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Planning Your Perfect Wedding Reception

The Ultimate Guide

By Mary Wells

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About the Author, Mary Wells

Mary Wells did not have to rely just on her recollections of her own wedding reception or those of her friends' weddings, (which included many great ones and a few disasters) for material to start this book.

She was almost overwhelmed by the response from her large family, friends and even members of the many social and community groups that she is part of when she casually brought up the subject of, “How to have a Perfect Wedding Reception”.

She hopes that this will help you, your partner and your families to ensure that yours is among the very best ever.

Planning the Perfect Wedding Reception

A wedding reception is the celebration of your wedding in the form of a party. There are no specific rules for them. It normally is a reflection of the personalities and preferences of the newlyweds and a time for you both to celebrate with your friends and families.

Planning for your wedding reception should start as soon as you fix the date of your wedding. You can choose to either take care of all arrangements or co-ordinate your efforts with a professional wedding planner. Plan well and carefully to get things right on your special day.

Location

The venue for your wedding reception is an important factor. Your choice needs to take many things into consideration, including the number of guests, music, entertainment, and bar requirements.

If you have a long guest list and plans to organize a DJ, bar, dancing and a lavish spread, you need a large, professional venue like a hotel, banquet hall or similar.

If it will be an informal wedding reception with very few of your close friends and relatives, you can have it in a smaller location, even in a hall attached to the church or chapel.

If you move to a reception soon after your wedding at a different location, make proper arrangements for all your guests to get there easily.

Budget

Your available budget is an important factor when deciding the extent of your celebrations. You can go for a lavish party with all types of flower decorations, music, dance, food and entertainment if you have that sort of budget. If you're on a tight budget, go low-key on your wedding reception.

If you decide to use a particular hotel or club, work with the wedding coordinator that is usually available at such hotels and clubs. They can arrange for florists, musicians, caterers and set up the mini-bars.

Further, they can offer various interesting tips to make your wedding reception a unique affair.

Dinner

Dinners at wedding receptions could be buffet-style, with guests serving themselves, or a traditional sit-down dinner where guests are served at their respective places.

You can hire a caterer to produce the perfect dinner at your wedding reception or you can organize to celebrate at an ice-cream parlor or a burger parlor.

Decide on the menu while you are consulting with coordinators and family members.

Set aside a separate area of your location for a bar, dance floor, and live music through DJs or other entertainers if you have them.

You need to arrange an area where the performers can change into their costumes and also for some refreshments to be available to them.

Shopping Around

This is essential to get the best value for your money. Do not settle for the very first wedding coordinator you come across or try to work with anyone that you do not trust, however cheap their quote. Take time to shop around and locate all requirements for your wedding reception according to your choice. Your wedding reception is probably the first party you two host together. Make it memorable for you and your guests without compromising on anything. It should be the best and you need to work to make it the best.

While searching for a good location, look through wedding directories and magazines in detail to choose the most affordable and comfortable venue. It should have all the basic amenities, sufficient space for accommodating your guests and other features like a bar, tables for food, and space for a DJ. You can choose a few of them and discuss their special benefits with their representatives so you can decide on the most suitable venue.

Lighting and Decorations

These constitute an important part of your wedding reception. They add glamour to your party venue.

You can choose simple lights such as twinkle lights or go for more elaborate decorative candles etc. Flowers and drapes at the wedding reception venue should match your wedding ensemble or them of the party.

Small decorations, like shallow water bowls with floating candles and bowls with flowers add to the mood at low cost.

Your reception is not only an occasion for celebration; it is a good time to express your gratitude to your friends and relatives. You

both get the opportunity of a lifetime to thank everyone and enjoy this moment of bliss with all.

This will make your wedding celebrations a great memory for all present.

Step-By-Step Wedding Reception

Wedding receptions are celebrations. Although there is no fixed rule for the organized parts of the event to take place in any specific order, there must be some pre-arrangement for everything to work well.

You can choose to follow some or all of my suggestions, or decide what order you both prefer. But, some organization will save headaches on the day!

You and your spouse arrive at the venue of your wedding reception with other members of your wedding party.

You freshen up before greeting your guests in the receiving line.

Your guests mingle while having drinks and other hors d'œuvres. You join them when your reception line duty is finished.

Next, your Master of Ceremonies introduces all in the wedding party, starting with the bride's parents, then the groom's parents, bridesmaids and groomsmen, maid of honor and best man, flower girl, ring bearer, and (at the end) the newlyweds. This is the traditional order of introduction.

You can choose to have your dance before the speeches or at end of all speeches. You can pose with different people for your photographer to get good photographs.

Next, before you both eat, the Best Man offers a Toast for the happy newlywed couple. You can opt for your priest or minister to say grace before your meal.

There will be different speeches from different people at the wedding reception. Instead of having them all at once, you can choose to have a few before the meal, some during, and others after it. However, if there are very few (fairly short) speeches, you can have them before you start with your meal.

If you have not yet had your first dance with your spouse, have it after dinner. Your wedding party would start dancing after you. The parents' dance follows thereafter. After that, the dancing floor should be full of couples dancing to the DJ's music.

Cake-cutting usually occurs after some dancing. However, cake cutting can be at any time in the evening. Ensure that your photographer gets good photos at the cutting of the cake.

Later that night, it is time for tossing bouquets and flinging of the garter. Many do not follow this event. It all depends on you both if you want to incorporate it into your wedding reception program. Late-night buffet or sweet-tables can start thereafter.

Then comes the time to change into ordinary wear and have your last dance at your wedding reception. You can then say your goodbyes and leave the venue.

You should have proper arrangements made beforehand for complete clearance of the venue and removal of rubbish and leftovers when the party is over.

You can reduce the amount of time your photographer has to be at the wedding party by having a fake cake-cutting session well ahead of time in his studio.

Common Format of a Wedding Reception

A common format for a wedding reception is:

Arrival of guests at Reception Venue: Guests start arriving early at the wedding reception. All preparations should be done well ahead of their arrival time.

All furniture, like the cake-cutting table, sign-in table, any tables required for the entertainment, tables (with chairs) for guests and food tables should be in perfect order. If you organize the seating arrangements, a list should be at the reception with each person’s name and place of seating.

Wedding Party Introduction: Make a ‘Reception Planning Guide’ and give it to the main organizer of your wedding party well in advance. Arrange for introductions as the wedding party enter the venue.

Normally, the order of entering the venue is:

bride’s parents

groom’s parents

bridesmaids

flower girl and ring bearer

special guests

best man

maid of honor, and finally

bride and groom.

Introduction of Bride and Groom: This introduction is normally the last of all introductions of your wedding party. All guests stand before the bride and groom enter.

Special music, songs, and other announcements may add a unique flavor to your grand entrance.

Blessing of the Bridal Couple: Although this is not a mandatory step, religiously-inclined people may prefer having it at their wedding reception. A Blessing could be from your religious head, parents or family, or friends.

There may also be a blessing of the meal.

Wedding Reception Meal: The traditional start of wedding meal is by the bride and groom. Guests wait for the bride and groom to start their meal before they start at the food line.

Cutting of the Wedding Cake: Bride and groom together make the first cut on their wedding cake. The bride then offers a piece of cake to her groom and the groom offers half of that to the bride.

This symbolizes caring and sharing for one another in their lives.

Toasting Ceremonies: This involves the bride and groom toasting each other, interlocking arms and then drinking.

Next, the best man and main bridesmaid raise toast the bridal couple. Other family members and friends follow suit.

First Dance of the Bridal Couple: This is the first dance of the bride and groom after marriage. You can have that First Dance immediately after the entrance of the bridal couple. The wedding party members encircle the bridal couple as they start dancing.

Otherwise, you can schedule ‘First Dance’ for later in the evening after the meal and toasts.

Father and Daughter’s Dance: This dance follows the ‘First Dance’. The bride and her father dance together. If the bride has more than a father in her life, she could interlink arms with them and dance together. If the bride does not have a father, a brother or any other respected fatherly figure could fill in the gap.

Mother and Groom’s Dance: This is between the groom and his mother. If the groom has more than one mother, he might dance interlinking arms with mothers. If the groom does not have his mother, an aunt, sister, or some other motherly figure can dance with the groom.

Special Dances: You can request musical entertainers or others to play your favorite songs soon after a few dances. You can dedicate dances to any family members.

Tossing of the Bouquet and Garter: After those traditional ceremonies, it is time for the bride to toss her wedding bouquet amongst the single women in her wedding party. The groom then removes his bride’s garter from her leg and tosses it amongst all the single men in their wedding party. The person that catches the bouquet or garter is supposed to be the next ones to get married.

Dancing and Enjoyment: It is now time to have fun, enjoy the music and dancing at the wedding.

All formal ceremonies are over and you can now enjoy yourselves.

Although this forms the traditional format of a wedding reception, you can choose to have a few ceremonies before or after or otherwise alter the schedule.

You can even exclude some of the formalities.

