

Weddings

A bride and groom are captured in a romantic moment, kissing on a wide stone staircase. The groom, dressed in a dark blue suit, has his arms around the bride. The bride wears a white wedding dress with a long train and a vibrant red ribbon, and she holds a large bouquet of red and white roses. The background features a light-colored stone wall with intricate green ironwork and a window with a black metal grille.

FEBRUARY 26

The perfect bouquet

Calming the 'I do' nerves before the big day

Why hiring a wedding planner could benefit you



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Where love takes flight



Planning a wedding is a tall task, so it's no wonder why so many couples look forward to their honeymoons. After months of planning and then saying "I Do" in front of family and friends, couples have earned a little R&R.

With so much already on engaged couples' plates, it's easy to overlook honeymoon planning. But finding time to plan a honeymoon can ensure the trip is one couples will cherish for the rest of their lives. The following planning pointers can help the trip go smoothly.

- Pick a passport-friendly destination. When it comes to honeymoons, couples' options run the gamut from domestic locales to faraway destinations on the other side of the world. That suggests couples can pick anywhere within their budgets and simply book a trip. However,

that's not necessarily true. According to the U.S. State Department, many countries require that travelers have six months of validity remaining on their passports before they will issue a visa permitting them to enter. So couples should look at their passports to determine how long it is until the document expires. If the document expires within six months of their passport expiring, couples may not be able to enter the country they hope to visit. In such instances, couples should ensure they leave enough time to renew and receive their passports.

- Utilize a travel agency. Contrary to popular belief, travel agencies are still around and remain useful resources, especially for travelers visiting a destination for the first time. Many honeymooners fit that bill, so

they can benefit much from working with a travel agency. Couples tasked with planning a wedding already have a lot on their plate, so letting a travel agency take care of the honeymoon planning can ensure a memorable trip without requiring couples to do any legwork.

- Purchase travel insurance. The need for travel insurance has never been more apparent than in the last few years. Since the pandemic began, air travel has been a somewhat risky proposition. According to Flightaware, the first six months of 2022 featured more domestic flight cancellations in the United States than the entire 2021 calendar year combined. International travel could prove an even riskier proposition. Though the potential for cancellation should not deter couples from traveling by air for their hon-

eymoons, the sheer volume of cancellations underscores the importance of purchasing travel insurance. Before purchasing a travel insurance policy, couples are urged to read it in its entirety to ensure it provides the protection they're seeking.

- Plan early. With so much other work to do involving a wedding, couples can be excused for putting a honeymoon on the back-burner. But planning early can make the trip much more enjoyable. The benefits to planning early include more flights to choose from, a wider selection of rooms/lodging options at your destination, and more time to budget for the trip.

Honeymoon planning can be made simpler with a few simple strategies that also can ensure couples enjoy the trip of their dreams.

Forever starts today, again

Milestone moments are few and far between, which underscores the significance of celebrating such occasions. Wedding anniversaries certainly fit the bill of momentous occasions worth celebrating. Whether a couple has been married for half a century or 12 months, the following are some fun ways they can commemorate their time together.

- Take a second honeymoon. Second honeymoons are wildly popular ways to commemorate a wedding anniversary. Such trips present a direct connection to the time couples tied the knot. Book a stay in the same locale where you honeymooned years ago, even staying in the same hotel, and possibly even the same room. Relive special moments you each recall but don't hesitate to create new memories as well. Couples also can consider a second honeymoon in an entirely different destination than the one they visited on their first trip as a married couple years ago.

- Tie the knot again. Many couples choose to renew their vows on particularly notable anniversaries, such as a silver anniversary (25 years). But there's no rule against couples renewing their vows whenever they think it fit to do so, whether that's one year, five years, 12 years, and so on. Incorporating certain components from the initial wedding ceremony can make a renewal of vows even more special.

- Do your first date all over again. Married couples often remember their first date, and recreating that experience can be a fun way to celebrate a wedding anniversary. If a first date was dinner and a movie, find the movie on a streaming platform and then watch it after arriving home from dinner at the same restaurant where the date began. If the estab-



lishment has since closed, order in dishes you enjoyed that night or work together to cook them in the comforts of your own kitchen.

- Commemorate the era you tied the knot with a themed party. Preferences in relation to music, fashion and design

change with each generation, and couples may find it fun to recreate the era when they tied the knot, particularly if it's been decades since they said, "I do." For example, couples who walked down the aisle in the 1980s can host an 80s-themed party where

guests are encouraged to don their favorite attire from that unique era. Spend the night dancing away to a playlist of popular songs from the year you tied the knot, ending the night with a recreation of your first official dance as a married couple.

- Go back to where it all began. Visiting the venue where you tied the knot can be a fun and moving way to stroll down Memory Lane. If possible, contact your reception venue and, if it's been awhile since you and your guests have gathered for a night of fun, book the space and host a laid back reception for friends and loved ones who were there to celebrate with you all those years ago.

Wedding anniversaries are milestone moments, and there are many fun and unique ways for couples to commemorate these special events.

Toast to the happy couple



Many special moments unfold during a couple's wedding day. A bride's walk down the aisle, a married couple's first dance together and, of course, the moment couples say "I do" are just a few of the many memorable moments to take place during a wedding.

Another memorable moment, and one that couples have little to no control over, is the wedding toast. Toasting is a tradition that some historians trace to ancient Greece, which should give nervous toasters-to-be a little more confidence as the wedding day approaches. After all, given the lengthy history of toasting, it's likely that millions of people have toasted happy couples over the years. If millions of others can

do it, then so can this year's crop of best men, maids of honor and proud parents who will be asked to raise a glass to happy couples. As a couple's big day draws near, those trusted with toasting the newlyweds can consider these tips.

