THE BTS *Dulhan*

PLAN YOUR HAWAIʻI WEDDING *around the sunset*

Sunset times by month · when to start your ceremony · first look or not · sample winter + summer timelines · checklist

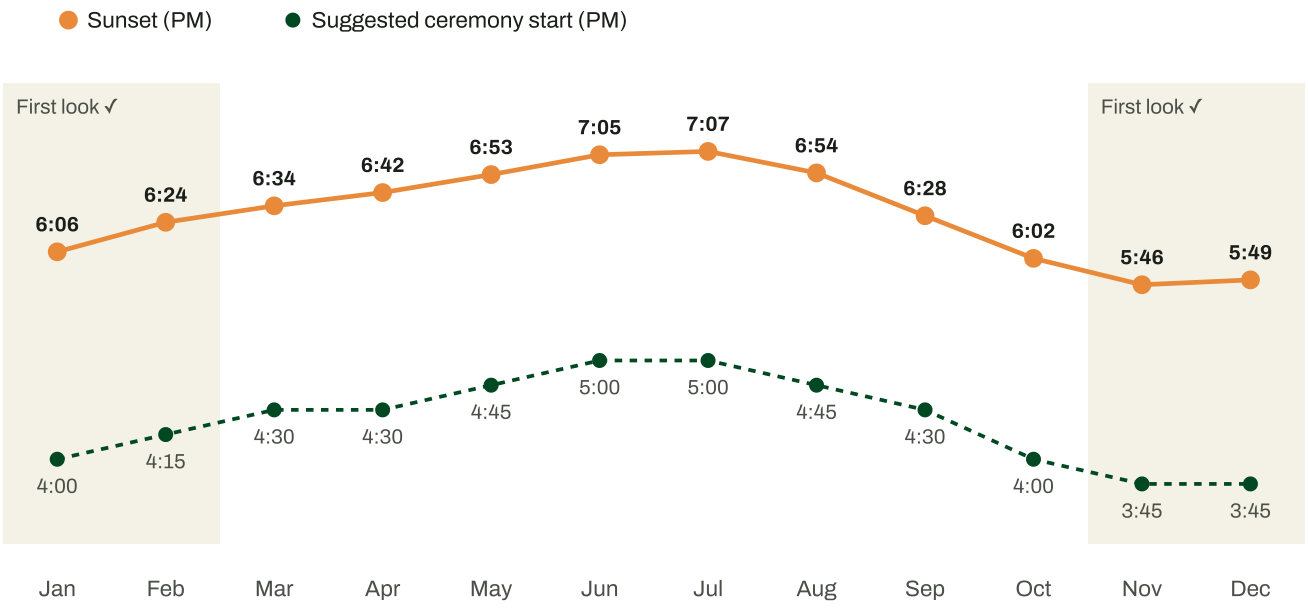
FROM 20+ REAL BIG ISLAND WEDDING TIMELINES · T

Build your Hawai‘i wedding day backward from sunset, not forward from the ceremony. On the Big Island, sunset moves about 80 minutes between late November and early July, and that one fact decides when you start hair and makeup, whether you need a first look, and how much time you get for family photos.

This guide comes from more than 20 real Big Island wedding timelines we've worked from, plus sunset data and island weather research. Every couple and venue is kept anonymous.

SUNSET IN KONA, MONTH BY MONTH

The earliest sunset of the year is about **5:45 PM in late November**. The latest is about **7:08 PM in early July**. Hawai‘i has no daylight saving time, so this shift is all the sun.



Sunset in Kailua-Kona on the 15th of each month (HST, no daylight saving). Ceremony start = sunset minus 1 hr 45 min minus a 20-minute ceremony, rounded to the quarter hour.

Because Hawai‘i is close to the equator, twilight is short: the sky goes from sunset to dark in about **23 minutes**. The golden light you plan around is the hour *before* sunset, not after.

WINTER WEDDINGS (NOV–FEB): BOOK A FIRST LOOK

In winter, sunset falls between about 5:45 and 6:25 PM, so the ceremony moves up to around 3:45–4:15 PM. After a 20-minute ceremony you have about **1 hour 40 minutes** of daylight left, and it has to hold family photos, wedding party photos, cocktail hour, reception details and sunset portraits.

Why a first look helps most in winter

- Couple and wedding party photos are done before the ceremony, in the early afternoon.

- After the ceremony, the only must-do is family photos (about 30 minutes). Then you actually get to enjoy cocktail hour.
- Sunset portraits stay protected. Nothing has to be cut to make up time.
- Without one, every portrait fits after the ceremony. If the ceremony starts 10 minutes late (it often does), those minutes come straight out of your sunset portraits.

Skipping the first look in winter? Start around 3:15–3:30 PM, keep the family list short, and expect brighter, harsher light on the ceremony itself.

The upside of winter: dinner starts around 6 PM, so with a 10 PM music cutoff you get about 4 hours of reception after sunset, compared with about 2.5 hours in July.