It all depends on the wishes of the bride and groom and their respective families. Plan accordingly and give the final order to the main person conducting and organizing ceremonies at your wedding party. This ensures everything goes as planned.

Traditional Wedding Reception Lineup

There are a few traditional wedding reception lineups to consider.

However, a wedding is time for celebration and enjoyment. It is therefore not necessary to stick to traditions and conventional reception lineups. You can choose to alter the order to suit your own preferences.

Receiving lineups can be done this way or you can vary it to suit yourselves:

Receiving lineup I

Bride’s mother

Bride’s father

Groom’s mother

Groom’s father

Bride

Groom

Maid of Honor

Best Man

Bridesmaid

Groomsman

Bridesmaid

Groomsman

Receiving lineup II

Bride’s mother

Groom’s mother

Bride

Groom

Best Man

Maid of Honor

Receiving lineup III

Maid of Honor

Bride

Groom

Best Man

Receiving lineup IV

Bride’s mother

Bride’s father

Bride

Groom

Groom’s mother

Groom’s father

Bride’s grandmother

Bride’s grandfather

Groom’s grandmother

Groom’s grandfather

Receiving lineup V

Bride

Groom

Receiving lineup VI

Bride’s mother

Bride’s father

Bride

Groom

Groom’s mother

Groom’s father

Maid of Honor

Best Man

Receiving lineup VII

Bride’s mother

Groom’s mother

Bride

Groom

Groom’s father

Bride’s father

Basic Etiquette on a Receiving Line

While at the receiving line, keep your hands free. Put away your purses, bouquets or anything else you are carrying.

At the receiving line, you hug and kiss your guests. Therefore, put away anything in your hands as this could prove to be a hindrance. You need to greet your guests and introduce yourself with your name and your relation to the bride or groom.

Normally, at reception tables, the bride’s and groom’s families sit together symbolizing one single family after marriage. However, you can choose to seat them separately with their own more distant relatives and friends.

The bride and groom sit at the middle of the table with the maid of honor seated beside the bride, and the best man seated next to the groom.

Other seating arrangements can be according to your preference.

Entrance of Wedding Party

At a wedding reception, the bride and groom with other members of the wedding party enter the wedding reception venue according to a specific line-up. The DJ or MC makes the announcements as the wedding party members enter the reception venue.

Your line-up could be like this:

Bride’s parents

Groom’s parents

Groomsman and bridesmaid

Groomsman and bridesmaid

Best man and maid of honor

Flower girl and ring bearer

Bride and groom

Favors and Bombonniere

These are small mementos or gifts that you give your guests at wedding receptions. Although it is not mandatory, it represents a small token of appreciation for their attendance at your wedding reception.

Normally, all female guests receive a special gift. It could also be a customary handing out of wedding cake cut into pieces or chocolates in gift boxes. You can hand out gifts at the receiving line or the bride and the groom could hand it out personally while visiting every table.

Wedding Receiving Line Etiquette

The basic perception behind having a receiving line is to greet and welcome guests. You thank them for their best wishes and for joining you on this happy occasion. A receiving line is probably necessary if your guest list exceeds fifty. Otherwise, you can have introductions and greetings at cocktails in wedding receptions.

However, you can choose to have a receiving line or not. If you have elderly parents, it could prove difficult for them to stand for long hours and greet guests. You can forego this formality and just have them mingle with the guests.

Simple and Common Receiving Line Etiquette

Your receiving line-up could be at either your wedding reception venue or at the church. It is essential for the bride's and groom's mothers to be present at the receiving line.

Fathers, traditionally, can forego standing at the receiving line-up. They can mingle with the guests at cocktail parties. However, if the bride's father chooses to stand, then the groom's father will probably have to follow suit.

It is best for you all to discuss this well before your wedding day.

Bridesmaids and groomsmen can skip the line if the bride agrees.

If the best man and maid of honor are sisters or brothers of the bride and groom, then they often stand in the receiving line.

In the case of divorced parents, they may want to avoid standing together in the line. They could stand at either end of the receiving line depending on how well they get along with each other.

If remarried, parents could stand with their respective spouses, which makes everything clear for all the other guests.

Location of the Receiving Line-up

The receiving line-up should be finished before you offer drinks and hors d'oeuvres to guests. This helps the guests shake hands with you easily without having to deal with plates in their hands.

It may be held in the vestibule after the wedding ceremony or at the entrance, down the front steps or on the front porch of your wedding venue.

Commercial wedding reception venues normally offer a wider choice for positioning your receiving line-up. It could be:

in the lobby

in the cocktail lounge

at the doors leading to the main room

within the reception room

or even at the dance floor.

However, make sure the place has sufficient ventilation and is comfortable for members of the receiving line-up and guests as well.

Greetings, introductions and pleasantries at the receiving line-up should normally be short, warm and gracious. Talking for a long time could make guests feel uncomfortable as well as irritate other members in the receiving line-up.

The bride should introduce her relatives to the groom and his parents just as the groom should introduce his relatives to his bride and her parents.

The receiving line-up offers the best opportunity to greet guests personally without missing any of them. Otherwise, you would have to keep going around during your wedding reception and you may not be able to complete a small conversation with one guest when another butts in.

With the receiving line-up, have music and refreshments close by. Soon after all your greetings are over, you can usher guests in to have drinks or a little refreshment while enjoying music in the background. This sets up the mood of the party and helps everybody enjoy and take part in your wedding reception celebrations.

Wedding Reception Checklist

Your wedding reception is a momentous event in your lives and your arrangements should be near to flawless so that nothing goes wrong on your big day.

Making a wedding reception checklist does not mean you have to go over every small detail. It only offers a checklist of events and the main things that need to be done before the day, and how everything should proceed on the day.

A wedding reception checklist is definitely a great help that keeps you organized.

Important Features of Your Wedding Reception Checklist

Set the start time of your reception and the time that you want it to end. Next, it details the desired order of events.

There are many different points in a wedding reception like the introductions, the dinner, cake-cutting, toasts, dancing, garter and bouquet tossing but not necessarily in that order.

Wedding Reception Costs

Costs for your wedding reception begin early with booking the venue. You have to select it and book your venue well in advance, maybe around four to five months before your wedding date.

Then, you order tables, chairs and additional necessary equipment like linen and seat covers.

You also need to book any further decorations like arch entrances, floral adornments, a backdrop to put behind the head table and stage that you might require.

You might also want to rent affordable centerpiece decorations to add to the dining tables at your reception venue.

Other necessary equipment for your wedding reception might include utensils, kitchen facilities, microphones, audio speakers, a dance floor, a piano, lighting, heater, air-conditioning units, VCR players with a giant TV screen and tablecloths.

You also need to check and finalize catering arrangements, if available, at the reception venue or through your personal caterer.

Budget Considerations

While preparing your wedding reception checklist, look into rentals, hiring charges, security deposits, refund policies, insurance requirements and similar charges and costs.

If your reception venue offers a bar, catering, florist, decorations, and other valet charges, calculate the possible costs and compare it to quotes if you organize it independently.

Check into rental charges of equipment, rentals of venue for a weekday or weekend, overtime charges, and charges for breakage, spillage, and other necessary insurance and possibly local government permits.

Guest List

Your guest list should be ready months in advance so that you can order invitations, thank you notes, announcements and other necessary personal stationery. Send out your invitations early to give those you invite as much time as possible to reply and arrange their schedules around your celebration.

Keep a gift diary and send thank you notes as you receive gifts.

Select and finalize gifts for your groomsmen, bridesmaids, attendants and other small favors for guests.

Make accommodation reservations for guests that are traveling from outlying areas for your wedding.

Finalize proper arrangements for transportation of the wedding party and guests to the ceremony and reception venues.

Wedding Attire and Honeymoon Preparations

Order your wedding attire well in advance. Go for preliminary trials and confirm proper fittings. Take delivery of your wedding attire well in advance.

Also, arrange for your wedding photos in the studio and at the venues.

Discuss and then finalize reservations for your honeymoon.

Final Preparations on the Wedding Reception Checklist

Arrange for all necessary regulations and requirements in registering your marriage.

Inform the clergyman or celebrant of your desires about the wedding ceremony and reception. Make any necessary arrangements for them to be at the venues and finalize details of their participation and arrangements about payment.

Issue notifications in newspapers regarding change of name, address and any other important announcements.

Arrange and attend wedding reception rehearsals and finalize all details with different parties like caterers, florists, photographers, and others.

Finalize the bride’s wedding day hairstyle, veil, headpiece, and other bridal make-up.

Keep ready an emergency kit containing small knick-knacks like safety pins, needle and white thread, hair spray, emergency medications, hanky or tissues, Band-aids and make-up accessories.

Budgeting – How to Save Money on Your Wedding Reception

Your wedding reception is an occasion for celebration and not for accumulating huge debts at the start of your newlywed life.

You can have an enjoyable and memorable wedding reception without splurging most of your finances without any idea how you are going to repay the costs.

Simple tactics and a little prior thought can make your big day grand and memorable without pinching everything from your pocket.