- Introduce yourself. Unless it's a very intimate affair with only a handful of well-acquainted guests, introduce yourself before beginning your toast. This not only ensures everyone recognizes who you are, but also provides a simple way to begin your comments without feeling a need to impress.

- Keep things lighthearted. Though it's best to avoid being too informal, a lighthearted toast

with a funny anecdote and/or a joke or two can help to maintain the jovial vibe of the reception.

- Explain your relationship. Maids of honor and best men are often chosen because they have a special relationship with the bride or groom. So it's alright to give a brief explanation of that relationship and explain how much it means to you during the toast.

- Toast the couple. Even though most people toasting at a wedding have a special connection with just one half of the newly married couple, it's normal to toast the new couple and their happiness before closing your remarks. If you want to toast each person when delivering your remarks, speak to your counterpart

(i.e., a maid of honor if you're the best man, or vice versa) for some special insight.

- Keep your toast short. Toasts need not be lengthy. In fact, toasts should be on the shorter side so everyone tasked with delivering a toast can do so in a reasonable amount of time.

- Avoid winging it. Plan your remarks ahead of time, even writing down your toast or at least organizing your ideas before you're handed the microphone. Winging it might seem like an option, but if you speak off-the-cuff you'll likely find yourself rambling and going off course. Planning also allows time to practice your remarks before the big day, which also can help to calm your nerves.

Giving that special gift

Who doesn't love a goodie bag? Goodie bags are staples of kids' parties, and "swag bags" have become the norm at everything from trade shows to town events.

Known as "welcome bags" at weddings, these tokens of appreciation help set the tone for the wedding experience and are an extra touch that couples may want to consider.

Welcome bags may be crafted for out-of-town guests or guests who are attending destination weddings.

They can be filled with necessities or just a fun mix of items. Either way, they're great ways for couples to show friends and family they are excited for those who are sharing in the celebration. Here are some ideas for filling welcome bags.

Essential items

Oftentimes welcome bags are filled with essentials that can help guests in a pinch. Pain relievers, breath mints, sewing kits, stain removers, and similar items are necessities that will come in handy.

Eats and treats

Food can appeal to a wide range of people. By filling up welcome bags with some bites from local vendors, couples can offer their guests a gift and support local small businesses.

Pampering products

Welcome bags also can include luxury toiletries, creams, bath bombs, or any other product designed to pamper.

Products for pets

If the vast majority of guests are pet lovers, then treats and trinkets for their four-legged friends may be appreciated.

Mixologist must-haves



Packaging the ingredients to make a signature drink, perhaps one that will be served at the wedding, is another clever way to fill welcome bags. Utilize miniatures/airplane bottles of liquor and pair with small amounts of mixer and garnish.

Overnight items

A welcome bag also can be outfitted with needs for travelers. Earplugs, sleep masks, cozy socks, and travel toothbrush are some essentials that many out-of-towners will appreciate when they check into their ho-

tel later on.

Personalized bags

Sometimes the welcome bag alone can be the gift. A decorative or monogrammed canvas bag works as a tote for the beach or a reusable bag for the supermarket.

place flowers on a chuppah to add beauty and elegance. Flowers also are commonly used in Muslim wedding ceremonies, appearing in floral arches or even as a stunning floral wall during the Nikah to separate the bride and groom. During religious ceremonies, couples should heed the requirements of the house of worship and ensure that flowers are modest and within the parameters set for the faith.

Aisle decorations

Flowers may be used on the seatbacks or on the sides of pews. Small flowers, ribbons and greenery are hung to enhance the ambiance of the space.

Centerpieces

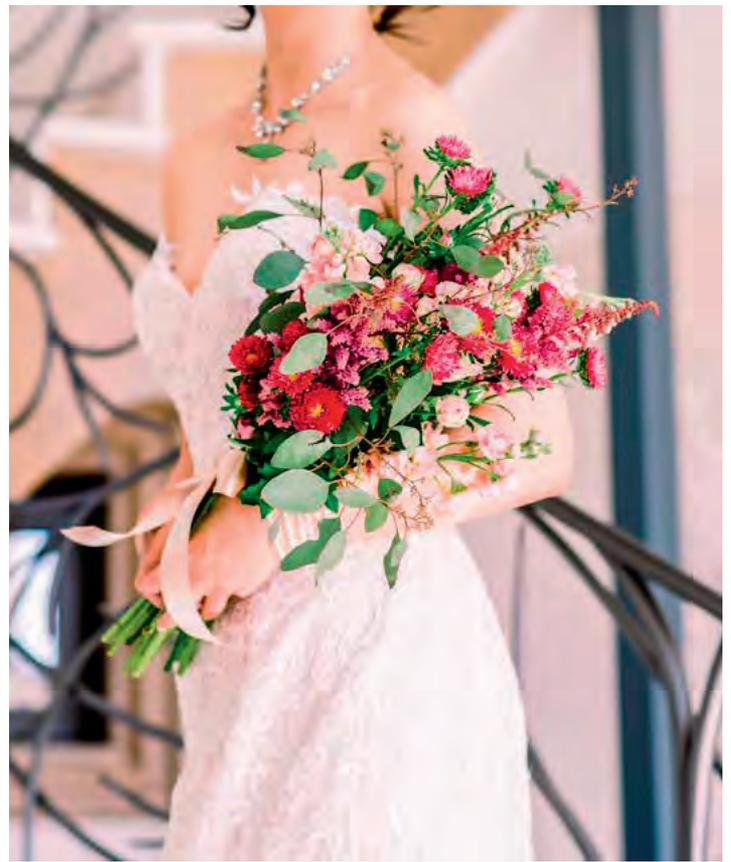
Flowers are a focal point during wedding receptions, taking up prime real estate in the center of tables. Knowledgeable florists can

create pieces that are beautiful and will not obstruct the view or comfort of guests when seated. Additional floral arrangements may be included to enhance additional areas of the reception space, such as floral arches for photographs, vases placed near the seating chart and even flowers in the restrooms to make these spaces even more inviting.

