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Wedding
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Tame the wedding day jitters

Brides magazine unveils latest wedding trends and spending habits

Today's couples are spending more of their own money to have the wedding they want, and in true millennial style, they are focused on making both the wedding and the planning process more meaningful and enjoyable for everyone involved, according to the latest American Wedding Study conducted by Brides magazine.

Brides, published by Condé Nast, has been conducting an annual survey of engaged and newlywed women for more than 20 years to glean insights into the behaviors and emerging trends among marrying couples with regard to their wedding, its costs, planning details, media, and industry trends.

Today's couples are seeking ideas and inspiration at a greater scale than ever before, and bridal media is more valuable than ever, said Brides editor in chief Keija Minor.

"This year's study shows that, to that point, brides are moving away from requiring their bridesmaids to wear the exact same dress, with 66 percent asking them to wear only the same color instead," said Minor.

"Grooms are weighing in on more of the details than ever before, making the big day and events surrounding it more personal and reflective of their style as a couple."

Key findings

The results indicate that more than ever, personalization is a priority, as couples are choosing to spend more on details that demonstrate their style and scaling back in areas that don't, such as the number of guests.

Couples' investment in their wedding has reached a new high, with 73 percent paying for or contributing to the cost. This has given some couples the freedom to choose what they want without as much pressure from parents and social traditions, Minor said. Social media sites are fueling this trend.

Couples have been more willing to break with tradition by writing wedding vows or having a friend or family member officiate. They are also taking the honeymoon and mini-moon, with some putting their own twist on it by inviting family and friends on the vacation for a "buddymoon."

The practice of including a "man of honor" is also on the rise, with 14 percent of brides opting to have a male

friend stand by their side.

Couples are also not adhering to the traditional "marriage first, children second" timeline. Some 33 percent of couples already have children by the time they marry.

Another big break from tradition is that September and October, at 16 percent each, now replace May (12 percent) and June (13 percent) as the most popular months to get married.

Costs

The average wedding cost is \$26,522.

The average reception has a price tag of \$11,380.

The next-biggest-ticket items are the engagement ring (\$5,135), photography (\$2,099) and video (\$1,533), reception music (\$1,508), and wedding bands (\$1,725).

The average wedding cake costs \$417.

The average wedding dress costs \$1,517, up \$137 from \$1,380 in 2015.

The average bridesmaids' dress costs \$133.

89 percent of couples set a wedding budget, and 35 percent spend more than intended, up from 30 percent in 2014.

58 percent are willing to increase their budget to get the wedding they want.

More couples are beginning to consider Friday and Sunday dates (15 percent and 13 percent, respectively), although Saturday remains the most popular date to marry (65 percent).

Social media

Social media is the main way brides-to-be are connecting with wedding brands and products during planning, with 82 percent doing so versus 75 percent in 2014.

Pinterest remains the most popular social-media platform for brides-to-be, with 72 percent using it to find inspiration or help planning their wedding, up from 67 percent in 2014.

33 percent of brides are connecting with brands and products through Instagram.

After telling close friends and family, 62 percent of brides-to-be changed their social media status to "engaged."

After receiving an engagement ring, 62 percent posted a picture of it

to social networks.

39 percent posted photos or video of the proposal to social media.

51 percent create a custom hashtag for their wedding and related events.

To keep their guests informed throughout the planning process, 39 percent of brides-to-be post photos and updates from cake tastings and vendor visits.

53 percent show wedding vendors their ideas on social media to use at their wedding.

Engagement

82 percent of couples live together prior to getting married, and 67 percent live together prior to the engagement.

33 percent already have children before marriage, 9 percent of them with each other.

The average length of engagement was 14.4 months.

December is still the most popular month of the year to get engaged (21 percent).

Only 60 percent of couples are having engagement photos taken, down from 64 percent in 2014.

Wedding details

29 percent of couples have an engagement party.

18 percent host wedding weekends, or multiple events over multiple days.

63 percent of brides are given a bridal shower.

19 percent of couples opt to continue the party after the reception.

10 percent of couples chose to combine their bachelor and bachelorette parties.

44 percent had their bachelorette/bachelor parties out of town, and 42 percent had them locally.

Honeymoons and minimoons remain popular, with 85 percent opting to take a post-wedding trip.

A "buddymoon," a post-wedding vacation with friends or family, with 3% of couples taking one.

17 percent of all weddings were destination weddings, slightly up from 16 percent in 2014.

At destination weddings, 38 percent of couples provide hotel accommodations for guests, up from 30 percent in 2014.

Of those having a destination wedding, couples are inviting fewer guests (91 versus the 145 for nondest-



ination weddings) but are paying for "extras" such as gift bags at check-in (53 percent), shuttle buses to the ceremony/reception (32 percent), and events beyond the wedding, such as planned activities (30 percent) and the rehearsal dinner (46 percent).

The Dress

The average cost of a wedding dress is \$1,517, up from \$1,380 in 2014.

Traditional white and off-white gowns are still the most popular, with 93 percent of brides selecting either color for their wedding dress.

More brides are looking to make a splash by wearing something nontraditional, with 11 percent opting for something "unique" such as a cocktail-length dress, separates, jumpsuits, or nonwhite outfit.

54 percent of brides chose to wear a veil.

Multiple dresses continue to rise in popularity, with 10 percent purchasing a second look for the reception and another 7 percent doing so for the after-party.

Groom's attire

Tuxedos remain the choice for 54 percent of grooms, while 36 percent opt for a suit.

51 percent rented their formalwear, and 41 percent purchased it, up from

36 percent in 2014.

Bridal party

88 percent of brides had a maid or matron of honor, and 14 percent had a man of honor, up from 10 percent in 2014.

82 percent of grooms had a best man, and 7 percent had a best woman.

99 percent of couples had bridal attendants, and 98 percent had groomsmen or ushers.

The average bridesmaid's dress cost \$133.

The average number of bridal attendants was 5.3.

The average number of groomsmen was 5.1.

Flowers girls were part of the wedding 63 percent of the time, and 57 percent featured a ring bearer.

Pets were included in the ceremony at 8 percent of weddings.

Brides are opting to be less matchy-matchy when it comes to their bridesmaids. Some 66 percent chose a color and let their bridesmaids choose the dress style, while 33 percent matched in both color and style, down from 38 percent in 2014.

Wedding and reception

September and October have become the most popular months for weddings, accounting for 32 percent

of all weddings.

63 percent of brides are having their ceremony and reception at the same place and same time, up from 56 percent in 2014.

A quarter of couples chose to marry in a house of worship, down from 35 percent in 2014.

28 percent of engaged couples asked a friend or family member to get ordained to marry them, up from 20 percent in 2014.

Almost all couples incorporate wedding traditions into their big day, including cake cutting (90 percent), the first dance (89 percent), toasts (83 percent), and "something old, new, borrowed, and blue" accessories (81 percent).

62 percent of brides chose not to see the groom before the wedding, down from 67 percent.

48 percent of couples opted for traditional wedding vows, down from 53 percent.

85 percent of women plan to take their fiancé's name when they get married.

About the survey

The Brides survey questioned women ages 18 and up who had been either engaged or married within the past year. It was conducted between March 22 and April 4, 2016. For more information on Brides see brides.com.