These money saving tips can help you enjoy extra days on your honeymoon or help you both make your first joint payments on a cozy little home.

Tips to Save Money on Wedding Receptions

Fixing Your Budget: The very first step involves setting a budget that includes all possible costs. You have to restrict yourself to keep within the budget. Plan how you can use your dollars to create a magical celebration.

Planning Early: Start making plans for your wedding reception early enough so that you do not have a last minute rush and thereby pay higher costs for everything.

Having sufficient time allows you to explore discount sales and other cost-reducing features for purchasing the necessary accessories.

Location: While choosing the venue for your wedding reception, choose to have the ceremony and reception at the same venue. This

can cut down on costs. It would also prove convenient for guests that have to travel long distances and also elderly guests, as they do not have to commute to different places.

You can cut down on transportation charges of the wedding party. Some churches offer fellowship halls if you or your family members are church members. These are often free.

You can choose to have ceremonies and receptions at parks, courtyards, or similar locales that prove convenient and do not cost so much.

Choice of Reception Day: Try arranging your wedding reception day on a week day evening. Hotels, banquet halls and other celebration halls charge less for such days. Usually, Saturday evenings are the costliest followed by Fridays.

Similarly, scheduling your wedding celebrations between November and March can get you substantial discounts as this is the lean period for suppliers.

May to October is the peak wedding season and all venues, and other costs associated with a wedding are higher during this season.

Wedding Gowns

You can rent your wedding dress if you do not want to preserve your wedding gown for future generations. Otherwise, you can choose an evening gown instead of buying a special wedding gown.

Evening gowns are considerably cheaper and you can use them for other occasions later.

Discount Sales

It is common for wedding gown shops to offer discount sales at the end of the season. You can purchase your gown at such a sale. You could even get a designer wedding gown this way and at much lower than usual cost.

Bridesmaid Dresses

Often bridesmaids prefer purchasing other comfortable dresses or gowns. They would prefer these rather than getting stuck with a special bridesmaid’s gown that they may never wear after that. You can choose coordinating colors for your dress to match with their ensembles.

Hair and Make-up

It is not essential to hire professionals for make-up and hairstyling. You can try it yourself or accept the help of your creative friends who would love to do it for you on your wedding day.

You can have a trial session to check if you are able to get the desired look. This can save you many dollars.

Making your Own Accessories

Accessories often cost a lot. You can choose to make your own accessories by your own creative skills.

If you make your own veil, veils often prove as costly as your wedding dress!

Suits for Men

You can choose to have suits for men instead of costly tuxedos. Suits offer many other occasions for wearing them later while tuxedos are often only used for a single day’s wear.

Group Discount Rentals

If you intend renting tuxedos and bridesmaid gowns, check what is available at shops offering group rentals. These shops offer huge discounts if you rent dresses in groups. Similarly, you can purchase ordinary shoes and other footwear without having to get extra special items that could lie around unused later. Ordinary shoes cost less and offer more usage.

Seasonal Flowers

For all floral decorations at your wedding reception, choose seasonal flowers. These cost less and are readily available. Florists find it easier to make bouquets and other necessary decorations with them too.

Wholesale Purchase

If purchasing flowers, look for wholesale florists. You can reap huge discounts on large purchases at wholesalers. They already offer lower rates than local flower retailers do. You can have more savings if you pay through cash-back credit cards.

Flower Arrangements

It is not necessary to hire professionals for floral decorations at your wedding reception. Take some time off and arrange flowers according to your imagination and the particular theme of your party.

Small bowls with floating flowers or candles with flowers always look good. You can get help from books on flower arranging or, if time permits, attend flower arrangement classes and make use of your knowledge.

Dried Flowers

While arranging flowers, it is not essential to use fresh flowers everywhere. You can use dried or artificial flowers that look much the same. These cost less and are reusable. You do not have the worry of flowers being damaged in transit in the case of dried and artificial flowers. Again, you can complete all floral decorations well in advance, as they would not wither away.

Limit Guest List

Although you would love to have everybody at your wedding reception, it is often best to trim your guest list. That trimming does not mean cutting off close relations and friends from the list. Instead, you can drop faraway acquaintances and relations.

Attendants

Choose a select group of attendants like bridesmaids and the best man. Many attendants means increased costs on dresses, accessories, rehearsals, gifts and transportation.

A single bridesmaid and a best man are often sufficient.

Photography

Wedding photo sessions and albums account for a major expense. Shop around and locate cheaper deals with photographers. Another alternative is to hire photographers for ceremonies only. You can choose to keep disposable cameras on the tables at your wedding reception.

Another alternative is to scout for student photographers at photography schools. These students would love to undertake wedding photo sessions and charge you substantially less. Always ask to see samples of their work first.

Friends would also prove to be a viable option. They would do it free.

Music

Music bands and DJs may prove costly. You can select your chosen songs and make a CD. You can ask your family members to play the CD while you walk down the aisle with your spouse. Otherwise, you can hire student music bands. They offer their services at cheaper rates. You can alternatively hire iPods and speakers and play music as you would like it.

If you use a commercial venue, you will probably have to check with them about what sort of music is permitted to be used in the venue as there are strict licensing rules for professional venues that are monitored by organizations that collect copyright fees for the musicians that make recordings.

Buffets

Buffets may prove cheaper than sit-down dinner menus. Guests can choose to have their choice of foods instead of wasting food that they don't like at sit-down dinners.

The necessity for waiting staff at buffets is less. Use disposable serving items instead of glassware and chinaware. These prove cheaper and more hygienic.

You do not have to hire staff for cleaning dishes, setting up dishes, and other associated chores.

Timing of Your Reception

You can organize a wedding lunch reception instead of a dinner reception to cut down costs. A lunch-time function may save money on alcohol and bar charges.

Otherwise, you might organize a small get together of close friends and family and serve snacks, cake, and soft drinks. Costs would only be a fraction of the expenses at lunches and dinners.

Organize a wedding reception breakfast, tea, brunch, or cocktail with hor d'oeuvres.

Bar

Choose a limited open bar offering a few choices of drinks. You can ask guests to bring in their own drinks. Purchase wine and champagne at discount shops and in bulk quantities to benefit from discounts. Serve homemade wine, beer, and punch.

Wedding Cake

Wedding cakes are available in different shapes, sizes, and designs. You can go for any sort of design that you want. Sheet cakes are cheaper than tiered cakes and also easier to serve.

Looks do not add to the taste of the cake as all cakes taste the same. You can go for a less fancy design and save few dollars along the way.

Small Get-together

In place of hiring costly professional caterers, organize small get-togethers for friends and family for your wedding reception. You can ask each guest to bring in a dish and have a meal together. Home-cooked food is as enjoyable as catered food.

However, this arrangement best suits a small gathering.

Invitations

Guest invitations need not be elaborate and intricate. You can make your own invitations by using relevant software and decorative

paper on your home computer. It only requires a little time, imagination and creativity to make exclusive wedding invitation cards that are much cheaper than printed and purchased invitation cards.

Reply Postcard

Use postcards as your reply cards rather than standard reply cards and envelopes. Otherwise, request guests to reply online at your web address. This saves costs on reply cards and postage.

You can offer a phone number for guests without Internet access.

Reception at an All-in-One Locale

While selecting the best location for your reception, choose to have your wedding reception at a place that offers all the supporting services and equipment like tables, chairs, staff, florists, decorators and waiting staff.

Charges will be all-inclusive and could amount to much less than sourcing your requirements from a variety of suppliers.

Adhering to Schedules

Don't go overboard in your wedding celebrations. Stick to time schedules and do not allow ceremonies or music bands to play beyond the agreed hours. They often charge overtime.

Similarly, exceeding booking time limits at your wedding reception venue could cost you extra dollars.

Altering Traditions

You can go for changes to traditions and this could lower your costs. You can hire an ordinary car instead of a limo for your wedding.

Guests could toast with any drink instead of traditional champagne.
You can forego a full bar and serve only beer and wine.

Wedding Reception Location

Choosing the location for your wedding reception requires careful thought and discussion of the different possibilities.

Your choice of location depends on your criteria like indoor or outdoor celebrations, traditional or nontraditional celebrations, number of guests, catering and music arrangements, and your budget.

Traditional and Non-traditional Receptions

Traditional wedding receptions are often at hotel halls, reception halls, restaurants or country clubs. These halls primarily offer all necessary items including power supplies for music, DJs, restroom facilities, knowledgeable staff that are ready for any emergencies, catering arrangements, valet services, parking attendants and florists.

Although you can choose to use all these associates of your selected reception venue, you could also choose to go about selecting and finalizing all arrangements individually.

Non-traditional wedding reception locations include cruise ships, beaches, hilltops, parks, museums and colleges. The choice of location depends on you two and your respective families.

However, you should always keep in mind the comfort, safety, and convenience of guests at your wedding reception. Your choice of location should be able to accommodate your guests, provide necessary restroom facilities, be easily accessible, offer adequate parking facilities and allow playing of music and dancing.