Toss bouquet

If a couple decides to adhere to traditional wedding customs, the bride will toss a smaller bouquet to eager single women ready to catch it. A tossed bouquet may feature fresh flowers or artificial silk flowers. This decoy bouquet enables the bride to return home with her actual bouquet to preserve it, but still participate in this classic tradition.

Flowers enhance a wedding with their beauty, symbolism and aroma.



YOUR CHOICE OF FLOWERS

Beautiful bouquets, arrangements depend on season, location, fragrance, and uniqueness. Here are some flower options to get you started on your dream bouquet.

- Roses
- Ranunculus
- peony
- Hydrangea
- Dahlia
- Calla Lily
- Gardenia
- Orchid
- Protea
- Lilac
- Lily of the valley
- Anemone
- Tulip
- Sunflower
- Baby breathe
- Carnation
- Sweetpea
- Anthurium
- Amaranthus
- Marigold
- Daisy
- Amaryllis
- Black-eyed Susan
- Camellia
- Cherry Blossoms
- Chamomile
- Craspedia (Billy Ball)
- Foxglove
- Lavender

Petals for your perfect day



Flowers showcase the beauty and pageantry of the natural world. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “The earth laughs in flowers,” and Lady Bird Johnson is quoted as saying, “Where flowers bloom, so does hope.” Flowers are inextricably tied to some of the most important events in a person’s life. Flowers wish people well, console those who are mourning, and symbolize love and affection.

Flowers are an essential component of wedding day celebrations. Flowers symbolize love, fertility and new beginnings. According to The Knot 2025 Real Weddings Study, the average cost of wedding flowers in 2025 was \$2,723, which serves as a testament to how important flowers can be on these special days. Flowers are incorporated into many facets of a wedding. Couples planning their weddings can give thought to the many ways flowers can enhance this special day.

Bouquets

Wedding bouquets are some of the first arrangements people think of when planning a

wedding. Historically, wedding bouquets contained herbs that were designed to ward off evil spirits. Today, one is much more likely to find a gathering of many beautiful flowers tied at the stems with ribbon. Bridesmaids carry bouquets as well, and flower girls toss flower petals along the aisle during the processional. Bouquets typically coordinate to the theme of the wedding and the color scheme. A bride’s bouquet tends to be similar in design to her bridesmaids’ but may feature more muted colored blooms to complement her gown.

Boutonnieres and corsages

Boutonnieres and corsages are customarily bestowed upon wedding party members and the parents of the happy couple. They also may be gifted to additional special people attending the wedding, such as grandparents or other guests of honor.

Altar arrangements

Floral decorations also may be placed around or near the altar for the wedding ceremony. Jewish celebrants may

Makeup that says ‘I do’

There is no denying that weddings can be exciting, memorable and expensive. According to data from the wedding planning and registry website Zola, the average wedding in the United States in 2024 cost \$33,000. Prices for weddings will vary depending on geography and services.

In an effort to rein in spending, couples may wonder where they can cut costs, and one service that may be up for consideration is a professional makeup artist. After all, a bride and her bridesmaids may feel they already have plenty of experience applying makeup, and the plethora of online tutorials can guide them through areas where they may need some help. But before making a pilgrimage to Ulta or Sephora for supplies, savvy brides should realize there are plenty of reasons to utilize a pro when it comes to wedding makeup.

· Bridal makeup isn't like everyday makeup. A professional knows how to create a look that will remain flawless throughout the entire day. From the ceremony to the reception, makeup has to be durable, and a pro will know which products and techniques to use to ensure everything stays put, advises Shervonne Kitto, a makeup artist serving New York and New Jersey.

· You can actually save money going with a pro. Doing makeup yourself may not result in cost savings. Remember, employees at makeup stores may do your makeup for a reduced cost initially, but they are in the business of selling products. Many consumers walk away spending more in products than they



intended, and sometimes the cost in getting all new bridal makeup could actually be more than if you relied on a professional.

· Enjoy time savings. Professionals who have mastered their crafts can quickly and efficiently create a desired makeup look, saving you time compared to a do-it-yourself

attempt.

· Enhance your beauty. A pro knows which techniques to use to play up certain features and minimize others. This can help present the best version of yourself on one of the most photographed days of your life.

· Create a comprehensive look. Hiring a professional

makeup artist means you can coordinate how you and your bridal party look, which can serve to complement the overall wedding theme. If you go the DIY route, you might end up with a bridal party with some very different-looking makeup applications. A pro may do some photo-enhancing minimal touches for the gentlemen in the wedding as well.

· Enjoy time to relax. Having your hair and makeup done by someone else affords you an hour or more to just sit back and be pampered, something that likely will not occur for the rest of the busy wedding day.

When considering makeup artists, each should offer a free trial and be receptive to clients' needs and requests. However, it is worthwhile to trust the makeup artist as he or she ultimately knows how to craft winning wedding day looks.

Gown goals achieved



Weddings mark a turning point from one stage in life to another. The significance of that transition is perhaps one reason why couples and their guests dress so nicely for a wedding ceremony and reception. Formal garb is a wedding tradition, and guests anxiously await seeing which type of gown a bride will wear. In western cultures, white wedding gowns have been the standard since the nineteenth century and are believed to symbolize purity and grace. In eastern cultures, wedding gowns often have been elaborate, colorful creations that have their own symbolic meanings.

