Memorable Moments
Your RGV Event Planning Guide

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Factors To Consider Before Choosing a Wedding venue

Once couples become engaged and share the good news with their friends and families, the next step is to begin planning their weddings. While couples must make a myriad of decisions during the wedding planning process, perhaps none is more significant than where to tie the knot.

According to The Knot 2016 Real Weddings Study, the average cost of a wedding for couples who married in 2016 was $35,329. That’s a sizable amount, and a big portion of that was spent on the wedding venue. The Real Weddings Study found that couples spent an average of $16,107 on their wedding venues in 2016. That figure easily dwarfs the next biggest expense ($6,163 for the engagement ring) for couples tying the knot.

Because the wedding venue comes with such a potentially high sticker price, couples should give ample consideration to a host of factors before choosing where to get married.

Size
Until they can agree on a guest list, couples might want to delay even looking for venues. However, some couples might want to first look at some venues so they can determine just how many guests they can afford to invite. Whether they’re hosting small affairs or large parties, couples should choose venues that can comfortably accommodate all of their guests. If possible, look for venues with multiple reception areas, which might allow for some wiggle room if the guest list grows or dwindles during the planning process.

Availability
Some couples might have an ideal time of year they hope to get married. Some even know the exact date they hope to get married. While that can help with the planning, it can also limit couples with regard to their venue options. Some venues may be booked for as much as a year or more in advance during peak wedding season. The Real Weddings Study found that the most popular months to get married in 2016 were October and September. Couples who hope to follow in the footsteps of many 2016 brides and grooms may need to book their wedding venues well in advance. Those who can be more flexible regarding their wedding dates may find it easier to book their dream venues.

Insurance
Ask about the venue’s insurance policies, including the policies the venue has to protect itself. In addition, ask if the venue requires couples to have their own wedding liability insurance for protection in the event of injury, property damage or incidents related to alcohol. Couples may also want to make the investment in cancellation/postponement insurance, and some venues may even require it.

Financials
It’s easy for couples to be focused on the bottom line when choosing wedding venues, but it’s also important that they get a complete grasp of the financials before choosing a wedding venue. Ask about the amount of the initial deposit and if that deposit is refundable. In addition, ask when the deposit is due and when each subsequent payment is due until the balance is paid in full. This can make budgeting easier and planning less stressful.

Couples should have fun choosing their wedding venues while recognizing that certain factors must be given ample consideration before signing any contracts.
The Origins of Quinceañera Celebrations

Different cultures mark the passage of time in unique ways. Most include lavish celebrations to welcome people into the next chapter of their lives. At age 13, Jewish children celebrate their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. The Japanese use the twenty-first birthday as the time to recognize young men and women as adults. And for people of Hispanic heritage, the fifteenth birthday is often a time for special observance.

What is a quinceañera?
A quinceañera is the name given to a girl who has turned 15 and the coming-of-age celebration in her honor. A quinceañera may also be referred to as ‘Fiesta de quince años.’ Legend states that girls were deemed eligible for marriage at age 15; otherwise, they would become nuns. Therefore, in the years leading up until their fifteenth birthdays, these young women would learn all of the skills necessary to run a household and manage a family. It’s believed the fifteenth birthday milestone originated with ancient Aztecs, who felt 15-year-old boys were now old enough to be warriors and 15-year-old girls were now women.

Today, quinceañera is more of a symbolic passage from childhood into womanhood. Depending on celebrants’ backgrounds, quinceañera celebrations are viewed differently. Some are simply a big birthday party, while others may have religious overtones. Still others include Aztec influences and references to their indigenous heritage.

Where are quinceañeras celebrated?
Quinceañera celebrations are popular among people who trace their heritage to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Argentina, and Portugal. These celebrations also are wildly popular in those areas of the United States and the United Kingdom that are home to high concentrations of Hispanics. Some have compared the quinceañera celebration to the debutante balls of the past or networking parties that still take place in many wealthy families.

Common quinceañera traditions
Each family brings its own interpretation to these celebrations, but many quinceañera parties are very similar. The following are some popular quinceañera traditions.