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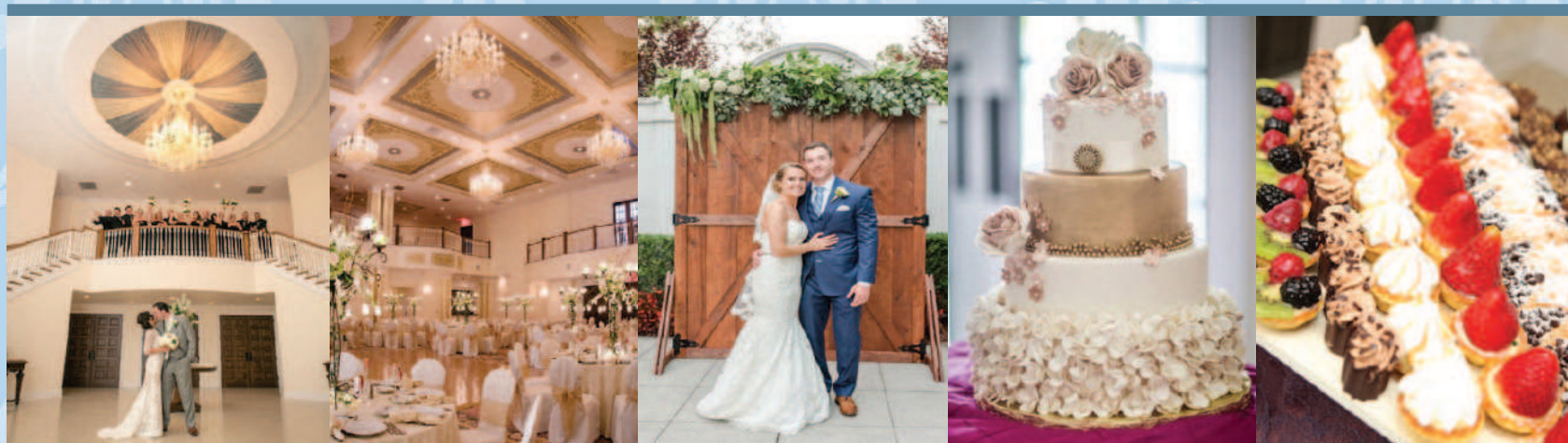
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Engagement ring alternatives

Diamonds have sparkled in engagement rings for centuries. Victorians popularized engagement rings forged from gold, silver, platinum and other precious metals featuring diamonds and other gemstones, but ever since the jeweler De Beers launched the advertising slogan "A diamond is forever" in 1947, the star of the show has been a twinkling diamond solitaire.

Even though diamonds may be a "girl's best friend," they may not fit every woman's style, particularly the bride who likes to buck tradition and think outside the box.

According to Money magazine, the average engagement ring costs more than \$5,800. While being one of the most expensive gemstones, the diamond has also become quite commonplace. Some women even eschew diamonds for moral reasons.

Vividly cut rubies, emeralds and tanzanite — all gems that are rarer yet less expensive than diamonds — can make beautiful engagement rings. Some couples also may opt for rings without gemstones, such as a traditional Claddagh or "true lover's knot" ring, to signify their union.

Whatever the driving force behind shopping for alternative gems, women who want to set themselves apart or express their individuality, and men looking to impress their significant other with a unique and eye-catching ring may opt for other another type of stone.

- **Moissanite:** This crystal naturally occurs in meteorites and is nearly as hard, dense and scuff-resistant as a diamond. Some feel moissanite offers more brilliance and fire than diamonds. Moissanite is a white-colored stone, so it can mimic the look of a diamond. And since it can be made in the laboratory at a fraction



of the cost of even lab-made diamonds, it is a frugal option. A nearly flawless one-carat moissanite can cost less than \$1,000.

- **Lemon quartz:** This is the trade name for a lemon-yellow stone that is color-enhanced transparent quartz. Quartz is turned into this sunny hue through an artificial gamma ray irradiation process. Like other quartz gemstones, lemon quartz is considered durable and suitable for all types of jewelry.

- **Sapphire:** Sapphires tend to be blue stones of varying intensity, but they also come in peach, pink, yellow, green and white. Sapphire may not sparkle as much as a diamond or even moissanite. However, it is the third hardest mineral, and with the right cut and at about one-third the price of a diamond, it makes an ideal diamond substitute.

- **Morganite:** According to the blog Bridal Musings, morganite is currently one of the most popular choices for engagement rings. Its pretty pink hue is romantic and feminine. It is about the same hardness as the sapphire, ensuring the rings will endure.

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EDITOR: James FitzPatrick, 609-601-5191

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Joan Kostiuk, 609-601-5190

NEWS MEDIA SPECIALIST: Emily Lingo, 609-601-5192

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER: Susan Papay, 609-601-5186

ADVERTISING CONSULTANT: Tanai Anderson, Jamie Bradley, Gregg Clayton, Charles Fahy, Marjorie Lakatos, Meg Perry, Morgan Scully, Stacy Wagner

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Weddings with nontraditional families call for extra compassion and tact

Weddings can be complicated affairs when factoring in blended families. During special events, particularly those steeped in tradition such as weddings, nontraditional families may have to employ certain tactics to ensure that the occasion is not marred by hurt feelings.

Even though a wedding is about the union of two people, couples who are planning a wedding must sometimes contend with divorce, family politics or other domestic issues. This includes if and how to incorporate stepparents and stepsiblings into the ceremony and celebration.

Couples are advised to give careful consideration to the needs of everyone if they aim to keep everyone happy.

There are no traditional rules regarding how to handle blended families, so couples getting married can customize their decisions based on their own unique situations. Even when family members get along well, the unique circumstances and traditions surrounding the nuptials can dredge up old feelings or conflicts, and certain aspects may require extra

patience and tact. Here are some pointers to help those going through the process.

- View stepparents and stepsiblings as wedding VIPs. Brides and grooms who are not particularly close to their stepfamilies still have to recognize the role they play in the family dynamics. These people are still family, so respect and courtesy should be offered. If there is any lingering animosity, extend the olive branch on this day and try to make everyone feel they are important. A simple announcement of who stepparents are at the wedding reception or inclusion of their names on itineraries can stave off any potential bumps.

- Put others' needs before your own and consider the feelings of others first. Biological parents and stepparents may act defensively if they feel uncomfortable or hurt, and that can create an air of negativity. Considering potential areas of conflict. For example, a mother might feel hurt if her ex-husband's new girlfriend is asked to be in a group family photo. Instead, select separate times to have photos taken. Give parents and stepparents



priority seating next to someone they love and can converse with comfortably. You may think everyone can play nice, but it's best not to force the issue.

- Recognize that some families break the mold. Recently a father made waves on the internet when a video went viral of him pulling the bride's stepfather from his seat to help walk her down the aisle. This was a wonderful image of families making it work despite their differences or the awkwardness that can result when

brides or grooms have parents and stepparents in attendance. Although this scenario might not play out for all, find ways to impart a special touch, especially if you're close to both your biological parents and your stepparents. For example, have your biological father walk you down the aisle and let your stepfather have the first dance.

- Order flowers and gifts for all. Purchase flowers and wedding party gifts for all of the special people in your lives, including your stepfamily.

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Add a twist to bouquet toss traditions

Part of what makes weddings such enjoyable events is the many traditions that are built into the day. Tradition lends familiarity to the proceedings and serves as unwritten cues for guests.

Certain traditions invite guest participation, and these can make great memories for couples and their guests. Just because something is a tradition, however, doesn't mean couples can't put their own unique spin on things.

The bouquet toss is one tradition that may benefit from a little personalization. In a 2015 Jezebel poll of about 4,500 readers, 19 percent supported having a bouquet toss, but 81 percent were against it, suggesting that the tradition is ready for some updating.

The bouquet toss traces its origins to 14th century England, when wedding guests used to try to rip off pieces of the bride's dress and flowers, and even her garter, believing they would bring good luck. To escape from the crowd, the bride would toss her bouquet and run away.

Today the bouquet is tossed to single women with the idea that whoever catches it will be the next to marry. This may have placated the throngs of single ladies in olden times, but many modern single women view the bouquet toss as a somewhat archaic or sexist tradition. Some guests are reluctant to participate in the bouquet toss because they dislike the expectation that they stand on the dance floor with the hopes of finding a spouse.

Below are some suggestions for couples who want to embrace the traditional bouquet and garter toss while giving it a more modern twist.