Shopping for a wedding gown can spark mixed emotions. While it is exciting to try on some re-

markable garments, there also is the pressure of knowing all eyes will be on you while wearing this couture creation. Narrowing down wedding gown prospects can take vision, time and patience.

Make an appointment

Many bridal shops operate by appointment only. That's because the staff wants to devote complete attention to a client, and having people simply walk in from the street can draw their attention away and/or lead to long wait times.

Narrow down styles

Think about what your personal style might be and how you want to look on your wedding

day. If you're not sure about the vocabulary surrounding dress silhouettes, visit Pinterest or Instagram and save images of dresses that you love. Then you can show the sales staff what you are thinking instead of going in empty-handed.

Keep an open mind

Try on a few different styles even if you have a particular dress in mind. You never know if something might be a better fit for your body type or the scope and style of your wedding unless you give it a go.

Start the process early

Unlike off-the-rack clothing, most wedding shops will have to order your dress and have it

shipped. Then comes a few weeks for alterations. KWH Bridal notes eight to 12 months before a wedding is a good time to choose and order a dress. Brides magazine says most made-to-order wedding gowns take about six to nine months to create. There also are three separate fittings to ensure the gown will fit like a glove.

Invite a handful of confidantes

It's best not to arrive at the shopping appointment with an entire entourage. Pick, at the most, four people whose opinions you trust; otherwise, it could be a case of too many cooks in the kitchen. As a bride-to-be you'll already be anxious, and you'll want soothing, supportive people with you.

THE FIRST LOOK

Tradition figures prominently in many weddings, but one notable custom is perhaps losing steam among modern couples. According to The Knot 2023 Real Weddings Study, which surveyed nearly 10,000 couples across the United States who tied the knot in 2023, 56 percent of couples did a first look on their wedding day. The first look refers to couples seeing each other all dressed up in their formal attire prior to the wedding ceremony. The Knot reports that just five years ago only 8 percent of couples surveyed did a first look, which suggests the tradition of a couple waiting to see each other until the ceremony begins is one wedding day tradition that is perhaps falling by the wayside.



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- “Somebody Like You,” Keith Urban
- “Perfect,” Ed Sheeran
- “Joy of My Life,” Chris Stapleton
- “Marry Me,” Train
- “Ho Hey,” The Lumineers
- “Rewrite the Stars,” Zac Efron, Zendaya
- “You Look Like You Love Me,” Ella Langley feat. Riley Green
- “Beautiful Things,” Benson Boone
- “Birds of a Feather,” Billie Eilish
- “Until I Found You,” Stephen Sanchez
- “Ordinary,” Alex Warren
- “Thinking out loud,” Ed Sheeran
- “Stand by me,” Ben E. King
- “My girl,” Otis Redding
- “Crazy for you,” Madonna
- “Fall in love,” Bailey Zimmerman
- “Just the two of us,” Grover Washington, Jr., Bill Withers
- “When I fall in love,” Michael Bublé
- “I will always love you,” Dolly Parton
- “We can reach the stars,” Blake Shelton
- “I love you so,” The Walters
- “Lover,” Taylor Swift
- “24K Magic,” Bruno Mars
- “I don’t want to miss a think,” Aerosmith

Music behind the moment



Weddings feature a combination of elements that set the stage for memorable events. Music is one component that can enhance any celebration. Couples often give considerable thought to the music that will be played at the reception, but they should not overlook the music that will be featured during the wedding ceremony. After all, the ceremony comes first and often helps to establish the tone for the occasion.

Whether the ceremony is traditional or not, couples can keep these tips and songs in mind when selecting music for their wedding day.

Know the song number

There are a few big moments during a ceremony where music can enhance the vibe. These include the prelude, processional and the recessional. The prelude is the music that is playing while guests arrive and find their seats. The processional occurs when the wedding party enters and walks down the aisle. The recessional is when the wedding party and newly married couple make their exit before their guests follow suit.

A religious ceremony may have music that precedes or follows certain ceremonial rights. Understanding how many songs will be needed gives couples a starting point for narrowing down song choices.

Identify potential restrictions

Conservative wedding venues, including houses of worship, may have certain requirements that govern song choices. In such settings, religious songs, including popular hymns or modern worship music, may be the standard. It's best to discuss ceremonial music guidelines with an officiant to understand what can and cannot be played during the ceremony. Non-religious venues typically allow for more flexibility in relation to music played during a ceremony.

Consider instrumental

Instrumental music can be a great choice for ceremonies, as it is understated and classy. Guests will be familiar with the songs, but will not be distracted by the lyrics. Instrumental selections also are easily played if live musicians will be performing at the ceremony.



Calming the ‘I do’ nerves



Nerves are to be expected when getting married. It is exciting to be engaged and realize you have met that special someone with whom you want to share the rest of your life. But anxiety may creep in as the big day draws closer.

A lot of planning goes into a wedding, and often the pressure that comes with trying to create the perfect day can overshadow feelings of love and excitement. That is when wedding jitters may crop up. Couples must recognize they're not alone if they feel a little uneasy as their wedding day draws closer. However, there are ways you can address and tame jitters both before and during the wedding.

Step away from tasks

Chances are you have spent

months with the wedding on your brain. In fact, it likely has consumed your daily life. Take a day or two to do something unrelated to the wedding, whether you're alone, with friends or with your future spouse.

Attend a fun event, go out to dinner, queue up several movies for a night in, or take a small trip. Keep wedding details out of the picture while you're enjoying yourself.

