RIVAS PHOTO & FILM · FIELD GUIDE

# The adventure elopement planning checklist.

Eighteen months out to the morning of, in the order we actually do it with our couples. Built from a hundred weddings, thirty-five national parks, and our own elopement at Glacier Point.

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HOW TO USE THIS

Tick things off top to bottom. The dates are guides, not rules; we have pulled off incredible days with six weeks' notice. If a line does not apply to you, skip it. If one makes you nervous, that is the one to talk to us about.

## 12 to 18 months out: decide the shape of the day

- [ ] **Pick the feeling before the place.** Sunrise quiet, a long hike, a lake you can swim in, snow, desert heat. The place follows from this.
- [ ] **Choose a season, then a month, then a week.** Waterfalls, wildflowers, larch color and snow each have a window of a few weeks. Weekdays mean emptier trails and easier permits.
- [ ] **Decide who is coming.** Just you two, a handful, or a small group changes the location options and the permit type. Write the number down now.
- [ ] **Set a budget range** for the whole trip, not just the ceremony: travel, lodging, attire, photography and film, food, permits.
- [ ] **Book your photographer and film team.** Popular months fill 12 to 18 months ahead. With us, this is also when planning support starts.
- [ ] **Check passports** if the dream is international. Six months of validity beyond your travel dates is the usual rule.

## 9 to 12 months out: lock the place

- [ ] **Shortlist two or three ceremony spots** with a backup out of the wind, fog or heat. Ask us for the honest version of each.
- [ ] **Learn the permit.** National parks need a Special Use Permit for ceremonies, usually with a fee and guest limits. Some open applications a year out and sell out.
- [ ] **Book lodging inside or next to the park.** In-park lodges and refuges often release rooms 12 months ahead and go in hours.
- [ ] **Decide on the legal part.** Many couples sign the paperwork at home and hold the ceremony on the mountain. If you want it legal on the day, check the county or country rules now.
- [ ] **Flights,** if flying. Early morning arrivals give you a scouting afternoon.

## 6 to 9 months out: the supporting cast

- [ ] **Officiant.** A friend, a local celebrant, or self-solemnization where it is allowed. We can recommend people in most of our destinations.
- [ ] **Attire that can move.** A dress you can hike in, boots you have broken in, layers for the summit. Try the whole outfit on a real trail once.
- [ ] **Florist, hair and makeup** if you want them. Ask about early-morning starts and whether they will travel to a trailhead.
- [ ] **Tell your people.** If family is not coming, decide how you will include them: a letter, a video call from the summit, a dinner afterward.
- [ ] **Travel insurance** for international trips, and a plan for weather days.

## 3 to 6 months out: the day takes shape

- [ ] **Timeline draft.** We build it around the light: sunrise or the last hour before sunset for the ceremony, with hiking time and a real lunch in between.
- [ ] **Write your vows,** or at least start. Short and specific beats long and general. Keep a copy on paper; phones die in the cold.
- [ ] **Rings, licence paperwork, and any permits** printed and in one folder.
- [ ] **Plan the celebration after.** A picnic on the dunes, a cabin dinner, a reservation in the nearest town. This is often the moment couples remember most.
- [ ] **Fitness check.** If the ceremony spot is a hike, do a hike of the same length at home with your wedding footwear.

## 1 month out: details

- [ ] Confirm the timeline with every vendor
- [ ] Confirm permits and rangers' contact numbers
- [ ] Reconfirm lodging and transport
- [ ] Check sunrise and sunset times for the exact date
- [ ] Check road and trail status for the park
- [ ] Share the plan with one person at home
- [ ] Download offline maps
- [ ] Arrange care for pets and plants
- [ ] Break in boots, steam the dress
- [ ] Book a post-wedding rest day

## What to pack

- [ ] Attire, in a garment bag that fits a car
- [ ] Broken-in hiking boots and trail socks
- [ ] A warm layer for the summit, even in summer
- [ ] Rain shell and a small umbrella
- [ ] Vows on paper, two copies
- [ ] Rings, in a case you cannot lose
- [ ] Licence and permits, printed
- [ ] Headlamps for sunrise starts
- [ ] Two liters of water each and real snacks
- [ ] Sunscreen, lip balm, blister tape
- [ ] A small first-aid kit
- [ ] Hand warmers for cold ceremonies
- [ ] A picnic blanket
- [ ] Something to toast with, and cups
- [ ] Phone battery pack
- [ ] Tissues. You will need them.

## The week of

- [ ] **Watch the forecast daily** and decide together when to call the backup. We will tell you honestly what we see.
- [ ] **Arrive a day early.** Altitude, jet lag and nerves all settle with one extra night.
- [ ] **Scout the spot** the afternoon before if you can. Stand where you will stand.
- [ ] **Lay everything out** the night before: attire, documents, rings, snacks, headlamps.
- [ ] **Sleep.** Sunrise ceremonies start in the dark.

## The morning of

- [ ] Eat a real breakfast, even if you are not hungry.
- [ ] Phones on airplane mode once the hike starts. We will have the time.
- [ ] Leave on schedule. The light does not wait, and we build in margin.
- [ ] When you get there: stop, breathe, look around. Nobody is watching. This is the part you planned for.

> Eloping with us? Every item above that involves permits, locations, timeline, vendors and backup plans is ours to handle. You handle showing up and being in love. That's the deal.