- **Girls-only dance:** Invite all of the women out on the floor – not just the single ones – and play a female-centric empowerment song or one that mentions women having a good time. This puts the emphasis on having fun rather than finding a spouse.
- **Attach a prize to the toss.** To encourage people to participate, explain that the bouquet- and garter-toss winners get prizes – and that the prize has nothing to do with finding a partner.
- **Wedding anniversary countdown:** Invite all of the married couples to the center of the dance floor. The DJ or band can play a love song and count up the years as the song plays. As each year is mentioned, couples leave the dance floor after their most recent anniversary has passed, until the couple married the longest is the last on the dance floor. That couple gets to take home the bouquet.
- **Have a bridal piñata.** All guests can take a turn at hitting a bouquet-shaped piñata. It's fun, gives guests something to do, and doesn't discriminate based on age or marital status.

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Throw a casual wedding to remember

While lavish storybook weddings and receptions remain popular, casual affairs are gaining popularity.

According to the bridal resource The Knot, more and more couples are opting for less pageantry and more laid-back panache when planning their weddings. For those who prefer something more intimate and personalized, a casual wedding may be just the thing.

There are many advantages to having a "luxé with less" wedding, including the freedom to break molds and impart more of the couple's personality into the event.

Another advantage is the price tag. The average U.S. wedding, according to The Knot 2014 Real Weddings Study, costs \$31,213. In some urban areas, such as New York City, average costs can run three times that.

Golden Girl Finance, an online financial source geared to women, found that Canadian weddings average \$31,000 with the honeymoon included.

Although wedding costs have gone up, the average number of



wedding guests has gone down. Transforming the festivities into a casual affair can help keep the overall budget low while still allowing

couples to show guests a good time. Here are some ideas for putting casual wedding plans into motion and bringing them to fruition.

other reception sites may meet the needs of many clientele, couples looking for something more casual or to reduce the per-guest cost may want to consider a venue change.

Look for public locations that allow couples to hire their own caterer, which could be a favorite restaurant or specialty food shop. The cost per person could be dramatically less than traditional venue costs.

Changing the venue also enables couples to pick a unique spot that may hold special meaning to them, such as the site of their first date or the location of their proposal.

Enjoy a casual, free-spirited wedding that incorporates some aspects of formality in an off-beat way. Think about serving fast food, such as fried chicken or pizza, on fine china. Or opt for casual footwear such as athletic shoes instead of formal footwear with your gown and tuxedo.

For table centerpieces, placing wildflowers in crystal vases can lend a rich feel to the affair without removing the fun element.

Personal touches

Menus and wedding programs printed at home in a fun font can set the casual tone couples are looking for. Look for eclectic fabrics to use as gift tags or napkin holders. Hand-painted signs or a hodge-podge of picture frames can display pertinent information, such as itineraries or seating arrangements. Encourage friends or family to contribute a favorite menu item to the food offerings. A home-baked dessert can be delicious and budget-friendly.

Wardrobe

Clothing often indicates the formality of an occasion. Everyone from the wedding party to the guests can dress down. Sundresses can be a comfy and relaxed replacement for taffeta bridesmaids gowns, and guys can opt for a tailored sportcoat with jeans. Guests may feel comfortable in less formal attire that facilitates dancing and mingling.

Venue

Food and beverage costs are often the most expensive wedding expense, and while catering halls and



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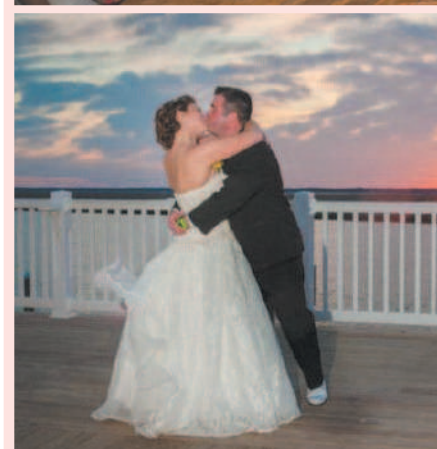



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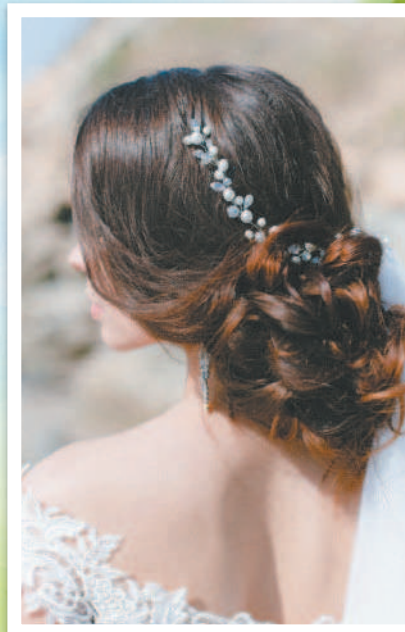
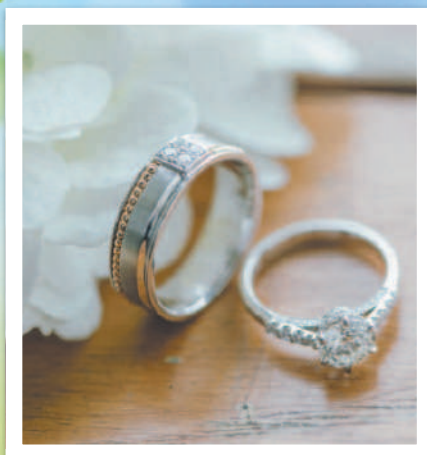
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Incorporate flowers in various ways

Flowers can enhance weddings in many different ways apart from bouquets.

Flowers, which take their cue from historical traditions, have been used in weddings for centuries, sometimes alongside herbs and even spices.

Today flowers are mainly used to decorate wedding venues, impart fragrance and complement formal attire – but in ancient times they were often used to bestow good luck on the couple and keep bad omens away. Brides carried aromatic flowers and spices to keep evil spirits from spoiling the festivities, and some brides even went so far as to tuck a bulb of garlic into their bouquet.

In ancient Greece and Rome, both the bride and groom wore garlands made from strong-smelling herbs and flowers around their neck or head. These wreaths were considered gifts of nature, and thus extremely appropriate for a wedding. Traditionally, bridesmaids would be responsible for fashioning these floral components.

In ancient Sweden, young girls would carry small bouquets of fragrant herbs down the aisle, and the groom would put thyme in his pocket. These aromatics were thought to help keep trolls at bay.

Besides warding off spirits and hungry trolls, flowers served more practical purposes throughout history. During the Middle Ages, people bathed less frequently than they do today. Bathing might only have occurred twice a year – once in the summer and again at Christmastime.

Because many weddings took place in the spring, flowers were used to mask body odors. Not only were flowers and herbs carried, but they also would be sewn into clothing.

Modern brides and grooms may no longer see their wedding day as opportunistic for evil spirits, but that doesn't mean they can't borrow from ancient traditions and incorporate flowers into their wedding in various ways.

- Wreaths and garlands: Ask the florist to attach small flower buds, berries and vines to a headband, wreath or piece of twine so the bride and groom can wear them the way they were worn by ancient Greeks and Romans. When coupled with a Grecian-style wedding gown, they can complete the look of a goddesses.

- Fragrant favors: Tuck dried rose petals and other fragrant flowers into sachets embroidered with the couple's names and wedding date to give away as wedding favors. Guests can use the sachets to keep clothing smelling fresh in drawers or as an air freshener.

- Edible flowers: Ask the caterer to make meals flower-friendly by including some edible blooms in the salad or as a garnish on meals.

- Raining petals: In lieu of bubbles or birdseed, guests can shower the newlyweds with rose petals after the ceremony.

- Memorial: Some couples like to honor departed family members. Floral arrangements with small placards can make for fitting memorials.



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Tips for trimming the guest list

Weddings are a time to celebrate, and many couples want to share their day with as many people as possible.