- A church blessing is bestowed on the birthday girl.
- The guest of honor wears a pastel, princess-style gown.
- Fourteen male and female attendants and escorts, called damas and chambelanes, participate, representing the previous 14 years of life.
- The guest of honor will give a porcelain doll to a younger sister to signify leaving childhood behind.
- The birthday girl will also change from flat shoes into high-heels to represent becoming a young woman.
- The quinceañera will dance the first dance with her father.

Quinceañeras are quite popular, and these heritage-rich parties still play significant roles in connecting Hispanics with their roots.
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Wedding Dress Fitting Guide

Because fashion preferences were once ornate and dependent on precise fits, ready-to-wear clothing really did not become widely available until the early 20th century. Such attire is now available in just about any retail store. Once a gown is chosen, the dress shop will take your measurements and order the gown according to the manufacturer’s sizing guide. Again, this can be shocking, since the size will likely be larger than what you wear in street clothes. Some shops will also order a little larger to allow for adequate tailoring.

Schedule the first fitting. The first fitting should be anywhere from eight to 12 weeks before the wedding date, according to experts at WeddingWire, an online wedding information provider. This is the time it takes to complete most standard alterations. Complex customizations can take even longer. Brides should also budget a minimum of $500 for alterations, which may or may not be included in the price of the dress.

Bring shoes and undergarments. Remember to bring along the exact shoes and undergarments you will wear with your gown. A change in shoes or bra/corset can result in the alterations fitting poorly the next time. Bring these items along to all subsequent fittings.

Speak up. Martha Stewart Weddings suggests speaking up at fittings if anything is uncomfortable or needs tweaking. Seamstresses are masters at their crafts, but only if they understand the desires of the bride.

Check the details. The second fitting is designed to check that all issues from the first fitting have been addressed, the gown is comfortable and you can move freely. At the last fitting, ask the maid of honor to come along so that she understands how to bustle or help you handle complicated straps or closures. Open communication with a seamstress and bridal shop can ensure brides-to-be get a dress that fits like a glove.

Because ready-to-wear clothing is so readily available, the average person may be unfamiliar with custom-made or tailored items. In fact, a couple’s wedding may be the only instance in their lives when they require the services of a seamstress or tailor.

Fittings are a part of wedding planning, and here’s how brides-to-be can navigate the process of finding and being fitted for a dress.
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Tips For Choosing a Honeymoon Destination

Couples planning their honeymoons want to get the most for their money while also ensuring their first trip together as newlyweds is as memorable as possible. The destination couples choose can go a long way toward making that happen, and couples can consider various factors as they work together to choose a locale for their honeymoons.

Once couples have tied the knot, hit the reception dance floor and thanked their friends and family for joining them, their thoughts might start looking ahead to their honeymoons. Statistics vary in regard to how much couples spend on their honeymoons, but those heading overseas can expect to pay thousands of dollars on such getaways. Couples planning their honeymoons want to get the most for their money while also ensuring their first trip together as newlyweds is as memorable as possible. The destination couples choose can go a long way toward making that happen, and couples can consider various factors as they work together to choose a locale for their honeymoons.

Activity level
Some couples might want their honeymoons to be filled with activities, while others might prefer more low-key trips spent relaxing at seaside resorts. Couples can discuss which types of trips they prefer and be willing to compromise if their desires differ.

Travel
Some couples may prefer to travel throughout their honeymoons, while others may want to stay at the same resort for the duration of their trips. Couples who want to travel may find a backpacking trip to Europe is a romantic way to indulge their sense of adventure, while those who prefer something more quiet may find a beach resort more to their liking.

Budget
Budget is a strong consideration for many couples as they plan their honeymoons. Because honeymoons can be expensive, couples who don’t want to sacrifice on their first trip together as a married couple can begin planning their trips early, even looking for ways to cut costs on their ceremonies and receptions if their honeymoons are a bigger priority. When planning their honeymoons, couples also can take steps to save money. For example, delaying a trip until a few months after the wedding can help covers get back on their financial feet and enjoy their dream getaways. Couples visiting resorts also may want to opt for all-inclusive packages, which can provide great value, particularly on food and beverages.
Tips For Choosing a Wedding Reception Menu

Weddings are memorable for a host of reasons. While couples remember their weddings because they mark the day they officially tied the knot, guests may remember weddings for other reasons, including the food served at the reception.