Forget about being perfect

Wedding jitters often stem from being nervous about everything going to plan. You may put undue pressure on yourself to ensure everything is perfect. But perfection is impossible, and the sooner you accept that a thing or two will likely not work out, the less stressed you may feel.

You'll be surrounded by family and friends who will help you roll with the punches, whether that's a torn hemline or a missing buffet item. Guests are here to celebrate you, not pass judgment.

Discuss large changes to come

Some couples feel jittery because they haven't spoken about all of the changes ahead. These can include relocation, merging of finances and whether or not children are in your future, among other things. Stress can be tamed if you take a break from wedding planning and discuss these important topics.

Learn relaxation techniques

Learning to relax is important when dealing with anxiety. There are many different

relaxation techniques to explore. Some include meditation, yoga, deep-tissue massage, exercise, or immersing yourself in a peaceful spot outdoors.

Some people turn to reading or other hobbies to relax. Do not look to alcohol or medication as an outlet to alleviate stress.

Talk to someone

If anxiety about the wedding is eating you up, consider speaking with a professional therapist or even a close friend or family member. Sometimes a new perspective is all you need to calm the jitters.

Nervousness when planning a wedding is understandable. However, couples can take steps to tame jitters so they enjoy all that goes into tying the knot.

Something old, new, and blue

Weddings are special events that celebrate two individuals' love for one another. Weddings bring together friends and family to witness couples share vows and devote their lives to each other.

Wedding guests recognize that certain components are commonplace in ceremonies and receptions. Perhaps you were once a ring bearer or caught the bouquet? There's a rich history behind the traditions that feature prominently at many weddings. Here's a look at traditions past and present and the meaning behind these customs.

Marriage

The custom of marriage can be traced back thousands of years to when hunters and gatherers started coming together to form societies and farm land. In order to ensure the success of communities, couplings were developed to produce offspring and maintain households.

Tie the knot

Getting married is sometimes referred to as "tying the knot." This stems from the custom of "handfasting," which is a common practice among various cultures around the world, and notably in ancient Rome. The bride and groom's hands are tied together for the duration of the ceremony, not to be released until the wedding is made official. This isn't something you see too often at modern weddings, but can be something unique couples may want to consider.

Bridal bouquet

A bouquet of beautiful flowers is held by the bride on her wedding day. Roses, orchids, peonies, and other fragrant blooms are often included, but in ancient times brides' bouquets were likely made of herbs. According to the resource Minted Weddings, these aromatic



herbs were used to ward off evil spirits.

Veil

Evil spirits also were the basis for the wearing of bridal veils, as they were utilized to hide brides from these miscreants. Veils now are more style than substance.

Bridesmaids

In ancient Rome, bridesmaids were tasked with protecting the bride. They wore the same dresses as the bride to confuse evil spirits from finding the soon-to-be-betrothed and cursing her. Today's bridesmaids are less decoy and more helper. They may wear similar dresses to the bride and one another, but they aren't trying to fool any spirits.

Tossing rice



Rice and grains were long regarded as signs of prosperity and fertility, according to the gifting company Personal Creations. Therefore, couples were showered with rice to ensure their good fortune. Consumption of uncooked rice has been

proven to be detrimental to some wildlife, so rice has now been widely replaced with bubbles or birdseed.

Cutting the cake

At the reception, many couples link hands and make the first cut in their wedding cakes. Wedding Wire says it's a tradition that around 80 percent of wedding couples partake in. It is believed this tradition symbolizes the couple's first official task performed together, and marks the promise to support and take care of one another throughout the marriage. However, in the past, brides were responsible for cutting the wedding cake alone and distributed slices to guests to aid in fertility, according to BakingNook.com.

Weddings are full of traditions with interesting histories.

Helping her shine

Engaged couples tend to ask their closest family members and friends to be in their bridal parties. Such requests are an honor and bridal party members tend to be excited to play such a significant role on a couple's wedding day. But bridal party members also do much to help engaged couples before the big day.

Couples can choose to delegate as many tasks as they desire to bridal party members. Before delegating, couples can look to tradition to guide them in regard to asking their bridal parties to lend a hand.

Best man:

The best man toast at a wedding reception tends to be a jovial part of the festivities that couples and guests look forward to, so asking a best man to give such a speech is customary. Best man responsibilities also may include organizing a bachelor party or a similar type of get-together with fellow groomsmen and other guests prior to the wedding. A best man also may coordinate a gift for the groom if the groomsmen want to give the groom an item that requires pooling resources.

Maid/matron of honor:

A maid/matron of honor typically delivers a toast at the reception prior to the best man's speech. A maid/matron of honor also may coordinate a bachelorette party and bridal shower in the weeks or months before the wedding. A maid/matron of honor may handle any problems that arise in the hours before the ceremony so the bride can relax. For example, a maid/matron of honor may work to ensure the bride is shielded from issues affecting hair and makeup, the venue, last-minute gown concerns, and other unforeseen problems that can arise. A maid/matron of honor may need to do some delegating of her own prior to the ceremony, asking fellow bridesmaids



to help coordinate party plans.

Bridesmaids

Bridesmaids can help a bride when she's choosing her gown as well as the dresses bridesmaids themselves will wear. Bridesmaids also help the maid/matron of honor coordinate the bachelorette party and pitch in to help address any issues that arise on the day of the ceremony.

Groomsmen:

Groomsmen can be tasked with helping the best man coordinate a bachelor party. Groomsmen also can be asked to schedule their tuxedo fittings to afford enough time for alterations and orders to be completed in time for the big day.

Parents:

Parents' roles have changed considerably in recent years. While the parents of the bride traditionally paid for the wedding and grooms' parents were tasked with bankrolling the rehearsal dinner, many modern couples now foot some, if not all, of those bills themselves. Parents can still be asked to lend some financial assistance.