But with the price of weddings on the rise, some couples are looking at trimming the guest list to keep a lid on costs. Other times, the reception venue can dictate the number of guests that can be invited.

Paring down a wedding guest list can be a difficult process, but couples should work together and respect each other's concerns when creating their final list.

The average American wedding includes 120 guests, according to a 2015 Newlywed Survey released by WeddingWire. Here are some tips for couples who are finding it difficult to create or to pare down their guest list.

- Start with a master list. Write down the name of everyone you want to invite, regardless of budget. Then list the must-have guests. This should include the family and friends with whom you interact on a regular basis. Create a separate column for guests who don't make the must-have list.

- Separate friends from friends' friends. If you don't see people outside of events set up by mutual friends, you should not feel obligated to invite them to the wedding. They are more likely friends of your friends and not your close friends.

- Know the guest list ceiling. Catering halls and reception rooms can only accommodate a certain number of people. Know the number before making a final list. The limits of the space may serve as the catalyst for trimming the guest list.

- Consider co-workers carefully. Think about whether you would still be friends with your co-workers if the company dissolved tomorrow. If not, you should not feel obligated to invite them.

- Have we met? If you don't remember interacting with a person (your parent's long-lost friend from high school) or the person has never met your significant other, then they probably can be cut. If parents insist on inviting someone you barely know, they should help defray the costs.

- Cut out the kids. Even though children's dinner costs may be lower than adults', inviting children can significantly increase the guest list. A no-child policy at the reception can save money.

- Avoid uncomfortable situations. Unless you have remained particularly close, keep former boyfriends and girlfriends off the guest list.

- Ask for an unbiased opinion. Give the editing pen to someone else if you cannot make a decision. This person may help weed out extraneous guests.

Tame the wedding day jitters

In the weeks and months before the big day, it is easy for couples to get caught up in the whirlwind of wedding planning, with no time to take inventory of any feelings they may have leading up to the nuptials.

As the wedding day nears, the bride and groom should not be surprised if some nerves set in. A survey from the anxiety self-help resource The Fear Source indicates that 71 percent of brides-to-be suffered from some type of nerves during the lead-up to their wedding. Ninety-two percent experienced nerves the day of the wedding or the night before, while 66 percent reported that it affected their daily lives prior to their wedding or hampered their performance and enjoyment on their wedding day.

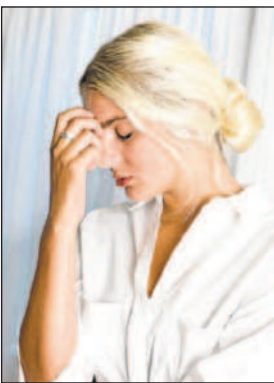
According to Psych Central, a modern online voice for mental health information, emotional support and advocacy, pre-wedding jitters are common and can be the subconscious telling a person that something needs to be remedied. Wedding nerves do not mean a wedding is doomed; it just means certain issues may need to be worked through. The following are

some ways to tame wedding day nerves.

- Keep an open dialogue. Speak with your future spouse about the things that may be causing your anxiety. Maybe you have doubts on financial choices or where you will be living after the wedding. Communicating openly and honestly is one of the foundations of a strong relationship.

- Slow down and breathe. Wedding planning involves making many decisions, and sometimes couples move at breakneck speed. Make slowing down a priority. Make time for a quiet dinner with just the two of you. Steal some peaceful moments, and take deep breaths to calm and revitalize yourself. If need be, consider signing up for a yoga or tai chi class to force you to slow down.

- Address performance anxiety. It's easy to build up the big day in your mind and hope that everything goes according to plan. But it's impossible to plan for each and every outcome on your wedding day. Focus on everything that can go right, rather than worrying about what might go wrong. And realize that your guests are your



friends and family members who will be forgiving of any hiccups. You're bound to recover gracefully from any mishaps.

- Work on your confidence. Wedding fears may stem from inadequate self-confidence. Give yourself a pep talk and surround yourself with positive people. Keep the worrywarts at arm's length for the time being.

- Recruit more help. A wedding is a huge undertaking, so it's no surprise that couples sometimes feel overwhelmed. Ask reliable relatives or friends to double-check all of the last-minute details. This way you don't feel it is all on your shoulders.



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'I do,' take two: guide to a second marriage

Couples are returning to the altar in increasing numbers, as second and third weddings are becoming ever more popular. The Pew Research Center indicates that as of 2014, 64 percent of divorced or widowed men had remarried, compared with 52 percent of previously married women.

Lavish second weddings were once uncommon, but that trend is also shifting. Couples who are taking another crack at marriage are tying the knot with renewed vigor and with weddings that may rival that of some first-timers.

Here are some guidelines for making the wedding sequel a success.

Wardrobe

Couples who have been married before often find that they have more leeway with regard to their wedding wardrobe than they did when tying the knot for the first time.

Brides may choose something less traditional than a long white dress. In fact, this can be a time to let loose and select something that is festive or even funky. It also may provide a great opportunity to choose a clothing style from different culture or that ties into one's heritage. This freedom also allows brides to broaden their horizons with regard to where to buy their wedding wardrobe.

Grooms may opt for something more casual than a tuxedo or coordinate with the bride-to-be so they are on the same creative page. Colored tuxedos and vintage suits are acceptable, even though such attire might have raised a few eyebrows the first time around.

Guest list

The guest list doesn't have to be a source of anxiety. Others will understand that there may be a melange of people at a second wedding. Children from previous marriages as well as divorced spouses and former in-laws are not out of the question. Even if exes will not be included, make sure they know about the nuptials in advance of others. It's common courtesy, and it can help head off any feelings of ill will.

Some couples choosing to tie the knot again scale back the size of the wedding this time around, feeling something smaller and more intimate, with only the closest of friends and family, is more suitable.

Registries and wedding gifts

Considering that many couples who have been married previously likely have many of the housewares and items for daily living that first-timers may not, registering for these gifts is not necessary. What's more, some of the same guests may have been present at first marriages and given gifts them. In lieu of gifts, couples may ask guests to donate to a specific charity or forgo gifts altogether.

Vows

Couples can use experience to draft vows that have personal meaning to their unique situation and make the wedding ceremony even more special.

Safe and smart ways to slim down before the wedding

Concern about fitting into their gown drives many brides to crash diet in an effort to lose weight.

In addition, brides-to-be and grooms-to-be want to look their best on their wedding day, and many express concern about their weight in the weeks and months leading up to the wedding. Losing weight is a goal for many engaged couples, but it's important that couples who want to shed a few extra pounds don't sacrifice safety for the sake of slimming down.

According to a Cornell University study of 273 women with a wedding day approaching, 70 percent wanted to lose more than 20 pounds before the wedding. However, reality indicates that a weight loss of 5 to 10 pounds is more attainable – more so if the weight loss regimen is spread out over several weeks.

The term "brideorexia" has entered the vernacular, and it is associated with brides who are taking extreme measures to lose weight. Taking laxatives, engaging in fluid-only diets and even using tobacco or drugs as appetite

suppressants are just some of the measures brides have taken to shed weight before their wedding day.

There is no magic formula to shed pounds, but there are certain ways to jump-start and maintain the process of healthy weight loss that can help you look slimmer and healthy for the big day.

Eat. Although initial calorie curbing can help shed weight, eventually your body may adapt to your new eating habits or go into "survival mode," which means conserving fat reserves. Researchers at Penn State University found that fasting signals to the body that it is being starved, triggering a lower metabolic rate. Brides-to-be should never cut out food entirely. Eating anything less than 1,200 calories a day will encourage the body to try to conserve energy by lowering its metabolism. Severe calorie restriction is not an effective way to lose weight.

Step up your exercise regimen. Reducing food intake alone will not help you lose weight quickly. For that you must burn more calories than you consume. Adding more



cardiovascular activity to your routine can help burn calories more efficiently. According to a clinical study from researchers at Italy's

University of Padua published in the 2011 International Journal of Sports Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism, eating a light meal before exercising helps you burn more fat and keeps your body burning fat even 24 hours after the exercise.