Outdoor and Indoor Receptions

Many prefer to have their wedding ceremonies and reception at home. This lends a personal touch to all celebrations. You should consider if all your guests can fit in comfortably within your house for the ceremony and reception.

If need be, you might organize parties on your lawn. You could rent any necessary chairs, tents, tables, drapes and other requirements to make your guests comfortable.

Check your home insurance for public liability and third party risks.

If choosing outdoor locations, such as open parks or similar large areas, you should have a proper back-up plan for any emergency. If the weather changes suddenly, you could save the day by having adequate tent facilities to accommodate all your guests.

Outdoor aesthetics could add to the event.

Factors Affecting Your Choice of Location

Different reception halls offer complete packages inclusive of all necessary arrangements to make your wedding reception a success. You can opt for these or choose to go into specific details regarding arrangements.

Always consider the following:

Location: If your wedding ceremony and reception are at different places, choosing a reception venue close to the venue used for the ceremony is best.

You could choose traditional banquet halls, local hotels, parks, country clubs, or church halls. Hotels and banquet halls would offer rooms for guests that have traveled a long way to your event.

Choose the most convenient location in terms of proximity, adequate restroom facilities, sufficient space and being well within your budget.

Accommodation: While choosing your wedding reception location, look into your guest list, and find accommodation that can offer comfortable seating for your guests. Too big a venue could make your guests feel lost while too small could make them feel cramped.

Check if the hall can accommodate a band or DJ, dancing floor, buffet food serving, bar and any other requirements.

Decorations: If the reception hall personnel arrange for all decorations, inquire into their arrangements and finalize if their styling suits you. Otherwise, arrange for suitable decorations like dim lights, floral decorations, arches, centerpiece decorations, candles, table linen, chair covers and themed potted plants.

Catering: Catering is an important factor for choosing a specific location. If banquet halls and hotels make catering arrangements, have a pre-booking tour of their kitchen, discuss menus, plates and silverware, look into cleanliness, and the menu at your reception.

Also, check if they provide glassware, tableware, and other accessories. Some may offer it included with the catering arrangements while some charge separately for it.

DJ and Music: Discuss music systems and programs with your DJ or band. Some hotels and banquet halls would provide contacts for DJs. Otherwise, you can organize it yourself.

If your location has many different halls for such celebrations, check if there is any spillage of music from one hall to another. Also, check if the dance floor is large enough.

Restrooms: Availability and cleanliness of restrooms can prove to be a major factor for consideration when choosing your wedding reception location. There should be a sufficient number of restrooms according to your guest list. They should be clean and smell clean.

Cleaning of Venue: Check and finalize with the people providing the wedding reception location if they provide the necessary staff for after-reception cleaning. In some cases, you would have to arrange for all cleaning after your wedding party but, in some cases, they will provide sufficient staff to take care of the cleaning of the premises, tableware and restrooms.

Parking: While choosing your location, check if it has sufficient parking spaces for guests to park their vehicles. Additionally, there should be sufficient attendants to help the guests to park their vehicles easily and keep them secure.

Costs: Before finalizing the location of your wedding reception, take full stock of all financial details like total costs, security deposits required, applicable taxes, overtime charges, and cancellation charges or refund amounts.

Get all details in writing so that there are no misunderstandings or ambiguities later.

Writing Your Wedding Reception Guest List

A wedding is the most important occasion in a couple’s life. They want close family members and friends present, besides their parents and siblings.

Drawing up a guest list should get appropriate attention well in advance. You must draw up the guest list with your fiancé to include the number of people that fit within your budget and the wedding venue.

In anticipation of the wedding, many couples first decide the venue and then draw up a long guest list that can never fit in the selected venue. Give priority to drawing up the guest list and then finalize the wedding venue.

Here are a few ideas to limit the guest list.

First, make a list of all the possible people you want to invite to your wedding.

Next, sit down with your fiancé while finalizing the guest list to invite a common group of friends while deciding to leave out distant relations and long lost friends.

It is also important to know what type of wedding you want - an intimate one, a medium size celebration, or a large gathering.

And, you want to share your special day only with the people who matter most in your life. Moreover, realistically speaking, does your budget permit a small gathering or a large one?

Set an upper limit to the number of guests and stick to it. Include important people who must be at your wedding. So, start with

parents of the bride and the groom, siblings and their families and then a close group of friends. Leave space to cut out guests, and do not expand the guest list.

Many people may feel hurt, but learn to come up with a plausible excuse for leaving them out of your wedding celebrations. Do not invite school friends whom who have never met after high school, or second and third cousins whom you have hardly met.

Skip inviting former lovers as it can cause uncomfortable situations during the wedding.

You can safely cut out inviting children from the guest list. When you are inviting single people, make it clear that they cannot bring along a guest for the wedding. This helps reduce expenditure and confines the guest list to the most desirable friends and family.

Avoid calling friends who get drunk and make a spectacle of themselves at such functions. You should skip calling everyone from your office and business associates.

You may however call your boss and a few close friends from work. Create another list of people whom you must invite, but who may not attend the wedding.

Ideally, the bride’s parents pay for the wedding reception, so they should have the final say in drawing up the guest list. However, the trend among couples today is to pay for their own reception. In that case, parents of the bride and groom should get to invite a third of the guests while the bride and groom invite the remainder of the guests.

Regardless of who pays for the wedding, the final list must include people important to all parties. You need lots of tact and diplomacy

to refuse invitations to guests that may be important to your in-laws or parents.

Draw up a list and then discuss it with your fiancé and family to add or subtract guests, before finalizing it. Make it a point to confer with your fiancé regarding the people not invited to the wedding. He or she may feel otherwise about such people.

Rank guests in the final list by order of importance to include people close to both families. Repeat this process to cut out unimportant people from the guest list, until you get the number of guests as per your estimates.

Then, enter the guest names on to a worksheet and start collecting their addresses. It helps to plan in an organized manner to avoid last minute hassles and trouble.

Finally, do not forget to mail the invitations for the wedding reception so that all guests can arrive on time on your important day.

Whom Should You Invite?

You are engaged and you are *dying* to tell the world about it!

Stop right there and think a while, before sharing your happiness with all and sundry.

With your fiancé, you should start to draw up a list of the people you want to invite for your big day. But, first, set the limit on the number of guests according to the size of the venue and your wedding budget.

Here is how you could create your guest list.

First, have a fantasy list without size and budget constraints to include all the family and friends that you would like present at your wedding.

Get your spouse to do the same.

You may want to invite neighbors or long lost friends on your special day. Discuss with your fiancé about the type of wedding you both want. An intimate affair will include only family and close friends, while a large gathering can include your extended family and all your friends. Include both sets of parents, grandparents, siblings, their families, and very close friends.

Next, prune the list of people whom you have not met or spoken to in a year.

Along with your fiancé, prioritize the list of people who must be present at the wedding. Share both lists as it helps cut out unwanted guests and avoids duplication of invitations to common friends.

Exclude colleagues from work, distant cousins and school friends you never met again after graduation. Leave children out of the wedding by mentioning it on the invitation.

Unless you are very broad-minded, exclude former girlfriends and boyfriends to avoid messy situations on the wedding day. Make some excuse to leave out a friend who gets drunk and makes a scene on such occasions.

You are under no obligation to invite guests of single friends, so address the invitation simply to the friend. Even if you went to somebody's wedding, you need not invite him or her to yours.

Split the invitations evenly between you. Give a few extra invitations to in-laws so that they can invite people not on your list. Keep tact and patience in place when dealing with people not invited for the wedding.

To avoid this painful activity, request those invited to avoid discussing the guest list for the wedding.

On an average, a quarter of people that are invited probably do not turn up for weddings. However, you can never be sure. Have a second list ready to invite other people, as the regrets come in.

If you go about this in a planned manner, you can comfortably share the most important day in your life with the people you love and those who matter most in your life.

Sending Out Your Wedding Reception Invitations

It is important to send wedding reception invitations to all your friends and close family members to inform them of the exact date and location of the reception. Sending these invitations well in advance ensures that your loved ones will be present at the most important day of your life.

Plan Your Wedding Invitations

Once you have decided the wedding date, the reception venue and the number of guests, you can start planning the reception invitations. This should be at least three months in advance in consultation with your fiancé and family, to avoid last-minute glitches.

Here is what you should consider.

Design: The invitation should be a reflection of your personalities, depending on your taste and the theme of the wedding. The design can be simple, elegant or in a style reflecting the theme of the reception.

Content: The invitation must clearly mention the date, venue, and time of the reception. Some couples prefer to be old style and let the invitations go from the side of the bride’s parents. However, this depends on the couple’s personal choice.

It should include the name of the bridal couple and the parents’ names. Provide the name, address, phone number, and a mobile number for further contact.

Include a map with detailed directions and a stamped envelope for responses.

Some people prefer to mention the reception on the wedding card itself. In that case, the invitation must be simple and to the point.

You can include a small introductory note sharing a personal anecdote, along with the reception invitations.