7 WAYS TO INCLUDE FAMILY

- **Processional**
Couples can let more than just parents and the wedding party strut their stuff down the aisle. Allow other family members to shine, such as grandparents or someone who has been a very close and supportive person in the couple's life.
- **Readings/Speeches**
Family members can give readings during religious ceremonies, lead prayers or make certain speeches. It's also possible to ask a family member to officiate the wedding entirely or lead certain unity rituals like candle-lighting or sand-combining ceremonies that signal the blending of lives.
- **Play music**
Musical family members can play an instrument during the ceremony or reception, or even sing if they have the vocal chops. Another idea is to include songs during the wedding that are meaningful to a particular relative.
- **Family traditions**
Incorporate family traditions into the reception, including cultural dances, special foods, traditional songs, or anything that is unique to the family.
- **Wear special clothing**
A couple wear clothing that is meaningful to a loved one, like a grandmother's wedding gown or a tie that was passed down through the generations. If a family member is a tailor or seamstress, that person might also help tailor a wardrobe for the wedding.
- **Coordinate dances**
The bride, groom, mother, and father typically enjoy the spotlight dances during a wedding reception, but couples can expand special dances to honor and include additional family members. A large group dance that invites several family members onto the dance floor is a great way to get everyone involved.
- **Photo display**
A couple can set aside a table to showcase special people in their lives with a brief description of why these people are so meaningful to them. This also is a place to honor any deceased relatives who are in couples' hearts.

Weddings meet expertise



The average cost of a wedding in 2022 in the United States came out to roughly \$30,000, according to a survey of 12,000 couples compiled by wedding planning site The Knot. The survey also found New Jersey and Massachusetts topped the list of most costly states to tie the knot.

When committing to as significant a financial investment as a wedding, couples may want to do all they can to ensure their big day is a hit. There are many advantages to hiring a professional wedding planner, who can take the stress out of a process that should be fun.

1. Serves as a sounding board: Wedding planners can

take couples' ideas and turn them into reality. Seasoned planners know how to help a couple's vision come alive.

2. Lightens the responsibility load: A wedding planner takes time-consuming responsibilities off couples' plates. These can include scheduling appointments, dealing with vendors, conducting walk-throughs of locations, and more. This can be a big asset to couples who work full-time.

3. Offers a wealth of knowledge: A good wedding planner has years of experience handling weddings and will know which aspects will work and which may not. Also, a wedding planner can likely handle tasks expeditiously, while cou-

ples with no experience planning a wedding may not work so quickly.

4. Helps couples save money: Knowledge and experience also comes with contacts in the industry that can help couples save money. The planner likely knows where to get the best deals, and may be privy to insider pricing and other discounts.

5. Serves as a buffer: While everyone wants weddings to be incident-free, conflicts can and do arise. A wedding planner can serve as a mediator or run interference between challenging family members or even vendors.

6. Reduces overall stress levels: There's a measurable

difference between the stress experienced by couples who don't hire wedding planners and those who do. The main goal of a wedding is for it to be memorable and for couples and their guests to enjoy themselves. By leaving the planning to someone else, couples can arrive at the big day feeling more relaxed and ready to have fun.

7. There is an extra person around: Wedding planners can field questions or handle tipping and other tasks on the wedding day, freeing up time for couples to have fun.

Wedding planners can provide support, expertise, company, and industry contacts to make weddings go smoothly.

Getting there stress-free

On a couple's wedding day, some effort will be required to transport the bride and groom and wedding party participants and guests. Coordinating transportation is a task couples must add to their planning checklist.

Wedding transportation is perhaps best broken down into three categories: transportation for the couple and the wedding party, transportation for guests, and transportation for unique situations. These tips can make navigating wedding transportation needs go smoothly.

Transportation for the couple and wedding party

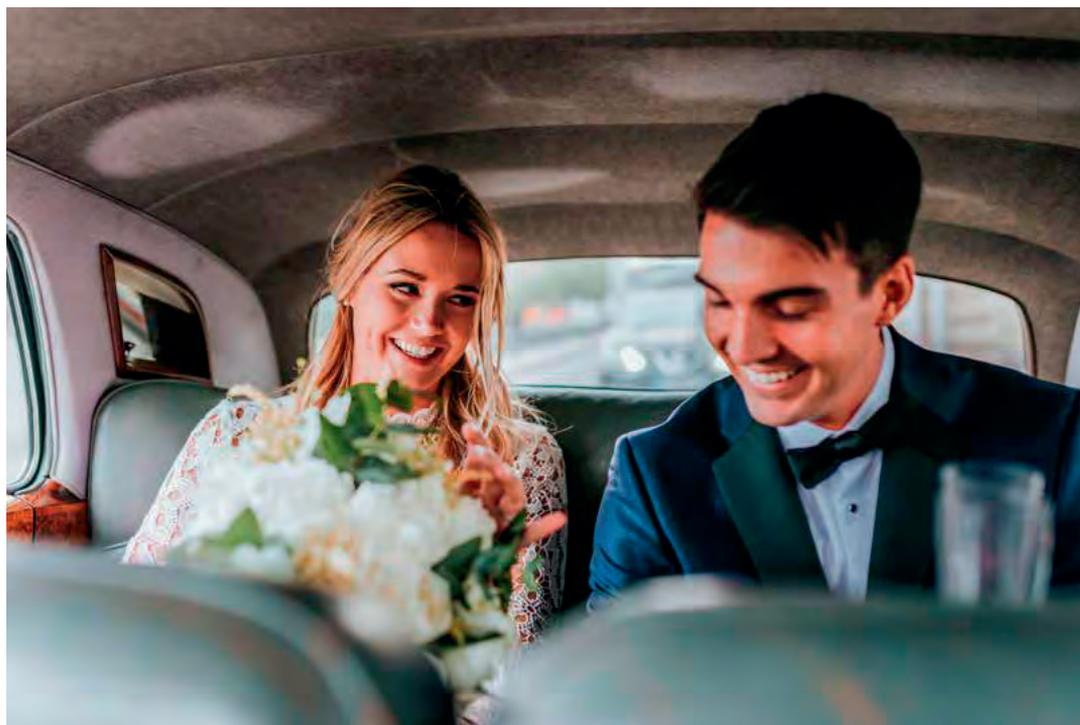
Ensuring that the couple and wedding party participants arrive to the ceremony (and later the reception venue) on time is essential. Couples and their attendants traditionally arrive in some sort of hired car, whether it's a limousine or vintage/classic ride. It's important to find a service that will pick up the couple (separately) and their bridesmaids and groomsmen as well as parents of the bride or groom and bring them to the ceremony site. Drivers usually wait for the ceremony to end before taking passengers to photography locations and eventually the reception venue. Vendors typically price for hourly service with a minimal rental period. Larger vehicles will have a higher hourly rate.