Reduce sodium intake. Sodium doesn't necessarily lead to weight gain, but it can make it appear so. Sodium contributes to water retention, which may make you appear heavier or bloated. Cut back on foods that are high in sodium, especially as the wedding nears, to reduce water retention.

Identify sources of empty calories. Fruit juices, soda and other beverages are often the culprits in cases of unnecessary calorie consumption. Choose your beverages wisely and limit them to water, tea and unsweetened drinks. If you want to drink fruit juice, consider diluting it. In addition, most alcoholic beverages have 100 calories or more. While it may be tempting to celebrate with wine, champagne and mixed drinks during your engagement period, your

waistline may ultimately pay the price for such indulgences.

Hire a good photographer. It is said that a camera adds 10 pounds, a reason many couples panic about their wedding day. A photo is a two-dimensional image of a 3-D object. The photo reduces depth perception and flattens an image, which may make some items look like they have more bulk. A professional photographer will know how to manipulate lighting and camera angles for more flattering shots.

Eat smaller portions. Often it's not a matter of what you are eating but how much. Most portion sizes served in restaurants or even at home are double or triple the amount you should be eating. When in doubt, cut portions in half.

Fill up on fiber or protein. Instead of resorting to pills to suppress an appetite, eat foods that will fill you up naturally. High-fiber foods will bulk up in the stomach and keep you feeling satiated longer. The same can be said for lean proteins, which take longer to digest, thus fending off hunger pangs.

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Getting there can be half the fun

Engaged couples may be ready to walk down the aisle and begin their new life together, but first they have to get to the ceremony.

Couples have many options for transportation on their wedding day. Limousines continue to be popular choices, but other vehicles also may fit your needs.

According to The Wedding Report, a research company that tracks wedding trends, the size of the average wedding party has grown, which means a greater number of people may need a ride to the festivities. But couples also must decide how they will get to and from the ceremony. Couples who want to arrive in style may want to consider the following options.

- Take it to the water. If you're having a lakeside or seaside wedding, taking a water route to the ceremony can make for a dramatic entrance. Vessel options include speedboats, yachts or something more intimate, such as a canoe or rowboat. Afterward, you can coast off into the sunset.

- Arrive like royalty. Take a page out of a favorite fairy tale and arrive in a horse-drawn carriage. Carriages can typically fit between two and six passengers. If you cannot find a carriage, consider

pedicabs or bicycle-drawn buggies as a novel alternative.

- Step out of a classic movie. Vintage cars can make a statement. While some people may immediately think of a Rolls Royce, consider cars that embody your personal style. Rugged couples may want a classic pickup truck, while those who live life in the fast lane may prefer a vintage sports car.

- Take the party on the road. Moving a large number of people in the wedding party takes forethought. Party buses and SUV limousines can fit a substantial amount of passengers, making them a more cost-effective option for large bridal parties. These vehicles may be equipped with party lights, sound systems and even minibars.

- Go eco-friendly. If your ceremony is nearby, arrive on horseback or even pedaling a bicycle. Such options are eco-friendly and, in the case of bicycles, may be free.

When booking transportation for you and your wedding guests, remember to do so well in advance. Get all agreements in writing, verify that the company is licensed and insured, and provide directions and the itinerary to drivers to ensure things go smoothly.



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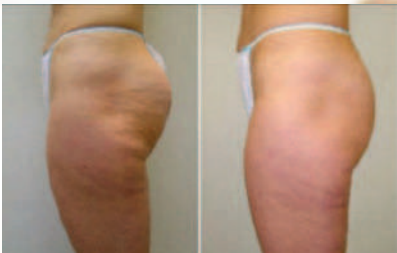
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Cost of weddings reaches all-time high

In 2016, the average cost of a wedding reached an all-time high of \$35,329, while the average number of guests dropped from 149 to 141. The increase in cost per person indicates that couples are spending with a greater focus on guests, according to a survey of nearly 13,000 brides and grooms who married in 2016 conducted by The Knot, an online wedding resource and marketplace that compiles statistics on wedding spending and trends.

Spending on custom guest entertainment has more than tripled, from 11 percent to 41 percent since 2009, with photo booths, games, musical performances and fireworks at the top of the list, The Knot stated.

“Wedding spend continues to rise, but at the same time, guest lists are shrinking as couples spend more per guest to create an unforgettable experience for those closest to them,” said Kellie Gould, editor in chief of The Knot. “Couples are also using their wedding day to make their first big statement as a couple. From invitations to the reception band, couples are spending more to put their personal stamp on every detail.”

Top 2016 wedding statistics

- Average wedding cost: \$35,329 excluding honeymoon, up from \$32,641 in 2015
 - Most expensive place to get married: Manhattan, \$78,464 average
 - Least expensive place to get married: Arkansas, \$19,522 average
 - Average spent on a wedding dress: \$1,564
 - Average marrying age: bride, 29; groom, 31
 - Average number of guests: 141
 - Average number of bridesmaids: 5
 - Average number of groomsmen: 5
 - Most popular month to get engaged: December (15 percent)
 - Average length of engagement: 15 months
 - Most popular wedding colors: dark blue (29 percent), gold (28 percent) and light pink (28 percent)
 - Percentage of destination weddings: 20
- The Guest Experience
- The average cost per wedding guest rose to \$245 last year, compared with \$194 in 2009.

Couples are amping up the entertainment and personalization.

Seventy-five percent of all couples have at least one signature wedding element (up from 66 percent in 2008), such as a signature cocktail (24 percent). Custom guest entertainment has more than tripled, from 11 percent to 41 percent since 2009, with photo booths (78 percent), games (18 percent), musical performances (12 percent) and fireworks (8 percent) at the top of the list.

Also on the rise are cigar-rolling stations, wine and liquor tastings and dance performers. Don’t be surprised to see aerialists, acrobats, live painters or gospel choirs this year as 2017 wedding trends reach new heights in guest entertainment.

Using technology to capture every moment

As technology becomes a bigger part of people’s everyday lives, 22 percent of couples incorporated some type of technology into their wedding day.

This included GoPros in bridal bouquets to capture the walk down the aisle, drones to take aerial wedding footage, and live-streaming video to share the wedding day with loved ones who couldn’t attend.

Sixty-four percent of couples created a wedding hashtag and shared with guests on their personalized wedding website (48 percent), table tent cards (32 percent), ceremony program (20 percent) and wedding invitation (19 percent).

Spending over budget

Couples are spending more than they planned, and parents are still paying for a majority of today’s weddings.

On average, the bride’s parents contribute 44 percent of the overall wedding budget, the bride and groom contribute 42 percent, and the groom’s parents contribute 13 percent, with others accounting for the remaining 2 percent. In 2016, 10 percent of couples paid for the wedding entirely by themselves, while 8 percent made no financial contribution to their wedding. Most couples (89 percent) said the economy had no effect on their wedding plans. About 47 percent of couples (up from 42 percent in 2011) reported spending more than they planned for.

Smartphone planning

The use of smartphones for wedding planning activities more than doubled, from 42 percent in 2014 to 90 percent in 2016. The most popular mobile wedding planning activity was browsing wedding gowns (62 percent). Mobile phones were also used for researching wedding vendors (51 percent, up from 31 percent in 2014), using online planning tools



(43 percent, up from 21 percent in 2014), creating a personal wedding website (25 percent, up from 14 percent in 2014) and using an online RSVP service (20 percent, up from 7 percent in 2014)

Reception hookups and faux pas

Looking for a love match? You may just find one at the next wedding you attend. Nineteen percent of couples said some of their guests hooked up during or after their wedding, with 4 percent reporting that guests who met at their wedding are now in a committed relationship.