Getting the Invitation Stationery

Place the order for the cards well in advance so that they are available on time. If you send out handmade cards, allow some lead time to the artist or calligrapher and set a date for delivery before the dispatch date.

Printing the Invitation

Once you decide the design and the content, carefully write out the invitations. Get your fiancé or a friend to double-check the invitations before sending it to the printer or printing it yourself.

Types of Invitations

Formal: For a formal reception, use traditional language and proper grammar in the invitation. White, cream, or ivory color paper works best for formal invitations. The printer can help you with the selection of paper and fonts for the formal reception. Spell out full names.

Informal: An e-mail, phone call, or a verbal message serves well enough as the invitation for an informal wedding reception. For a formal wedding reception, you can use a unique and original invitation.

Addressing the Invitations

There are different rules of etiquette for addressing guests. Instead of sticking on printed labels, it is better to write out each invitation personally. For unmarried couples, put the name of the person you know best first.

Be sure to follow rules for addressing different types of couples when sending out the invitations, to avoid embarrassment.

Dispatching the Invitations

If you want some important people to be present, no matter what, send them a small card to block dates for the reception, before the reception invitation. This is advisable, especially if your reception date clashes with a public holiday or festival.

Once you have the names and addresses of the guests on the envelopes, send the invitations immediately. Put all the cards in order and ask a friend to cross-check each envelope of all the cards before sealing it.

Ideally, dispatch the invitations at least six to eight weeks in advance, so that guests can make adequate arrangements for travel and accommodation.

This also helps with confirming the exact number of guests attending the reception. Post all invitations simultaneously to avoid uncomfortable questions and phone calls among your prospective guests.

Overall, pay attention to every detail of the reception invitation as it marks the beginning of your married life.

Choosing the Wedding Reception Theme

Most couples prefer a traditional church ceremony for the wedding, but have no qualms about experimenting with the wedding reception.

Need for Wedding Reception Themes

Couples want to cherish the memories of their wedding day and usually want to host an unforgettable wedding reception. Moreover, with complicated family structures, a themed reception helps overcome the awkwardness associated with many traditions. The trend today is to organize receptions around themes. The theme begins with the reception invitations and extends to the décor, the menu, the music, and the wedding favors.

Factors Influencing the Reception Theme

Money is an important aspect of planning the theme. You must choose a theme that does not stretch the budget.

Weather plays a central role in selecting the theme. You cannot plan an outdoor reception when the weather predictions are for rain or snow.

The **Venue** of the wedding reception also decides the viability of the theme. If a theme requires big decorations or people in costumes, you need ample space to move about. So, keep the size of the venue and the number of guests in mind when selecting the theme.

The theme chosen must be such that the guests and the bridal couple can enjoy themselves comfortably throughout the reception.

Varieties of Themes

There is no limit to the number of possible reception themes. It all depends on the budget and the creativity of the couple. You can:

visit craft stores

check wedding websites

bridal shows

consult catalogs and magazines and

talk to friends

... for ideas to come up with an unusual theme.

You may come up with a theme reflecting your personalities or hobbies.

If you cannot come up with anything, you can always consult a wedding planner.

Types of Wedding Reception Themes

Color Theme: A simple idea is to have a dominant color running through the reception. The entire décor, linen, invitations, and favors can be in the chosen colors. You can have a simple motif running through the reception that covers the napkins, the wedding cake, and so on.

Beach Theme: It is one of the more popular themes. You can have seashells and sand decorating the tables. You can serve tropical drinks and use shells in the décor of the guest tables and the venue. You can select peppy numbers to play in the background to create a relaxed and casual atmosphere.

Western theme: This is a fun theme that can start with setting of a saloon and ushers dressed as cowboys. Guns and Stetson hat can

form a part of the decor, while guests feast on interesting appetizers like meatloaf.

Romantic theme: This is ideal for an evening reception where candlelight and flowers can create the perfect romantic ambience. Have a band play soft, romantic numbers in the background, with the bridal couple formally dressed.

Floral theme: A floral theme lets you arrange plenty of flowers of different varieties in the chosen colors. You can have beautiful decorations with seasonal flowers around the buffet tables, on each guest table and around the dance floor. The bride can put flowers in her hair for added effect instead of expensive accessories.

Ethnic theme: If you choose to stick to your roots, you can host an ethnic reception with the customs and traditions of your family. For example, a Korean theme will have the food, music, and dress of that region.

Holiday theme: If the reception date is around a festival like Christmas, you can choose the colors of the festival, red and white in the decorations, food, favors, and the cake. Sprinkle plenty of holly and mistletoe with Christmas carols playing softly in the background.

Fantasy theme: You can conceptualize the reception around a particular fairytale or Disney characters. The bride can dress as a princess with guests dressed in regal robes feasting on the lavish breads and starters.

Historical theme: The options for this are endless as you can choose any era. You may have to scout around to get the dresses and inform guests well in advance, so that they come prepared.

The great outdoors: This theme is ideal for sunny days and a great location. It saves a lot of money and effort as nature provides a scenic backdrop for the reception.

Choose a wedding reception theme with care and spare no effort to make it an event to remember.

Wedding Reception Decorations

The wedding reception is an important event after the wedding ceremony where you can display your sense of aesthetics.

The wedding reception decorations must not be over-the-top, but be a reflection of the couple’s personalities and tastes. The decorations must create the right atmosphere for merrymaking, following the wedding ceremony.

Plan the wedding reception decorations well in advance so that you too can enjoy yourself.

Decide on the venue, whether indoors or outdoors, depending on the season. The choice of venue depends on the number of guests and your budget.

Decide beforehand who will bear the expenses for every detail of the decorations so that there is no confusion. Share the task of the reception decorations with a few close and responsible family members who can handle any problems once you are out of the picture.

Alternatively, if it suits your budget, you can outsource the worries of the decoration to a wedding planner.

Choose the decorations, keeping in mind the theme of the wedding. The same colors should run through the decorations, tables, the wedding cake, and the wedding favors. Discuss the reception theme with your fiancé and family members. Visit online stores for discounts on decorations and ideas on themes.

The decorations depend on the timing of the reception. Daytime receptions are a little informal while evening receptions tend to be more formal.

Visit the venue in advance and take pictures from various angles to get an idea of the decorations required. An outdoor location usually requires fewer decorations as nature does the job of beautification. You can drape lights or flowers around trees, matching the theme of the reception. Check in advance, if the venue has a list of banned items like candles or confetti on the tables.

Flowers and candles are the best decorations for any reception. Decorate the buffet tables, the guest tables, the cake table, the table for the bridal couple and their parents, the area near the dance floor as well as the restrooms in the same theme.

The reception menu, lighting and the music must also go with the selected theme.

The table and chair decorations, the napkins and the table linen must all reflect the common theme. You can have one motif that can decorate every item in the reception, or go for one or two colors to reflect the theme of the reception.

Your choices are unlimited and the themes are endless, ranging from a beach theme to a vineyard theme, limited only by your imagination and budget.

The overall reception decoration must be a reflection of your personalities and style.

Once you decide the overall theme, it is time to buy the decorations. You can buy from discount stores, wholesalers; the local party supply stores and scores of online stores. You can save on costs by

renting general items like tables, arches and table linen that are easily available at most wholesalers. If you buy from websites, some let you return the items in a reverse sale, after the reception. If you have a theme close to a festival, you can buy supplies in bulk at wholesale rates.

Select large flower decorations in the theme color for the buffet tables, cake table and around the dance floor. Go for small centerpieces for the guest tables. You can put small vases on the guest table that they can take away as favors. Use different flowers of the same color for the guest tables to create unique centerpieces. Use an array of colored pebbles, ribbons and vases for each table and bestow these centerpieces upon a special guest at each table.

Those on a tight budget can buy potted plants from the local nursery, matching the theme and paint the pots in bright colors. Alternately, you can plant flower seeds in the garden and then transfer the flowers to small pots for the big day. You can use foil to wrap the pots attractively and tie them with lace or satin ribbons matching the reception theme colors.

Use several of these pots to line the aisle and near the dance floor to give the room a fuller effect.

Candles are another popular item for a wedding reception. Candles of all shapes and colors are readily available at most stores. You can have dramatic centerpiece decorations incorporating candles and flowers for the guest tables.

Placing candles in votives creates a soft and warm glow, reflecting the ambience of the reception. However, remember to light the candles before guests arrive and keep them away from ribbons to avoid a fire hazard.

Using colorful balloons tied with ribbons is also a good way to decorate the reception area.

You can get trees matching the reception theme on rental, to fill up empty spaces in the room.

For an interesting touch, choose a fruit bowl matching the reception theme as a table centerpiece. Other tasty centerpieces can include sugar sculptures, candy, chocolates, and mini wedding cakes that the guests can eat, strictly at the end of the meal.

Here are a few general things to consider when decorating the reception venue.

If children are present, remove sharp objects that can hurt them.

If inviting elderly people, avoid having extra smooth floors except on the dance area.

Check all details with the venue owners about the decorations and menu to avoid last minute mishaps.