Transportation for guests

Although it's not customary to offer transportation for all guests to the ceremony or reception venue, in the event of circumstances like hotel room accommodations close to the reception, couples may want to offer shuttle service between the reception center and hotel. If the wedding reception will be non-traditional, and take place at various stop-off spots, like a bar crawl, party buses or trolley service could be considered to keep all guests together.

Unique situations

Couples may want to enhance



their wedding festivities with some specialized details that might require unique transportation situations. For example, a wedding that takes place on an island would require a ferry service or water taxi. Couples tying the knot during the picturesque winter season can go the extra mile and commission horse-drawn sleighs. Rustic weddings have grown in popularity. A charming hayride can complete the picture for a wedding recep-

tion held at a farm or in a converted barn.

After the festivities

The couple also may need to consider transportation once the wedding has ended. Those going directly to a honeymoon may need a hired car to take them to the airport. Transportation also will be needed for any wedding party participants who did not take their own vehicles to the wedding, but

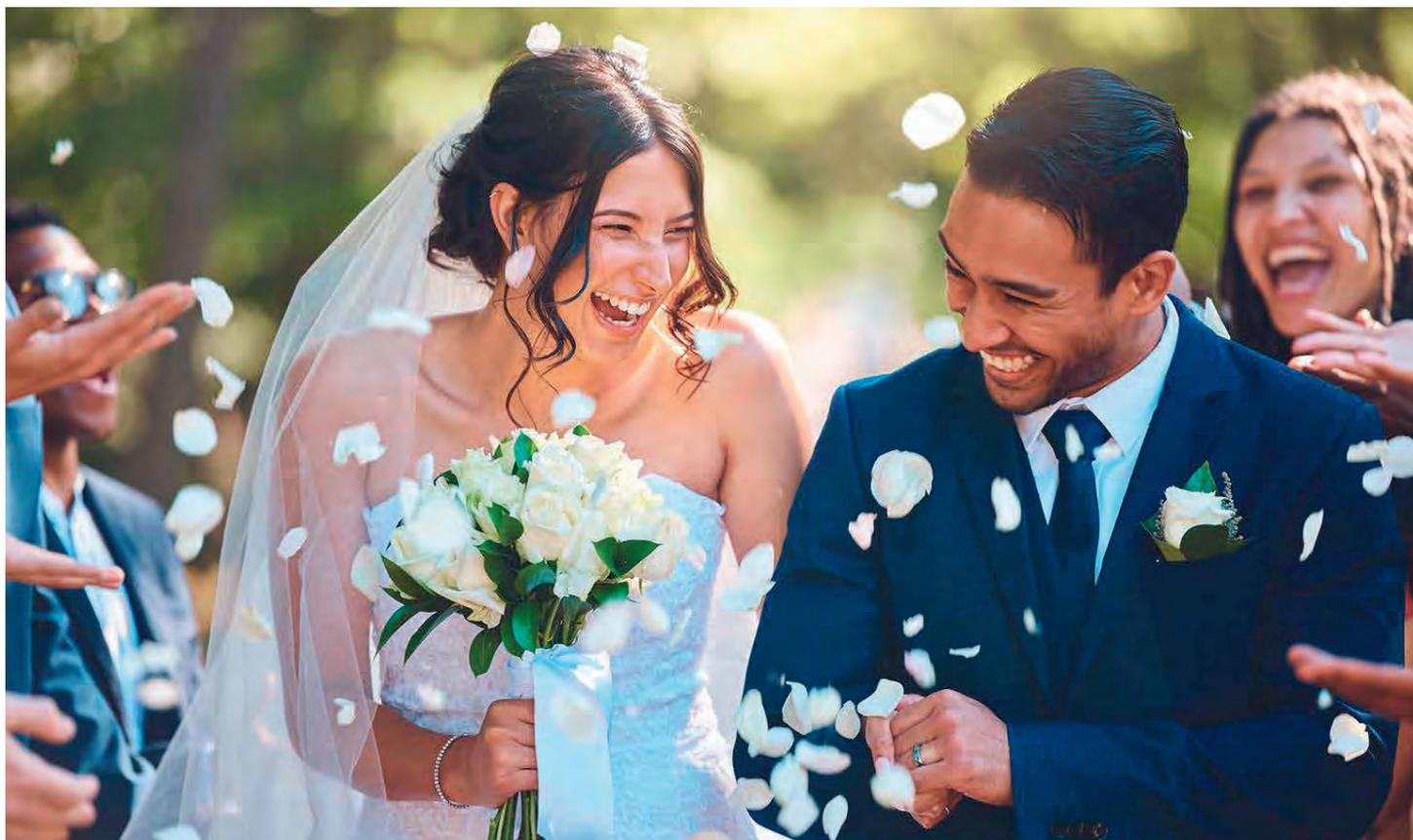
DID YOU KNOW?