With regard to reception libations, 15 percent of brides admitted that they got drunk at their wedding, and 18 percent said their groom got drunk as well. Nine percent of brides reported that they, or both they and their groom, had an ex-lover at their wedding. Four percent of survey respondents admitted that their best man insulted someone during his toast.

Nontraditional venues

Ceremony and reception locations are becoming more important as couples plan a personalized wedding that is a true reflection of their personalities and relationship. Forty-eight percent said having a reception venue with a scenic backdrop or locale was the top priority, while having both an indoor and outdoor space was most important for 30 percent of couples.

Unexpected places to wed are on the rise. Only 26 percent of couples had a ceremony in a religious institution (down from 41 percent

in 2009). Hosting weddings at farms, barns and ranches increased from 2 percent in 2009 to 12 percent in 2016, and historic buildings and homes rose in popularity from 9 percent in 2009 to 13 percent in 2016.

Other popular nontraditional ceremony sites include beach houses, public gardens, wineries and museums.

Destination weddings

Only 20 percent of couples considered their wedding a destination wedding, down from 24 percent in 2011. Of those who had a U.S. destination wedding, 49 percent got married 200 miles or more from where they lived at the time of their wedding. Nearly 13 percent of destination wedding couples hosted a second party when they returned home for friends and family who weren’t able to attend.

There are more than 340,000 destination weddings each year, with 89 percent (up from 77 percent in 2015) taking place in the continental United States and 11 percent (down from 23 percent in 2015) at international destinations. Top locales include Hawaii (35 percent), California (14 percent), Florida (12 percent) the Caribbean (27 percent) and Mexico (10 percent).

Fall is the new spring

Summer remains a popular season to say “I do,” but fall has taken the top spot with 40 percent (up from 30 percent in 2009) of couples hosting their nuptials in the fall. September and October are tied for the most popular month, each accounting for 16 percent of weddings, followed by June with

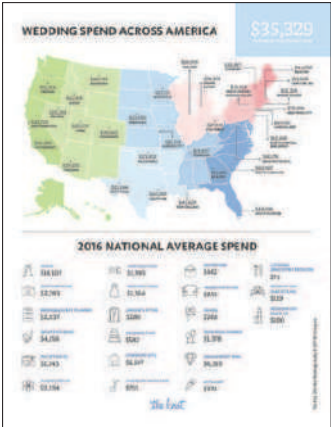
13 percent. Saturday nuptials are still strong at 70 percent followed by Fridays (14 percent) and Sundays (12 percent).

Top 25 most expensive places to get married

Based on average cost of a wedding in 2016, couples spent the most on their weddings in the following areas in the United States. Four of the five most expensive places to get married were in the New York tri-state area.

1. New York – Manhattan: \$78,464
2. New York – Long Island: \$67,831
3. New Jersey – north/central: \$62,606
4. Illinois – Chicago: \$60,035
5. New York – outer boroughs: \$59,027
6. Massachusetts – Cape Cod: \$58,608
7. New York – Westchester/Hudson Valley: \$54,428
8. Rhode Island: \$52,328
9. Florida – southern: \$48,596
10. Pennsylvania – Philadelphia/Delaware: \$48,093
11. New Jersey – south: \$46,486
12. California – Santa Barbara/Ventura: \$45,957
13. California – Los Angeles: \$44,062
14. Massachusetts – Boston: \$44,028
15. California – San Francisco/Greater Bay Area: \$42,716
16. Louisiana – New Orleans: \$42,628
17. Connecticut: \$42,127
18. Texas – Houston/east Texas: \$40,285
19. Washington D.C./northern Virginia/suburban Maryland: \$40,176

See COST on Page 24



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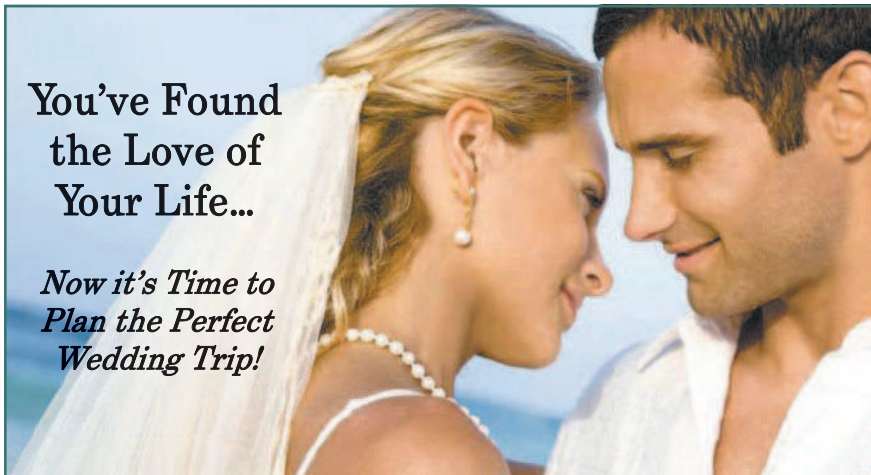
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Cost

continued from page 23

20. California – San Diego: \$37,268
21. Texas – Austin/San Antonio/south and central Texas: \$36,522
22. Maryland – Baltimore: \$35,861
23. Michigan – Detroit: \$35,576
24. California – Orange County: \$35,303
25. New York – Capital district/upstate N.Y.: \$34,874
Top 10 most affordable places to get married
Based on the average cost of a wedding in 2016, couples spent the least in the following areas.

1. Arkansas – \$19,522
2. Utah – \$20,337
3. Montana – \$20,794
4. Texas – west Texas: \$21,688
5. Oregon – \$21,854
6. Idaho – \$22,018
7. Arizona-Tucson – \$22,175
8. Iowa – \$23,098
9. Nevada – \$23,239
10. Oklahoma – \$23,302

Average budget breakdown

The cost of every wedding category surveyed rose over the previous year. Figures are based on respondents who hired a professional vendor for their wedding.

Overall wedding (excluding honeymoon) – \$35,329, up from \$32,641

Venue (reception hall) – \$16,107, up from \$14,788

Photographer – \$2,783, up from \$2,618

Wedding/event planner – \$2,037, up from \$1,996

Reception band – \$4,156, up from \$3,833

Reception DJ – \$1,245, up from \$1,171

Florist/décor – \$2,534, up from \$2,300

Videographer – \$1,995, up from \$1,824

Wedding dress – \$1,564, up from \$1,469

Groom's attire and accessories – \$280, up from \$269

Wedding cake – \$582, up from \$575

Ceremony site – \$2,197, up from \$2,089

Ceremony musicians – \$755, up from \$703

Invitations – \$462, up from \$445

Transportation – \$859, up from \$792

Favors – \$268, up from \$267

Rehearsal dinner – \$1,378, up from \$1,296

Engagement ring – \$6,163, up from \$5,871

Catering (price per person) – \$71, up from \$68

Officiant – \$278, up from \$273

markets. Regional highlights include:

- Cost of wedding: Manhattan, New York and Long Island have the highest average wedding spend (\$78,464 and \$67,831, respectively), and Arkansas and Utah have the lowest (\$19,522 and \$20,337 respectively), excluding honeymoon.

- Marriage age: New York City had the country's oldest brides, with Manhattan brides being 31.7 years old on average, and brides from Southern Florida being an average of 31.2 years old. Alabama and Tucson, Arizona, had the youngest brides (26.5 and 26.7 years, respectively) on average. The country's oldest grooms were found in Manhattan (34.4 years old) and Southern Florida (33.1 years old), and the youngest grooms were in Alabama and Utah (27.9 and 28.2 years, respectively).

- Engagement length: Couples from Orange County in California, and Lehigh Valley/the Poconos in Pennsylvania, had the longest engagements (20.5 and 19.3 months, respectively), while couples in Utah and Mississippi walked down the aisle a bit sooner after getting engaged (8.5 and 11 months, respectively), on average.