Do not use expensive decorations unless you can keep an eye on them throughout the function.

Include the groom in the decoration planning, since it is his big day too.

Get his help in setting things up, so that he feels a part of the occasion.

Lastly, enjoy yourself on your big day, after the meticulous planning and effort you have undertaken for the superb reception.

Wedding Reception Favors

Wedding reception favors are take-away gifts given to guests who attend the wedding reception. They reflect the couple’s gratitude to the guests for attending the reception. They serve as a reminder of the wedding and guests will cherish the memories of your special day when they look at the unique wedding reception favors.

You can choose from a large variety of wedding favors that are available at gift stores, wholesalers and on the Internet.

You can go for customized wedding favors that are expensive or go for creative and unusual favors that you made yourself.

Keep in mind the number of guests and the budget before selecting the wedding favors.

Secondly, choose the wedding favors always keeping in mind the theme or the colors of the reception, for better impact.

Talk to people who just got married or to wedding planners for new ideas.

Research websites for interesting but reasonably priced wedding favors.

Go through bridal magazines for interesting and creative ideas.

Brainstorm with your family about possible wedding favors that the guests will appreciate without hurting your pocket.

Here are some interesting ideas for wedding reception favors.

Use frosted coasters on every table that the guests can take away as they leave the party. Put a picture of yourselves with your names, the wedding date, and a small note of thanks to the guests.

Guests can reuse these coasters as photo frames or place cardholders.

You can record the first dance song of the reception and compile a collection of your favorite songs on to a CD. Insert a photograph of you and your spouse on the CD cover along with your names and the wedding date to make a memorable take away gift.

Common wedding favors include heart-shaped candy in attractive jars and beautifully wrapped Jordan almonds. You can buy chocolates in bulk from any wholesale store. Then, wrap them with special wrappers depicting the wedding date and hand them to the guests. The chocolates will soon be gone, but the sweet memories will remain.

For a spring wedding, you can present each guest with a packet of colorful flower seeds. This gives an earthy and eco-friendly touch to the reception. As the flowers bloom, the guests will fondly remember your wedding reception. Remember to include a small thank you note with each gift for every guest.

For a beach-themed wedding reception there is plenty of inexpensive, but readymade gifts like shell-shaped soaps, candles in the shape of seashells or flip-flops, readily available.

If hosting the reception in another town, you can pick a memento personalized with your photograph or names. Include a small note of explanation that mentions facts about the place to remind guests of the wedding.

Those on a tight budget can buy packing material like tulle, ribbons, small baskets, ribbons, labels, or jars available at wholesale or discount stores and fill them with candy or chocolates, decorative candles or homemade cookies, to create unique wedding reception favors.

You can make chocolates or jams and preserves in advance and then pack them in attractive jars for the guests. Paint the gift jars with your names or with flowers matching the wedding colors.

Remember to accept the help of family members and have the favors ready well before the wedding reception.

Several websites offer items at a discount, so order well in advance to get the favors on time. You can print photos and include a note about how you met, or print a special message or poem that you both love as a wedding favor for the guests. This is very personal and guests will appreciate the thoughtfulness behind this gesture when they remember your wedding reception.

Those with an unlimited budget or select guests can go for stylish favors like specially designed napkin rings or holders. Gift shops will readily pack and customize the favors for each of your guests.

These exclusive favors include items like customized pens, cufflinks, and brooches.

For a romantic themed wedding, you can have a Cupid’s bow with your picture or a heart-shaped measuring spoon with your favorite recipe given as favors to the guests.

Pack the favors attractively in clear boxes with satin ribbons matching the wedding colors for greater impact. Floating candles, flowers, and votives are other items that go with this theme.

There are so many ideas for different and unique wedding reception favors to make your special day memorable.

Wedding Reception Games

Normal wedding receptions usually have cake-cutting by the bridal couple, followed by the dance and the meal.

Need for Wedding Reception Games

The couple usually invites family and friends from both sides, not all of who may know each other. Having some innovative games helps lighten the atmosphere and is a great way for people to make new friends.

People can enjoy themselves better and will remember the reception party for years to come. However, choose games that everyone can play depending on the age of the guests.

Second, decide on the nature of the games keeping in mind the tolerance of the players involved.

Different Wedding Reception Games

You can choose from a wide range of games for the wedding reception.

Musical Chairs: Remove a chair from each table and let the music play. As people get out gradually, the winner on each table gets to take home the centerpiece or a special gift. An interesting variation is to get the men to kneel on one knee as the women run around them. When the music stops, the person who gets no knee to sit on is out.

Rolling the Dice: Form couples on each table and get them to roll the dice. If the total is even, then the bridal couple kisses, and if the

sum is odd, the couple must kiss. This can lead to odd situations, especially if the couples are of the same gender.

Trivia Quiz: Write questions related to the bridal couple in advance and get the DJ or a family member to ask them. It helps to highlight facts about the couple and is good for a few good laughs when family members answer incorrectly. The guest who answers correctly asks the next question and so on.

Guess the Bride or Groom: Blindfold the bride and ask her to guess the groom by touching the feet or hands, from five men. You can play this with the groom too. It is funny when the person guesses wrongly.

Treasure Hunt: Hide different things around the reception hall and ask for one volunteer from each table. The DJ will ask for a particular item that the volunteers have to find. One person must note the points for each table. The table that gets the maximum points wins.

Treasure Hunting the Groom: In this naughty game, the blindfolded bride must search the groom physically for items hidden on his person. The game will surely generate mischievous laughs among the guests as the bride fumbles.

Queen of Sheba: In this, the DJ asks for specific items and the person who takes this item first to the DJ gets a point for his table. You can ask for the obvious items like a flower or a girl in pigtails. The table with the maximum points gets a prize.

You can adapt several popular games like passing the parcel for the reception. Wedding reception games can spice up the after-effects of some formal proceedings during a wedding reception. But they

should be tuned to the mood of the group and none should be run for very long.

Wedding Cake

Wedding cake is an integral part of every wedding. It is often the greatest attraction at a wedding with guests viewing it all through the reception. Cakes and desserts are an intrinsic part of every celebration and wedding cake is no exception.

A traditional wedding cake is a large, multilayered or tiered cake with extensive icing and decorations. The topmost layer features a couple symbolizing the bride and groom. Other popular motifs for the top include doves, horseshoes or gold rings. These motifs are normally of edible sugar paste or colored clay. Wedding cake puts your baker’s artistic and baking skills to the test.

You can choose your design and the size of your wedding cake at your local confectioners or bakery. Before placing an order, taste samples of the chosen cake flavors. Look into different photographs of the styles that your shop provides and choose accordingly.

Baking and decoration of wedding cakes should start around ten days before the wedding and should be ready two days before the wedding day.

Cutting the Wedding Cake

Cake-cutting at a wedding is an important ceremony at every wedding. The wedding cake should be placed in a prominent place, preferably on an extensively decorated table. You should have an ornamental knife for cutting the cake.

Cutting the wedding cake is normally done after receiving guests, serving dinner and raising toasts. A formal announcement always precedes the cake-cutting ceremony. The bride should hold a

ceremonial knife in her right hand and the groom should stand a little behind her, covering the bride’s hand with his. Together, they should make the first cut on the wedding cake.

Next, the groom feeds the first slice to the bride and then the bride feeds the remaining part of that first slice to her groom. This symbolizes sharing, caring, and togetherness. Then, family members or catering staff members make individual slices of cake and offer them to guests with coffee or tea. You can also give cake pieces in gift boxes for guests to take home.

Wedding Cake Traditions

Normally, a portion of wedding cake, preferably the topmost portion consisting of fruitcake is frozen. The couple has it at their first wedding anniversary or at the christening of their first child.

Another age-old tradition is that the bridesmaid may sleep with a piece of wedding cake underneath her pillow and she could dream of her future husband.

Wedding Reception Food

Food at a wedding reception is a major attraction and almost everybody looks forward to enjoying a grand treat. Planning the food for your wedding reception depends on various factors. You should focus on your culinary tastes, the preferences of your guests (including special dietary requirements), time of the day, theme of wedding reception, seasonal choices, traditions and, of course, your budget.

Although it is not possible to satisfy and cater to everything, wedding reception food depends on the desires and choices of the bride, groom and their respective families.

The ideal fare depends mainly on the time of day and the season. If your wedding is held in the early morning, you could celebrate with a wedding breakfast.

Where the ceremony is later in the day, you could have a ceremonial lunch. However, if your wedding ceremony and other traditions are for the major part of the day and exclusively for close friends and relatives, you could have a dinner with all other invitees.

You can ask guests for any allergies or dietary restrictions on invitations so that you can serve them accordingly. Some may be lactose-intolerant while some others would prefer more vegetarian dishes. Some may go totally vegetarian. Your wedding reception food should accommodate all guests and not just cater to the majority. Otherwise, many guests would go hungry or have to decline your invitation to the reception and, maybe, the wedding itself.