Some wedding venues are known for their stunning landscapes, while others build their reputations on unique interiors that provide unforgettable ambiance. But regardless of where weddings take place, guests are liable to discuss the food served at the reception. Guests might rave about the escargot or complain that the fish was flaky, but couples who choose reception menus wisely can go a long way toward ensuring there are more compliments than complaints once the dinner bell rings.

- Don’t zero in on specialties. According to The Knot 2017 Real Weddings Study, a survey of nearly 13,000 brides and grooms who tied the knot in 2017, the average wedding hosted 136 guests. While couples might be tempted by specialty dishes when choosing their wedding menus, couples who are hosting dozens, if not hundreds, of guests should keep things simple.

- Consider potential allergies. In regard to entrées, make sure guests with food allergies can choose something that won’t make them sick. According to Food Allergy Research & Education®, an organization devoted to improving the quality of life of individuals with food allergies, some common foods cause the majority of allergic reactions. Peanuts, soy, sesame, and shellfish are among the most common food allergies, according to FARE®. FARE also notes that allergies to wheat, milk and eggs are common in children. While such foods can still be served at wedding receptions, make sure to also include foods that are unlikely to trigger allergic reactions. Couples can even ask guests to inform them of any food allergies.

- Don’t hesitate to offer a favorite food. While specialty entrées might not be a great choice, especially at large receptions where lots of mouths must be fed, a couple who has a favorite food that’s symbolic of their relationship should not hesitate to offer it during the cocktail hour. For example, a couple who met in Thailand may want to offer a favorite Thai dish.

- Offer an elaborate dessert. The last bite guests will take is dessert, so couples who want their guests to go home raving about the food may want to offer something special after the entrées have been taken away. Some guests may not indulge, but those who do might end their nights thinking about the delicious dessert they enjoyed as the festivities drew to a close. If the dessert is especially unique, offer something more traditional alongside it for more hesitant guests.

Choosing a wedding menu should be fun. Menus should reflect not only couples’ tastes but also include some popular foods so no one goes home hungry.
Birthday Party Pointers To Make Kids, Parents Happy

Childhood is filled with many memorable moments. Among the more memorable are children’s birthday parties. During their children’s formative years, parents may wrestle with ideas, themes, etiquette, and more as they plan birthday parties to remember. Hosting birthday parties that touch on all the right notes can be easier if parents follow a handful of strategies that many parents have been employing for years.

- Involve your child. Chances are your son or daughter has been plotting out ideas for his or her party since last year’s festivities ended. Ask questions about what he or she would like to do this year. Seek your child’s input on the guest list and preferred theme. Playing an active roll in party planning can make kids even more excited about their birthday parties.

- Focus on fun and making your child feel special. Some parents feel birthday parties must be expensive and all-encompassing bashes. But many children simply want parties that allow them to participate in an activity they enjoy, eat sweets and share the experience with their closest friends. Recognizing this can help parents keep their workloads and budgets in check.

- Trim the guest list. Parents should not feel the need to invite every acquaintance to their children’s birthday parties. Parents understandably don’t want to exclude or offend anyone by leaving them off the guest list. However, try to limit the guests to around 10, including the guest of honor. This makes the entire party more manageable.

- Keep it quiet. Make sure your child avoids bragging about the party at school or at extracurricular activities. Doing so may offend those classmates who are not on the guest list. Send invites directly to homes rather than distributing them at school so that no one feels excluded.

- Develop backup plans. There’s no accounting for the weather, illness, venue cancellations, or food flops. Always have a plan B (and, ideally, a plan C and plan D) so that the kids can stay entertained.

- Encourage drop-and-go. Hosting young children can be stressful. And when parents attend the party as well, entertaining duties expand to an entirely different level. Recruit another helper or two and be sure parents know you are comfortable with them not staying for the party. They may even appreciate your looking after their children for a few hours.

- Plan for additional guests. Part of planning for the unexpected includes being able to accommodate a few extra children. You never know when a sibling will have to tag along or a last-minute invite pops up, so keep some extra snacks and favors on hand just in case.

- Open gifts after guests leave. Opening gifts is time-consuming, and young children may not be adept at filtering their comments. No one should go home feeling their gift was not appreciated.

Keep children’s birthday parties simple so guests and hosts have as much fun as possible.
Taking a Hands-on Invitation Approach

Invitations are a key component of wedding planning. Not only can invitations set the tone for a wedding — giving guests an idea of whether it is formal or casual while offering clues to the theme — but also they are essential for conveying important information about the festivities.