- Wedding size: Nebraska and Iowa couples had the largest number of wedding guests (230 and 210, respectively), and couples who tied the knot in Hawaii and Nevada had the smallest number of wedding guests (74 and 84, respectively).

- Wedding style: Hawaii and Montana weddings were more likely to be casual than any other region in (44 percent and 39 percent, respectively), while Long Island and northern and central New Jersey had the most black tie weddings (40 percent and 38 percent, respectively).

- Wedding dress: As in 2015, brides in Manhattan and Long Island spent the most on their wedding gowns (\$2,564 and \$2,473, respectively), while Nevada and Oregon brides spent the least (\$1,074 and \$1,171, respectively).

- Honeymoon: Couples from Alabama (89 percent), Mississippi (89 percent), Toledo, Ohio (87 percent) and Tennessee (87 percent) were most likely to book a honeymoon, while couples in Montana (33 percent), Nevada (60 percent) and Hawaii (61 percent) were the least likely.

- Gift registry: Couples in Nebraska and Alabama were most likely to register for wedding gifts (98 percent and 96 percent, respectively), while couples in Nevada and Hawaii were least likely (66 percent and 70 percent, respectively).

About The Knot 2016 RealWeddings Survey

The 2016 RealWeddings Survey captured responses from nearly 13,000 US couples married between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2016 who had membership in theknot.com. All qualified respondents attested that they were 18 or older and had a wedding in 2016.

Regional differences

The Knot 2016 Real Weddings Study can be broken down on a region-by-region basis across more than 80

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When to visit these honeymoon hotspots

A honeymoon provides a welcome getaway for couples after months of budgeting, planning and ironing out the details of their wedding. A honeymoon gives the bride and groom a chance to escape the pressures of everyday life and enjoy being alone with each other in a special place.

Honeymoon vacations can be expensive, and many couples want to ensure they get the best value for their trip. A honeymoon that is overshadowed by inclement weather can make this once-in-a-lifetime trip memorable for all the wrong reasons.

While not every hiccup can be avoided, couples can plan their honeymoons around those times of year when specific locales experience their best weather.

- **Jamaica:** This can be a good choice for couples tying the knot in the earlier part of the year. With average temperatures in the 80s year-round, Jamaica makes for a great honeymoon destination. January through April see less rain than other times of the year. Keep in mind that June through the December is hurricane season.

- **Australia:** People opting to get married in the winter in the Northern Hemisphere might want to escape the cold and shorter days with a honeymoon south of the equator. Australia and New Zealand are beautiful spots to visit and enjoy summer when the Northern Hemisphere is mired in winter.

- **France:** Paris and other French cities can be enchanting to visit any time of the year, but locals advise honeymooners to visit in September when the climate is quite comfortable and tourism is minimal. Spring is another great time to visit France, especially for people who want to spend plenty of time outdoors.

- **Mexico:** Areas of Mexico, such as popular Cancun and Cozumel, tend to stay warm all year long, but they can be particularly hot in the summer. Spring brides and grooms may want to venture there before summer is in full swing. Couples might want to avoid vacationing in certain areas in March, as students visiting for spring break may compromise the romantic atmosphere honeymooners may be hoping for.

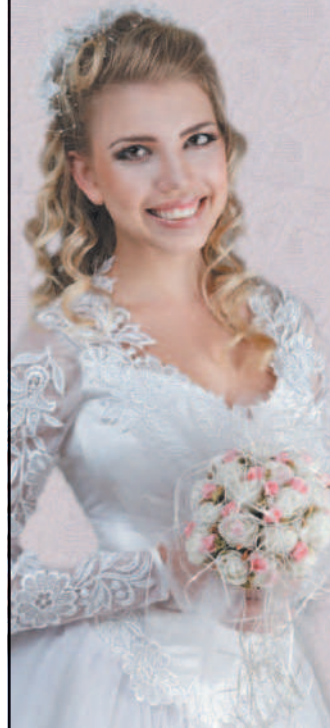
- **Hawaii:** Spring and summer can be ideal times to visit the islands of Hawaii, as the weather can be beautiful and travel tends to be less expensive during at that time of year. Rains increase as autumn sets in, and Hawaii often sees the bulk of its vacationers during the winter, meaning higher costs and bigger crowds.

- **Italy:** April through June and September through October are some of the best times to visit Italy. Be aware that Venice tends to be misty and damp in the late fall and early spring. Italy, especially southern Italy and Sicily, can get quite hot during the summer.

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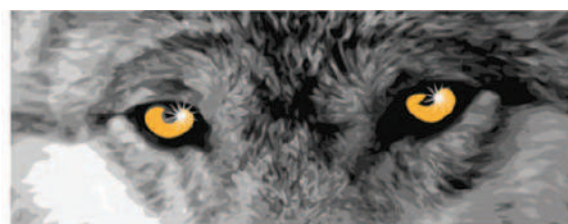
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Merging finances after marriage

Newly married couples should make every effort to be on the same page with regard to handling their finances.

Couples can spend months or even years planning their wedding – but they would be wise to also give some thought to life beyond their wedding day.

One of the more important matters couples must consider is how to manage their finances once they tie the knot. Discussing money can be a tricky issue, particularly when couples have long been accustomed to handling their own accounts and being responsible for their own income and expenditures.

Bringing another party into the equation can complicate matters, particularly when one spouse may not have the full picture of the other's spending and saving habits. In fact, the financial resource Bankrate.com says some of the most common financial problems newly married couples encounter include overspending and managing debt.

When deciding how to merge their finances, couples can experiment to see what

works best for them. It may take some trial and error before couples find a solution that fits their needs, but it's important that they keep the lines of communication open and express a willingness to compromise with regard to managing money.

The following are some additional tips for couples who want to make the transition to sharing finances go as smoothly as possible.

Start the conversation early

According to a recent poll by the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, more than two-thirds of engaged couples had negative attitudes about discussing money with their soon-to-be spouses, with 5 percent saying even having the conversation would cause them to call off the wedding.

If money is causing this type of issue before the wedding, delaying the conversation until after tying the knot can be a big mistake. It's better for couples to begin financial discussions and start brainstorming long-term goals and plans as soon as they get engaged. Don't hide

negative financial information from a prospective spouse. Being open and honest – even though it can be challenging – is the best way to proceed.

Deal with debt

Hiding debt is a big mistake. Discuss debt early on and come up with a way to pay it off together. The experts say that, like it or not, once you're married, your spouse's debts become your problem. Individual credit scores can impact your ability to get credit as a couple. It's best to handle debt efficiently regardless of who is responsible for it.

Decide who is the money manager

One person may be better or more organized when it comes to paying bills. Whether you keep separate accounts or combine them, it is easier for one person to take the lead and manage the finances from month to month. Money can funnel into a joint account specifically established to pay bills.



Develop a joint budget

Not only do finances need to be merged, but

so, too, do lifestyles. Couples must be on the same page regarding their spending habits and keep luxury or personal expenditures in check. Work out a budget and a savings plan together.

Better Business Bureau offers tips for avoiding common wedding hitches

It is estimated that more than two million couples will tie the knot in 2017. With the average cost of a wedding now at upwards of \$26,000, and all the time that goes into planning and holding a wedding, it is more important than ever that couples take every precaution to ensure their big day goes off without a hitch.

Because of the details involved – everything from choosing the venue, florist, caterer and photographer to the honeymoon location – it is difficult to have everything go perfectly. The Better Business Bureau receives hundreds of complaints every year about wedding-related vendors.

"There are honest mistakes that can be made, and there are also dishonest individuals who can ruin the best laid plans," said Steve J. Bernas, president and CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving Chicago and Northern Illinois. "That's why couples need to be very diligent in determining who they hire for one of the most important days of their lives."

The Better Business Bureau website is a place to start the search for reputable businesses that receive few complaints and make a good faith effort to resolve any complaints.