Your Menu for the Wedding Reception

Morning Reception

If you have a morning wedding reception, food should ideally be breakfast or brunch with items like bagels, pastries, smoked salmon, pancakes, cheeses, omelets and fresh fruit. This helps you have the entire day for yourself. You can plan to start on your honeymoon the same day.

Lunch Reception

If you organize your wedding reception for later in the day, it could be a wedding lunch gathering. Common fare at wedding lunches includes salads, sandwiches, pasta, and fruit. Lunch menus can fit easily within your budgetary constraints.

Tea Reception

If your wedding reception is at this time of day can fit in easily within a small budget. You can choose to serve simple fare like cake, finger sandwiches cookies, and candy that reflects simple celebration.

Dinner Reception

This is the most formal wedding celebration. Dinners are normally elaborate where cocktail parties and other drinks precede dinner wedding parties. It allows you to experiment with different ideas and food themes. You have numerous choices of food, serving styles and menu considerations.

Dinner wedding parties normally include dance sessions, so it proves to be a more elaborate and a long affair.

Food served at dinners could be a traditional sit-down dinner or buffet style. You can alternatively organize food stations for your

guests to stand and have their choice of food. In some cases, you can have chefs prepare your guests' choice of food at food stations in front of your eyes. You can serve food according to any specific wedding theme.

In any case, a dinner reception allows for maximum presentation of the selected fare at your wedding.

Choices might include roast beef, baked or fried chicken, vegetables with soup and salad, filet mignon, baked potato or mashed potatoes and gravy, pasta, pizza, vegetables, vegetarian dishes, and dishes that comply with dietary considerations.

Choice of Wedding Receptions

Wedding receptions could be at venues like hotels, banquet halls, and restaurants. Otherwise, it could be at community parks, home lawns, beaches, and other similar locations.

Most venues offer catering services with their halls. If you choose to go with their catering service, take time to decide and taste samples from the menu before finalizing the deal.

Do not settle for the first caterer immediately. Take your time to select, taste, and choose. You cannot possibly experiment with food at your wedding reception.

Another option is to have a buffet style of dinner at your wedding reception. You can arrange a caterer of your choice if you are not satisfied with the caterer usually recommended by the hotel or restaurant.

You can solicit caterers recommended by your friends or relatives and may prefer having a small gathering before your marriage so

that you get to taste the culinary skills of the specific caterer. Food in accordance with the theme is another popular option.

Buffets prove less expensive than traditional sit-down meal services. Guests can choose to have their choice of dishes rather than having to eat or waste whatever is served on their plate.

For a buffet system, you can set up separate food stations like Chinese, Italian, and the like. This allows guests to experiment.

Traditional sit-down meals are the normal trend at formal dinners. Although you may have various choices of food, you should consider popular menus and favorites rather than experimenting.

Elaborate Wedding Reception

You can go for an elaborate celebration at your wedding reception if there are no budgetary constraints. It should ideally consist of:

Open Bar Service: This open bar runs for whatever period of your wedding reception that you can afford, but closing it an hour before dinnertime could prove a good idea.

The bar should contain frozen drinks, top-shelf liquors, cream-based drinks, nonalcoholic soft drinks, beer, wine, and soda.

Cocktail Hour: This normally lasts for an hour and guests can enjoy a wide choice of appetizers like breads, cold deli platters and hors d’oeuvres.

You can choose to have serving staff carry them to your guests on trays or set up food stations for the guests to make their choices. This should preferably be in a separate room away from the wedding reception area. This allows the bride, groom and other

members of the wedding party to have a few moments for themselves.

Main Dinner Service: This involves buffet serving of food or a traditional sit-down service. You can choose from food courses like poultry, fish, or beef dishes. You can have various appetizers like sliced fresh fruits, salads, and soups.

Wedding Cake Cutting: This is another important part of the wedding reception. After the traditional cutting of your wedding cake, you can choose to serve cake slices to guests with tea or coffee.

Dessert Hour: Next, you could offer various desserts featuring different pastries, cakes, mousses, ice cream, cookies, and other mouthwatering treats.

Cost Considerations at Wedding Receptions

Food is often one of the major expenses at wedding receptions. The cost depends on the elaborateness of food choices, number of guests and the time of reception.

If you want to reduce expenses and be well within a small budget, choose a small reception like a tea reception or breakfast reception. Lunch receptions have a moderate costs while dinner receptions are usually the costliest.

The number of guests is another major factor. If you have a long guest list, you will incur higher expenses with food at your wedding reception, irrespective of the type of reception.

If you choose to celebrate within a small private gathering, your costs should certainly be well within your budget. Self-catering services require no staff or only a minimum number.

You place food at decorated tables and guests can help themselves.

Wedding Reception Drinks

Drinks, including nonalcoholic beverages, form an important part of the wedding reception. However, if you and your spouse do not drink or hold religious beliefs that forbid alcoholic drinks, you can avoid serving it.

Then, you should have an interesting mix of fruit juices and smoothies for the guests.

Planning the Drinks

Consult the caterer and ask for the list of beverages available, their prices, and the approximate cost of serving the guests at the reception.

Do your own research, read reviews of available wines and hard liquor before selecting the brands.

If it is way out of your budget, you can get your own bottles from a wholesale store and hire a bartender for the reception.

Depending on the budget, opt for a good mix of wine, beer and hard drinks like vodka, gin, and rum.

Keep an interesting selection of fruit punch, sorbets, and even chocolate milk for children, as well as mineral water.

If hosting a themed reception, serve appropriate cocktails, like Sangria for a Mexican theme.

Serving Drinks during the Reception

You can serve champagne for the inaugural toast, or let guests toast you both with an array of drinks.

Limit the drinks list to a few wines and hard drinks along with some interesting cocktails.

Serve the expensive wines and alcohol initially and then substitute with less expensive brands as the reception progresses. The guests will be too busy to notice, but enjoy their drinks all the same.

Stop serving drinks as the meal nears completion and serve Irish coffee or liqueurs at the end of the meal.

Instruct the bartenders to limit drinks to tipsy guests and not to serve underage children.

Ensure that you have the proper license to serve liquor at the reception venue.

Check with the reception manager regarding the corkage charges to avoid extra payment for unopened bottles.

Most couples opt for an open bar but, if it is too expensive, you can opt for a limited open bar. Here the wine and beer is unlimited while guests pay for other hard drinks.

DJ's and Music for the Wedding Reception

The wedding reception is a great occasion for celebration and the music for this event must be out of this world. The music must create an atmosphere of merriment, happiness and joy.

Criteria for Selecting the Music

The music chosen must reflect the tastes of the bridal couple. It could be a compilation reflecting the reception theme, ethnic music, traditional classical pieces, or a combination of several styles.

Depending on the budget, the couple can opt for recorded music, a live band, or a DJ.

Selecting a DJ

- Consult the yellow pages for a list of potential DJs at least six months before the wedding. You can choose the DJ from the local radio station, if you like the selection of music he plays.
- Visit a party or event that the DJ hosts, before finalizing the hiring of the DJ.

The DJ must be a professional and respond promptly to your calls or emails. Talk to him about your musical tastes, the age group of guests, and the music mix you want. Go over the selection a few times, adding or deleting songs.

Some DJs can arrange an entire program with laser lights and professional dancers, if you want.

Familiarize the DJ with the names of important family members like your parents, the groom's parents, and so on. This will help him to invite them for the dance and give a personal touch to the reception.

Plan the entire sequence of events; starting with the toast, the first dance, the breaks, and the music that will play for each sequence.

A good DJ can help set the mood for a rocking reception that guests will remember for a long time to come.

Sign a proper contract with him, listing terms of payment, advance, and details about the equipment and the music.

Selecting a Live Band

- If you desire live music, you must make a careful selection of the band. Listen to them at another reception or an event before finalizing their hiring.
- Decide upon the number of musicians, the pieces for each event depending upon the size of your budget and the size of the venue.
- You may choose a band with one or two singers; decide the songs they will sing and the schedule for these songs.
- Ask them for suggestions regarding the music as they have more exposure and can guide you, especially on the classical pieces.
- Give the band ample lead-time to set up their instruments before the reception and enough time to pack up at the end.
- Serve them refreshments and something to eat, since a reception can last a really long time, and make arrangements with them well before the event for them to have sufficient breaks to keep them refreshed. Provide a clean, private area for them to change their clothes and relax between performing sessions.
- If possible, confirm that the musicians are all familiar with all the musical pieces that the band will play, to avoid any last minute glitches.

- Hire a professional orchestra, even if it is a little expensive. They are seasoned professionals who know exactly what to play and when. They dress smartly, befitting the occasion and can handle minor social emergencies.
- Decide when there will be breaks and choose the recorded music that will play during these breaks.
- Discuss all the estimated costs, overtime and confirm what charges you have to bear. Usually the host bears the cartage and transport charges to and from the reception venue.

Tips to Save Money on the Musical Arrangements

Hire some talented young musicians who will provide entertainment at a fraction of the cost of a professional band. Hire a local college band that is good and will not empty your pocket.

