine tasting, visit www.facebook.com/MirassouWinery or www.mirassou.com.

Photo courtesy of Getty Images, Source: Mirassou Winery. (Family Features)

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Wedding celebrations with tropical flair

Between engagement parties, bridal showers and brunches with new family and friends, there are plenty of opportunities to celebrate the happy couple. Why not bring a taste of the tropics to your celebrations with mangos?

Each of these elegantly simple recipes is inspired by the color, texture and sweet, slightly exotic flavors of mangos - and you won't need to hire a caterer to pull it off. When choosing mangos, don't focus on color. Instead, gently squeeze. A ripe mango will be slightly soft to the touch, similar to a ripe peach or avocado.

To get more fresh recipe ideas for wedding celebrations - and everyday occasions - visit www.mango.org. To get more hosting ideas and helpful entertaining tips, visit www.culinary.net.

Roasted Shrimp and Mango Salad

Serves 8 to 10

2 pounds large shrimp, peeled and deveined

6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided

2 teaspoons paprika

Salt and pepper

2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 tablespoon honey

6 cups mixed baby lettuces, washed and dried

2 large mangos (about 2 pounds), peeled,



pitted and diced
1/4 cup shaved or shredded
Parmesan cheese
Preheat oven to 400°F

On large rimmed baking sheet, toss shrimp with 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, paprika, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Roast until pink and cooked through and beginning to lightly brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from oven and transfer to bowl to chill in refrigerator. In large bowl, whisk together remaining 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, lemon juice and honey. Season with salt and pepper. Toss lettuce, mango and chilled shrimp in olive oil lemon juice mixture. Divide among plates, and sprinkle with Parmesan.



Goat Cheese, Bacon and Mango Crostini

Makes about 30 pieces

1 baguette, sliced crosswise into 1/2-inch pieces

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
Salt

1 pound bacon, chopped

1 cup balsamic vinegar

3 tablespoons sugar

8 ounces goat cheese, softened

2 large mangos (about 2 pounds), peeled, pitted and diced

3 green onions, sliced thin (about 1/3 cup)

Preheat oven to 400°F

Place sliced baguette on large rimmed →

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baking sheet and drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and bake until golden brown and crisp, about 10 minutes, flipping halfway through baking. Set aside. Meanwhile, cook bacon in a large non-stick skillet over medium heat until fat is rendered and bacon is crisp, 12 to 15 minutes. Using slotted spoon, remove from pan and drain on paper towel lined plate. In small non-reactive saucepan, simmer balsamic vinegar and sugar over medium heat until reduced by half and balsamic is thick and syrupy, 15 to 20 minutes. Set aside to cool. To assemble, spread toasted bread with 1 1/2 teaspoons goat cheese, top with diced mango, sprinkle with cooked bacon, and drizzle with cooled balsamic syrup. Top with sliced green onions. Note: Balsamic syrup can be stored at room temperature for up to 1 week.

Mini Vanilla Cupcakes with Mango Buttercream

Makes 48 mini cupcakes
 Cupcakes
 1 15.25-ounce box vanilla cake mix
 1 cup water
 1/2 cup vegetable oil
 3 eggs
 Preheat oven to 325°F
 Line mini muffin tins with cupcake liners.
 In large bowl, beat cake mix, water, oil and eggs with electric mixer on low speed about 30 seconds. Increase speed to medium and mix until



smooth, about 2 minutes. Pour into prepared pans and bake until a toothpick inserted into center of cupcake comes out clean, 15 to 18 minutes. Cool in pans for 5 minutes then cool completely on wire rack.

Mango Buttercream

2 large mangos (about 2 pounds), peeled, pitted and diced
 2 1/2 sticks (1 1/4 cups) unsalted butter, room temperature
 5 cups powdered sugar
 2 tablespoons white sparkling sugar sprinkles (optional)
 Puree 1 1/2 diced mangos in food processor or blender until smooth, set aside (will yield about 3/4 cup). Reserve remaining diced mango for garnish. In large bowl, beat butter with electric mixer on medium speed, until smooth. Slowly add pow-

dered sugar, 1 cup at a time, mixing between each addition. Add 3/4 cup of mango purée. Increase speed to high and beat until incorporated, about 2 minutes. Transfer buttercream to a pastry bag or a large zip top bag fitted with a pastry tip. Top cooled cupcakes with buttercream. Top with 1 piece diced mango and sparkling sugar, if desired.

Frost Cupcakes Like a Pro

It's easy to create these Mini Vanilla Cupcakes with Mango Buttercream. With a few simple tricks, they'll appear as though you selected them from a professional bakery. Just follow these simple steps from the kitchen pros:

- Use a large, star-burst piping tip in a pastry bag or large zip top bag.
 - Set the bag over a tall glass or measuring cup, and fold the bag edges into a cuff over the rim of the glass.
 - Scoop frosting into the bag using a rubber spatula. Fill it about two-thirds full.
 - Take the bag out of the glass and twist the top closed.
 - Hold the bag just barely above the top of the cupcake at a 90 degree angle.
 - Squeeze the bag to pipe a spiral of icing, starting at the outer edge and working inward.
 - Stop squeezing and pull the tip straight up.
- Visit www.culinary.net for more tips.
 Source: National Mango Board / Culinary.net (Family Features)

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*"The best and most beautiful things
in the world cannot be seen or even touched.*

They must be felt with the heart."

-HELEN KELLER-



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