According to The Knot Real Weddings Survey, 57 percent of couples invited 101 or more guests to their weddings in 2023, suggesting that large weddings are in style. The Knot survey found that the average wedding size in 2023 was 115 guests, and that only 13 percent of couples invited between one and 50 guests to their big day.

rode in party buses or limousines.

Wedding transportation may not be the most glamorous aspect of wedding planning, but well-coordinated transportation is a necessity that couples, their friends and family will appreciate.

Say yes to the perfect venue



Engaged couples make plenty of decisions when planning their weddings, and some may be more significant than others. Choosing a wedding reception venue is among the most important decisions couples will make.

The reception venue is where couples and guests will spend the majority of the day, and no two venues are the same. As couples begin shopping for a place to host their reception, they can ask themselves and venue representatives a multitude of questions to narrow down their options and ultimately make the best decision for them.

What are we looking for in a venue?

Some couples may know precisely what they want their receptions to be like, while others may not have the slightest idea. Of course, some couples may be somewhere in the middle. Prior to beginning the process of choos-

ing a venue, couples can identify what they're looking for. Is a venue with outdoor entertaining space a priority? Do you want to hold the ceremony and reception at the same venue? How many guests will the venue need to accommodate? Answering these questions and others can help couples narrow down their search.

How much can we afford?

Budget is a significant variable when shopping for a wedding venue. Some venues offer multiple spaces that can accommodate couples with a wide range of budgets, while others are singular spaces suited to receptions within a specified size. Itemizing a budget and determining how much can be allotted to a reception venue can serve as a guideline when couples begin searching for sites.

Is our date available?

Once couples know what they want and what they can afford, they can prepare a number of questions that are worth asking at every venue they visit. Perhaps the most important, at least for those couples who have already chosen a wedding date, is the availability of the site on that date. If couples have not yet chosen a date, they can ask for a list of available dates at each venue they visit and perhaps use that knowledge to pick a day, particularly if they prefer a given venue.

Who will cater the meal?

Some venues do their own catering, while others may have working relationships with outside caterers. And some venues rent only the spaces and require couples to hire their own caterers and arrange all the details on their own. If a venue caters the meal, ask if they accommodate people with various restrictions,

such as food allergies and gluten intolerances.

How many hours are included in the rental agreement?

It's important that couples know what they're getting, including how much time they get in each space they consider. The online wedding resource The Knot notes a standard wedding reception is five hours, the first of which is generally designated as cocktail hour.

What is the payment structure?

Identifying the payment structure, include down payment due date and when the final payment must be made, is important as well. This knowledge can allow couples to map out their expenses, the most significant of which is typically the reception venue.

These are just some of the questions couples can ask as they plan their wedding receptions.

Big love, smart spending

Wedding planning is a unique experience unlike any endeavor most couples will ever encounter. Much effort goes into planning a wedding, and that includes building a budget that ensures the big day will be fun without breaking the bank.

Most couples planning a wedding have never tied the knot before, so it can be difficult to determine a reasonable amount to spend. It's easy to go overboard when planning a wedding, and couples may find their list of wants and, consequently, their expenses, growing as they get into the weeds of wedding planning. Though it might require some difficult decisions, couples can keep these tips in mind so they can build a wedding budget that won't land them in debt after saying, "I do."

- Determine funding. The days when a bride's parents would finance the wedding entirely on their own are largely a thing of the past. According to a recent WeddingWire Newlywed Report, parents now pay for 52 percent of wedding expenses. As couples begin establishing a wedding budget, it's imperative that they first determine who, if anyone, will be helping them finance the big day. Fifty-two percent of wedding expenses is a significant amount of money, but in that scenario, couples will still need to come up with roughly half of the money needed to fund their weddings. Couples without substantial savings may be forced to cut back in order to avoid beginning their life as a married couple in debt.

- Make a list of potential expenses. Location will be a significant factor when determining potential expenses. For example, a 2022 ValuePenguin analysis of data from The



Photos by MetroCreative

Wedding Report found that the average wedding in Massachusetts cost roughly \$30,500 in 2020, while couples tying the knot in Arkansas spent around \$12,500 on their weddings. With such wild fluctuations, it's important that couples get an accurate estimate of how much it may cost them to get married in a given city. Couples who met in a city and still live in a city but grew up in a suburb might save a considerable sum by getting married in their hometowns. Compare and contrast prices in locales you're considering, and then build your budget accordingly. This can help you avoid sticker shock and going over budget. Notable expenses to budget include the venue, attire (i.e., wedding dress and tuxedo rental), hairstyle and makeup, entertainment, photography, and transportation, among others.



- Make a list of what's most important. Most couples will have to compromise in order to avoid taking on debt to finance their weddings. An earnest discussion about what's most important to each person can ensure you both get what you want. Each person can make a

list of their priorities, ranking them from most important to least important. Once lists are shared, couples can see where their priorities converge and where they diverge. Any items that rank low on each person's list of priorities can be afforded less funding, while those that are high on each list can take up more of the budget, if necessary.

- Commit to a limit before spending a dime. Committing to a limit before spending a dime can help couples keep wedding costs more manageable. Once that number is defined, couples can then work within its parameters, which can make potentially difficult decisions a little easier by narrowing options at a time when options can seem endless.

A well-planned budget can be just what couples need to begin married life on strong financial footing.



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