Use recorded music instead of live music at the reception. Check if you need a license to play recorded music at the venue.

Hire a smaller band that will be affordable compared to a full orchestra.

General Guidelines

Provide a Proper Place for the DJ and his Equipment.

If hiring a band, provide a large area for the instruments.

If the reception is outdoors, arrange a canopy that will protect the band and their expensive equipment from the elements.

Arrange standing lights for the musicians, if it is an evening reception.

Make sure that you check what accessories such as chairs and power outlets that the DJ and the band will need.

If the reception is on a boat, provide a stable stage for the band, so that they are comfortable.

Set up the stage away from food, fire, and heating equipment, to avoid mishaps.

Give them proper direction to the venue so that they arrive on time for the reception.

Confirm if the reception venue permits live music and the time limit for it. Some venues do not allow music after a fixed time in the night because of local government rules.

Go ahead, have a blast, and let your hair down.

Wedding Reception Dance Tips

The first dance of the bridal couple is an important event during the wedding reception.

You should practice well in advance to get the steps right.

Practicing for the First Dance

If you know formal dancing, practice with your fiancé for half an hour at least twice a week. Start at least three months in advance to overcome any awkwardness on the big day.

After all, you must look your best in the photographs and the wedding video.

Find out about dance classes that teach you waltz, swing, tango and other traditional dances that will be played during your reception. If this is too expensive, ask a family member to teach you the basics.

Compile a CD of the play list that will play at the reception. Practice the first song with your fiancé so that things proceed smoothly during the reception.

Learn the Rules of Dancing

Usually the bridal couple takes the floor for the first dance. You must decide in advance, who will take the floor after this; whether it will be the traditional order of parents and grandparents or a free-for-all.

Next, the bride dances with the groom's father while the groom dances with the bride's mother. Then, the parents dance with their respective spouses and the other guests then join in. A man will always ask a woman to dance and he leads, while the lady follows.

Tips for a Smooth First Dance

- Choose a short song with a good beat for the first dance.

- Choreograph the first dance to have a terrific beginning and end.
- The bride must practice in a dress which is of similar length to match the wedding dress.
- The groom must lead firmly and look up at all times. The same goes for the bride.

Relax and learn to enjoy dancing with your life partner.

Wedding Reception Photography and Videography

Wedding Reception Photography

Photographers freeze magical moments of your wedding reception creatively. These help you relive those moments again when you look at your wedding photographs. Hiring a professional photographer can make your job simpler.

Photographers will discuss candid shots, possible poses, and why events require expert attention for perfect photos.

While engaging the services of a professional photographer, you only have to hint at additional photos you may require at your wedding reception. You may want close-ups with your colleagues, college-mates or others.

While discussing details with your wedding photographer, confirm and finalize all costs. Photographers have different techniques of analyzing costs. Some do it by the number of snaps while some go by the number of film rolls. Further, additional expenses are required for developing, framing, and presenting.

Some photographers would give negatives on CD-ROM, video, or e-mail. Not all would allow you to purchase the negatives. Some photographers will reserve the copyright of the photos that they take. Be sure to check this with the photographers that you consider hiring.

While choosing your photographer, critically examine his work. Look into technical aspects and see some of his photographs of other events. The most important factor is that you should feel

comfortable with your photographer and his style of working and presenting the pictures.

Wedding photographs are not only specific poses; photographers will try to get photos of all the highlights of the event and present them creatively. Therefore, you should develop a rapport with your photographer so much that you might almost categorize him as a family member just for the day.

Wedding Reception Videography

Videotaping a wedding reception involves lot of skill and professionalism. It is not possible to film all events in your camcorder and later present them. It requires an artistic sense of coordinating events subtly to retain the essence of the event.

A good video photographer should have all the necessary technical expertise of their videography equipment and its correct usage. He should be able to document all events and inter-relate them artistically.

This helps preserve and retain your heightened emotions within the videotape. It brings back all the magical moments whenever you view your unique videotape in the future.

Hire a videographer with whom you feel most comfortable. View his earlier presentations and get to understand his style and technique. This should suit your requirements so well that you don't worry whether everything will be perfect on your wedding day.

Videography requires sufficient light and an ideal combination of all sounds and ambience without being too loud or too low. It is obvious that your videographer cannot capture every single moment

on camera. Yet, the videographer must capture all the key moments and present them so that they are not lost forever.

Before finalizing any deals, discuss cancellation and refund policies of the videographer. Also, check if there is sufficient back up of equipment and personnel if there is any unforeseen problem on the big day. You can provide a few photos of you and your spouse’s childhood and growing years to incorporate within your video album.

Maximizing the Fun – Useful Tips for the Ultimate Wedding Reception

Your wedding reception is a unique time for a lifetime celebration.

You should ensure that everything remains perfect on this special day and all celebrations prove to be the best for you and your guests.

These simple tips can help you to create the magical day for both of you and all your guests:

Reception Location: Choose and finalize your wedding reception location well in advance. Normally, during wedding season (from May to October), it is difficult to book good locations easily.

Advance booking of up to six months is normal. Again, the day of your wedding is also an important factor. Weekday evenings and nights are usually more free than weekends, especially Saturdays.

Sending Invitations: You should send guest invitations early, preferably a minimum of three weeks in advance. This can help your guests to sort out their itinerary for the day and keep it free to attend your wedding reception. Keeping a safe margin can help you schedule the final guest list for catering and other services.

Guest List: A long guest list could prove a heavy drag on your wallet. However, try not to exclude many friends and relatives. The more of guests at your wedding reception, the livelier and merrier it will be.

Start of the Wedding Reception: Allow an hour's time beyond the scheduled start of your reception for all guests to arrive and settle

at your wedding reception. There could be unexpected delays due to weather, traffic and distance traveled. Having extra time in hand helps all guests to mingle and enjoy your wedding festivities.

Décor and Ambience: These essential factors set the mood at a wedding reception. Decorate your wedding reception location as lavishly as possible. Flowers and other accessories like silk ribbons in colorful colors and in accord with your party theme can make your wedding reception location look and seem out of the world.

Special Activities: It is very common for most guests at your wedding reception to be strangers. Choose simple interactive methods for guests to start mingling and feel like a huge family. Simple fun activities, dances, games and announcements can set the ball rolling for guests to get together and have fun at your reception.

You should soon find guests talking and laughing with each other as if they are old acquaintances.

Dance Time: The bride and groom should have the First Dance before guests start streaming on to the dance floor. This is your big day and you should be all out to set the tone of your wedding reception.

Set aside all your worries and stresses and enjoy everything wholeheartedly. Your guests will sense your feelings as you start dancing. Allow others to be happy at your wedding reception too.

Cocktails: Serve a variety of cocktails, soft drinks, martinis, wine, beer, and other alcoholic beverages at your wedding reception unless that conflicts with your beliefs. Try to help your guests unwind so that they make the wedding reception merrier.

You can serve inexpensive wine and beer or have a cash only bar with free soft drinks and water.

Early booking of wedding services: Ensure early booking of photographers, florists, caterers and bands for your wedding.

Fixing and finalizing deals early can ensure there are no disappointments or last-minute tensions and worries.

A lot of planning and preparation goes into organizing a wedding reception. Plan and go into all nitty-gritty details so that there is no cause for any disturbances or anything to go wrong on your day.

Sending the Thank You Notes

Thank you notes are simple, personalized acknowledgments for gifts that you receive at your wedding reception. Your gifts could be according to your list at your bridal registry or the personal choices of your guests. Either way, it is essential to thank your guests for their thoughtfulness.

The best way to send thank you cards is to purchase empty thank-you cards while ordering invitation cards. This way, your thank you cards would be similar to your invitation cards.

Next, you should have a written record of all gifts you receive with full details of the gift, person sending it and date of receipt.

You can choose to keep this list on your computer or have a handwritten list.

Thank-you letters and notes should be brief, handwritten and personal. They should pour out your warmth. They need not be elaborate letters. Otherwise, you would soon exhaust yourself.

You can send thank-you notes soon after receiving the gifts or within two weeks after returning from your honeymoon. Writing thank-you notes immediately could prove less cumbersome.

Your thank-you notes should address the people individually like Aunt Jane, Grandpa etc. It makes it more personal. You should specifically mention the gift you received, how you plan to use it and how apt the gift proved to be.

If you receive cash, you can mention how you intend spending it.

If you receive more than one gift from a person, you should send separate thank-you notes. If any of your invitees is unable to attend your wedding and sends the gift, you can add few extra lines in your thank-you note. You can forward a few of your wedding photos and describe some of the events while mentioning how much you missed their presence at your wedding.

There could be a few people within your close family and friends, who have been most helpful and always available. A small gift with a handwritten thank you note can be the best acknowledgment for all their help during your wedding festivities.

The Start of your Wonderful Future Together.

I am grateful for the advice and support of my family and friends while I've been preparing this book.

I hope that their suggestions and my research have helped you with preparations for your big day.

My thanks for your purchase and my best wishes to both of you for a wonderful reception and your future together.

Mary Wells.

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