

A Day Within Budget

Couples planning their weddings realize pretty quickly just how expensive weddings can be.

Depending on where couples tie the knot, the costs can stretch into the tens of thousands of dollars, leaving many young men and women to scramble to find ways to trim costs without trimming quality.

Many couples look for ways to cut wedding costs, and couples facing that very dilemma should know that there are several ways to save money but still host the wedding of their dreams.

Guest list

Guest lists can consume a significant portion of couples' wedding budgets. When compiling the guest list, couples should keep in mind that guests will need save-the-date cards, invitations, catered meals (including cocktail hour, dinner and dessert), drinks, and gifts (including hotel gift bags and wedding favors). So the cost per guest will be more than just the per person cost of the meal couples negotiate with their caterer. Couples who can pare their guests lists down to just family and close friends can save a substantial amount of money without affecting their ceremonies.

Reception

A couple's wedding reception also will chew up a lot of their

wedding budgets. But there are ways to reduce the costs of receptions, too. Couples planning on having a morning wedding can shift their receptions from the evening to the afternoon, when the cost per meal will be considerably less. Afternoon receptions also can be alcohol-free, saving couples even more money. If a nighttime reception is a must-have, choose a limited cash bar instead of an open bar. Limited cash bars often provide guests with free beer and house wine while guests who prefer liquor or mixed drinks must pay for their own libations. If you are planning an outdoor wedding reception, you may even be able to provide your own alcohol, which can save considerable amounts of money.

Couples also can trim reception costs by choosing the least expensive meal package. Packages often differ greatly in price but are not always so different with regard to their menus. If you find the packages offered by your venue are similar, choose the least expensive option.

Arrangements

Floral arrangements are a big and potentially expensive part of many couples' weddings. The bride needs her bouquet, as do

her bridesmaids. In addition, many couples decorate their ceremony space with flowers, and of course reception table centerpieces typically include flowers as well. When working with your florist, request in-season flowers, which will cost considerably less than exotic flowers that are out of season. In addition, let your florist know your budget and ask that he or she recommend flowers that won't break the bank.

Gifts

While it's become customary to prepare gift bags for guests

staying in hotels, couples should not go overboard with such gifts. Gift bags need not include more than a snack, a bottle of water and a homemade thank-you card. Couples also should not break the bank with regard to reception gifts, which have also become a standard offering. Keep such gifts simple and inexpensive, even opting for homemade gifts if you and your future spouse are skilled with crafts. Wedding costs can be eye-opening for couples preparing to walk down the aisle. Fortunately, there are many ways to cut costs without cutting quality.

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