While it was once common to work with a specialized printing and engraving company when ordering wedding invitations, couples tying the knot now have more options. Due in large part to computer and internet access, and myriad user-friendly design applications, it's easier than ever to design high-quality wedding invitations.

According to the wedding industry survey site TheWeddingReport.com, the average price for 150 invitations and response cards is $245. To maximize efficiency and come away with wedding stationery they will love, couples can employ the following tips and techniques.

Start with the paper
The heavier the stock, the more luxurious the invitations will feel. Quality stock also costs more. Wedding invitations should be printed on substantial stock so they don't bend or feel flimsy. Industry experts say that 100 percent cotton paper is the most costly paper. Couples can choose from linen stock and textured surfaces as well. Expect to pay more for natural or handmade papers. Those concerned about price can choose the highest-quality stock within budget and then play with other invitation elements to conserve funds.

Printing companies
Options abound in regard to in-store and online printing companies. Many companies offer self-service design templates that enable customers to tweak text and placement of some graphic elements and then have the invitations printed and shipped to their homes. Companies may provide stock samples and examples of lettering so that couples can touch and see the invitations prior to placing an order.

Engraving and letterpress
Engraving and letterpress techniques are an art form and create unique wedding invitations. Engraving creates raised lettering while letterpress presses the lettering into the paper. Many people do not have the equipment necessary to produce these designs at home, and if they want a truly high-end invitation, they'll need to use a professional printing service. Thermography is an alternative that can deliver raised print using heat and special inks.

At-home printing
One of the more accessible invitation production methods is at-home printing. However, there are some limitations when printing at home. For example, couples who do not have a high-end printer may find that the text on their invitations is not as crisp and the ink may smudge. Also, paper options may be limited to what the tray feeder can accommodate. Stock that is 80 pounds or 12-point stock is preferable, but anything more may jam around the print head. It may take some trial and error (and wasted paper) to perfect alignment and achieve the desired look. DIYers also need to know about 'bleed' designs. According to the advice site A Practical Wedding, bleed is a printing term for design elements or images extending beyond the trim edge so that unwanted white space is eliminated. Again, it may take some practice to get the desired look.

Couples have many different options when designing their wedding invitations, and some may even be able to design and produce their own.
Successful Event Planning Strategies

Other occasions call on individuals to organize professional events, such as conferences or large scale presentations. Whether planning personal celebrations or professional gatherings, event planning can be challenging.

Getting started
Event planners must analyze various things before they can hit the ground running. These include answering questions, such as:
- What is the purpose of the event?
- Is there a certain theme?
- How many people will be invited?
- What are the goals of the event?
- What is the budget?
- What kind of help is available?
Answering these questions will provide those tasked with planning events a solid foundation on which to build the events.

Build a solid team
Planning an event is a tall task, but a trusted group of helpers can lighten planners’ loads. Event planners should play to their teams’ strengths and delegate tasks accordingly. For example, a natural salesperson can be tasked with negotiating rates on venues or vendor services, while a bookkeeper can keep track of the budget.

Find the right venue
A venue can make or break an event. That makes selecting a venue crucial. Things that need to be considered include proximity to where people live; availability of transportation to and from the event; hotel accommodations nearby; parking; event space; and other factors, such as a stage or podium or other special equipment, as they apply to the event. Sometimes it is worth spending a little extra to secure a top-notch venue that will ensure guests walk away satisfied.

Fill their stomachs
People who have had enough to eat may be more inclined to have a good time. At professional events, a well-fed audience may be more receptive to the message being presented. Event planners should give careful consideration to the types of food and beverages that will be served. Buffet-style may be easier for larger crowds. However, if the goal is a lavish event, a sit-down meal can help achieve the right ambiance.

Promote well
Those invited to the event should be informed well in advance so they can make plans to attend. If the event is a fundraiser or designed for a specific marketing goal, event planners will need to promote the function well to ensure substantial attendance.

Offer a take-away
Whether a swag bag, small gift or another token, event planners should budget for gifts that guests can take home with them. Such gifts increase the likelihood that guests will remember the event fondly and may generate positive feedback from guests. Event planning skills are important. Such skills can serve people well in their personal and professional lives.
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