Sample winter day: mid-December, sunset 5:49 PM, first look, bride + 4

TIME	WHAT HAPPENS
8:50 AM	Hair and makeup begins (about 40–45 min per person)
11:30 AM	Bride's hair and makeup (about 2.5 hours)
1:15 PM	Photo + content team arrive: details, getting ready
2:00 PM	Into the dress
2:15 PM	First look, couple portraits, wedding party
3:05 PM	Tuck away, touch-ups
3:15 PM	Guests arrive
3:45 PM	Ceremony
4:05 PM	Family photos (30 min)
4:35 PM	Cocktail hour (you join!)
4:59 PM	Reception details photographed
5:24 PM	Sunset portraits
5:49 PM	Sunset ☀
5:59 PM	Grand entrance + pule, then dinner
6:40 PM	Toasts, 2–5 minutes each
9:30 PM	Staged last dance
10:00 PM	Music ends

SUMMER WEDDINGS (MAY–AUG): PLAN FOR HEAT AND A SHORTER PARTY

In summer, sunset moves to about 6:50–7:08 PM and the ceremony starts around 4:45–5:00 PM. There's more daylight after the ceremony, so you can skip the first look and still fit everything in.

- **Heat.** At 5 PM the sun is still high. Give guests shade, water and fans, and face the ceremony so nobody squints into the sun.
- **A shorter reception.** Dinner starts around 7:30 PM. With a 10 PM cutoff you get about 2.5 hours, so keep toasts short and start dancing right after dinner.
- **A slower morning.** Hair and makeup starts later, which most brides love.

Sample summer day: early July, sunset 7:08 PM, no first look, bride + 4

TIME	WHAT HAPPENS
10:50 AM	Hair and makeup begins
1:30 PM	Bride's hair and makeup
2:30 PM	Photo + content team arrive
3:30 PM	Into the dress
3:45 PM	Wedding party photos, each side separately
4:30 PM	Guests arrive (bride stays tucked away)
5:00 PM	Ceremony
5:20 PM	Family photos, then wedding party together
6:05 PM	Cocktail hour (you join)
6:18 PM	Reception details photographed
6:43 PM	Sunset portraits
7:08 PM	Sunset ☀
7:18 PM	Grand entrance + pule, then dinner
7:58 PM	Toasts
8:25 PM	First dance, then open dancing
9:30 PM	Staged last dance
10:00 PM	Music ends

Spring and fall (March, April, September, October) sit in between, with sunset from about 6:00 to 6:45 PM. A first look is optional but still makes the day calmer.

FIRST LOOK OR NOT? A QUICK DECISION GUIDE

Do a first look if two or more of these are true.

IF THIS IS YOU	FIRST LOOK?	WHY
Wedding between November and February	**Strongly recommended**	Only about 1 hr 40 min of light after the ceremony
Family photo list over 15 groupings	**Recommended**	Family photos alone can take 30–45 minutes
You want to be at your own cocktail hour	**Recommended**	Portraits are already done
Wedding party over 10 people	**Recommended**	Big groups take longer to arrange
Summer wedding, small family, short list	**Optional**	There's time for everything after the ceremony
The aisle reveal matters most to you	**Skip it**	Do a first touch or letter exchange instead

A middle option: a private first look with just the two of you and your photographer, and wedding party photos after the ceremony.

THE NUMBERS FROM REAL BIG ISLAND TIMELINES

Ceremony start	About 2 hours before sunset (median 124 min)
Ceremony length	20–30 minutes
Family photos	30 min; 45 for big families
Reception details photographed	45–60 min before guests are seated, room fully set, candles lit
Cake cutting	Often early and unannounced, before sunset portraits, with just parents
Sunset portraits	Start ~25 min before sunset, end at sunset
Grand entrance	5–25 min after sunset, then a pule (blessing)
Toasts	2–5 minutes each
Music ends	9 or 10 PM at most venues; last call 15–30 min before
Hair and makeup	40–45 min per person; ~2.5 hrs for the bride, who goes last
Night before	Rehearsal ~100 min before sunset, welcome party ~50 min before

The simple formula: ceremony start = sunset – 1 hr 45 min – your ceremony length. Round to the nearest quarter hour.

ISLAND-SPECIFIC THINGS TO PLAN FOR

- **The Kona and Kohala side is the dry side.** Kailua-Kona gets about 27 inches of rain a year and Waikoloa about 9, compared with about 120 in Hilo. Winter is wetter island-wide, but most of that rain falls on the Hilo side.
- **Clouds build in the afternoon.** Kona skies are often clearest in the morning. Get key portraits before the last sunset minutes, in case clouds roll in.

- **Trade winds are real.** Pin veils well, choose a hairstyle that can handle a breeze, and weigh down signs and florals.
- **Short twilight.** Dusk comes about 23 minutes after sunset. Have candles, string lights and uplighting ready the minute the sun goes down.
- **Vog.** Volcanic haze changes with wind and eruptions. It can soften the sunset, which isn't always bad.
- **Hurricane season runs June–November.** Direct hits are rare, but always keep a rain or wind backup space on hold.
- **Beach ceremonies** need permits and follow state setup rules. Your planner handles these.
- **Noise cutoffs.** Most venues end amplified music at 9 or 10 PM. Plan an after-party if you want to keep going.

YOUR CHECKLIST

☐ Look up sunset for your exact date (or let the Timeline Builder do it)

☐ Set your ceremony start: sunset – 1 hr 45 min – ceremony length

☐ Decide on a first look

☐ Write your family photo list and name a helper to call groups

☐ Count everyone in hair and makeup and work back from your dress time

☐ Ask your planner to have the reception fully set 45–60 min before guests are seated

☐ Block 25 minutes before sunset for portraits, and protect it

☐ Confirm the venue's music cutoff; plan a staged last dance 30 min before it

☐ Put a rain and wind backup on hold

☐ Share your draft timeline with your photographer and content creator

Want it done for you? Plug your date into the the Timeline Builder at thebtsdulhan.com/timeline and get a sunset-perfect timeline you can edit, print and share with your planner.