While wedding expos can be a great place to find many of the services needed for a wedding, the BBB advises couples to be cautious when presented with one-day deals or discounts in exchange for payment in advance. The BBB advises wedding planners to ask questions before

signing anything and to be skeptical if vendors request a large chunk of their fee in advance.

"It's also very important to ask about refund policies for deposits or prepayments," noted Bernas.

The BBB advises couples to ask vendors for references. Don't rely on brochures or online reviews, which can be faked.

Some common problems that couples encounter and tips for avoiding them include:

- Unexpected fees. Some caterers, hotels and reception venues try to charge extra for plate splitting, or cake cutting and corkage fees in cases where the cake or liquor is purchased off premises. Ask whether any fees apply beyond the cost per person, gratuities or room rental, if applicable.

- Dresses that don't measure up. Brides have complained to BBB about bridal shops ordering the wrong sizes and colors of gowns as well as dresses that arrive too late for alterations to be made. Make sure your order specifies new merchandise, and that it be sized to fit you and your bridesmaids. Remind the shop of your schedule in advance.

- Wedding transportation problems. Complaints about limousine service include poor customer service and rigid cancellation policies. Get details in writing. Ask in advance how the company handles problems if you aren't satisfied. And never pay the entire amount in advance.



- Musician switch. Avoid relying on a website, demo tape or phone conversation when hiring a band or other music service. Find out where you

can hear the musicians or the DJ play before you hire them. Ask who will actually perform at the reception and get a written commitment from

the band or musician, including the amount of time they will play and how much it would cost to extend the time if you so decide.

- Photographer issues. A common complaint is that the photographer hired doesn't show up or fails to deliver pictures until months after the wedding. Find out when and how pictures will be delivered, whether you will have the option of getting all the images on a DVD or CD, how much time you will have to choose the pictures, and whether other members of your family or wedding party will have access to the pictures.

- Floral changes. Fresh flowers are a perishable commodity, and the final bouquet or arrangements may need to change depending on what is available on the wedding day. Make sure you spell out a minimum size or number of stems in each bouquet or arrangement. Ask how the florist will handle any last-minute substitutions and charges.

- Bridal gown preservation. Some bridal shops and other businesses sell bridal gown preservation packages that include cleaning and a box for fees of \$250 or more. Many of these packages are no more than regular dry-cleaning and a cardboard box, which may not be acid-free. Check with a reputable cleaner about the cost of cleaning and storage for your gown.

The Better Business Bureau publishes reviews and ratings on more than 5.3 million businesses and 11,000 charities at bbb.org.

Experts predict hottest wedding trends for 2017

So what are the hottest wedding trend predictions for 2017? Experts who study the industry are predicting everything from Star Wars themes to image mapping technology to farm animals making an appearance at weddings in 2017.

Here are some predictions taken from The International Academy of Wedding and Event Planning's third annual International Wedding Trend Report and The Knot's Wedding Trends Report for 2017.

A twist on the sit-down dinner

Television personality, designer and planner David Tutera sees a shift away from food stations and toward "stylized tasting menus with tableside service."

"This lets you keep the sophistication of your menu, while having a little twist on the traditional sit-down dinner, making it more unique and fun for your guests," he said.

Over-the-top decor

Celebrity planner Fabrice Orlando says that over-the-top décor will continue to dominate designs, with special attention made toward vertical space.

Tutera echoed that.

"A new spin to hanging décor will start to emerge in addition to further use of the entire event space, from floor to ceiling, putting more emphasis on the walls or negative space in the reception as well," he said.

Opulent simplicity

Jes Gordon of properFUN says couples want something that is warm and inviting but also elegant and something that they want their guests to be organically impressed by.

"Our clients are enjoying rambling floral runners with lots of texture and varied views from all angles so each guest has a different take on the centerpiece," he said.

"They want to achieve a perfect balance of joy across all five senses."

Taking cues from Hollywood

Stylist Louise Beukes of B. Loved believes that couples will turn to popular movies for inspiration, including the recent "Star Wars: Episode VIII" and Disney's live-action remake of "Beauty and the Beast."

Reduced carbon-footprint fetes

Reducing the carbon footprint is on trend in 2017. For food and flowers, opt for in-season and locally sourced. Earth-friendly invitations can be made by printing with soy-based inks on recycled paper. For place cards, forget the paper and have a calligrapher write each guest's name on stones that can be kept as favors. Once the guests have gone home, don't toss the flowers; donate them to a hospital or nursing home to spread joy to others.

The guest swag lounge

This fun twist on the hotel welcome bag is ideal for destination weddings. Instead of stuffing and delivering them yourself, let your guests do the work. Set up a



room full of swag like snacks, drinks and local sweet treats and let guests choose their favorite items. This also gives you the opportunity to meet and greet guests in person when they arrive.

Icebreaker games

Some weddings today are an all-weekend affair, so it's essential that guests meet and get to know each other. What better way to get your guests mixing and mingling than with the ultimate grown-up icebreaker: games. Personalized Mad Libs about your first encounter and crossword puzzles that keep guests guessing your favorite date spot are great ways to break the ice before the ceremony or during the cocktail hour. Lawn games like croquet, horseshoes and cornhole are perfect for promoting new friendship at an outdoor wedding or cocktail hour.

Exceptional entertainment

Couples are pulling out all the stops to entertain their guests. Aerialists, acrobats, live painters and even choirs belting out Beyoncé have made their way into weddings. If that's too trendy, try a traditional route with music, but pair it with a performance – like a classical quartet and ballerinas in tutus.

One with nature

If you can't celebrate under the stars, bring the outside in. Add oversize potted trees and shrubbery to a ballroom for an enchanted forest look. Natural elements like wood and stone can be incorporated into table settings, and hanging flowers over tables or the dance floor creates an instant wow factor.

Image mapping technology

Want to turn your indoor venue into a lush garden, but don't have the budget for thousands of flowers and potted trees? Try a new projection technology called image mapping that allows you to transform a space with lighting and moving pictures. Give your ceremony and reception a special vibe by changing scenes from one to the next. You can even use this technology on your wedding cake. Not only is this trend tech forward, it benefits the environment and saves money on flowers and décor.

Metallic dresses and breezy silhouettes

Metallic dresses – think tasteful gold threading and silver beading – flooded the runways during Bridal Fashion Week. Wearing a metallic dress is perfect for a sophisticated evening affair. Also big this year are effortless dresses with flowing fabrics. They're a must-have for providing a lightweight, ethereal vibe for destination weddings or the second dress. Detachable skirts, floral embellishments and off-the-shoulder styles will also make an appearance on the aisle.

Formal portrait studios

There's a new twist on the traditional photo booth: portrait studios. These involve a designated space and sometimes props, but instead of posing with feather boas and silly sunglasses, the photographer asks you to vogue for the camera. The result is a glamorous, intimate portrait in your finest attire. Also trending for 2017 is the live illustrator who walks the party sketching guests.

Translucent cakes

The new take on the naked cake is the translucent cake. Instead of totally bare tiers, translucent cakes have a thin veil of frosting with just a bit of the cake showing. Typically iced in buttercream, these sweet delights are topped with fresh flowers or in-season fruits that hint at the flavors of the cake filling.

Furry friends

The hottest wedding guests of 2017 have four legs and furry coats. From bunnies and donkeys to llamas and pigs, couples having rustic barn weddings are incorporating farm animals into the wedding day.

A movable feast

With food trucks and passed multicourse meals, the sit-down dinner is starting to be replaced with more interactive options. Stations that feature your favorite eats, like a raw bar with a waiter live-shucking oysters or wine and cheese pairings with an on-site sommelier. If you don't want to forgo a plated dinner, host a cocktail hour and serve the main meal family style for a twist on tradition.

The Knot is the flagship brand of XO Group Inc., which helps people navigate and enjoy life's biggest moments, from getting married to having a baby. See theknot.com.

The International Wedding Trend Report can be found at weddingacademylive.com.



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