



ATTENDING WEDDINGS WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK *Beyond Bride and Groom, Festivities Pose Big Financial Challenge*

GREENWOOD VILLAGE, COLORADO—Ayelet Drori is a 24-year-old bride-to-be planning a wedding on a budget. Even in a troubled economy, the cost of weddings remains high. In fact the typical price tag in the United States is \$27,000, according to the wedding-related Web site *The Knot*. But the costs associated with her own nuptials are only one consideration for Drori. There also is a definite financial burden to just attending weddings, as she experienced with more of her and her fiancés' friends getting married in the last few years.

“When going to a wedding, you don’t only have to worry about gifts, but also travel, food, clothes and more. It all adds up quickly,” says Drori, who works for the National Endowment for Financial Education® (NEFE®).

The first step to keeping wedding expenditures in check is to create a spending plan that incorporates all anticipated costs.

“I always consider ahead of time just how much money I’m able and willing to spend on the event. This varies depending on how my fiancé or I know the couple and if we’re standing up in the wedding,” says Drori.

Wedding attendants and guests typically spend money on pre-wedding parties, gifts, attire, travel and additional day-of expenses, such as child care. As you set your budget, consider these tips on spending less and cutting costs.

Pre-Wedding Parties

Just as the price for weddings has increased, so have the number of pre-wedding parties. Guests and attendants can expect to be invited to an engagement party, a bridal shower, and bachelor or bachelorette parties. Along with these comes a variety of expenses, from gifts to attire and more.

You can save money on pre-wedding presents in a number of ways. For example, consider pooling your money with a friend who also is attending the pre-wedding party so your combined funds can buy a more desirable gift. And of course, bachelor and bachelorette parties present the perfect time to give cheap gag gifts.

If you are an attendant in the wedding, it may fall on you to throw a pre-wedding party. Consider cutting expenses by having the event at your house, asking other guests to bring food or drinks to share, and providing appetizers and dessert instead of an entire meal.

Wedding Gifts

In most cases, the bride and groom will have registered for a number of gifts through different stores. These gifts typically are intended to help the new couple set up house, although some contemporary registries include everything from camping gear to outings on the honeymoon. Usually, the couple will provide wedding guests with a number of options at various prices. However, if you are struggling to find an item within your budget, consider buying the couple a gift card at one of the stores of choice.

“No matter what gift you choose, remember your budget,” Drori urges. “Don’t feel obligated to buy a gift that will compromise your financial situation.”

Wedding Attire

Whether you are standing in the wedding or observing with the rest of the crowd, purchasing a new outfit and partaking in pre-wedding pampering can prove costly. If you are an attendant, simply ask the bride or groom what is required of you to get a better idea of how much to budget in this area. You may find the financial expectations are minimal. On the other hand, you could learn that the bride wants you to buy a \$500 dress, new shoes and matching jewelry, and pay to have your hair, makeup and nails done. Understandably, forking over this much for the big day may not be feasible for you. Acknowledge this is the bride and groom’s big day, and you know that they want everything to be perfect. But with that said, explain the costs are a concern to you.

“If the bride and groom have chosen you to stand by their side, they undoubtedly see you as one of their closest friends,” Drori says. “If something is out of your reach financially, try to see if there are compromises that’ll make everyone happy.”

Is it possible to have a friend do your makeup instead of paying to have it done professionally? Maybe you could get your hair done at a beauty school, which usually is cheaper than a salon. Even if you aren’t in the wedding, selecting the right attire can prove a fiscal challenge. If you have a limited budget for wedding attire, consider asking a close friend if you could borrow something of his or hers. If you choose to buy a new outfit, keep an eye out for sales, and shop early to avoid last-minute decisions.

Travel and Other Expenses

If you have to travel a considerable distance to get to the wedding, the costs associated with that most likely will be your largest expense—particularly with the increased rates in fuel. If you are flying, shop for tickets as soon as possible. Usually, you will get a better fare the earlier you purchase the ticket. Consider flying at off-peak hours or look at an extra night’s stay over. This may drop your fare as well.

Hotel costs are another expensive item to consider. Certainly, out-of-town guests will need to find a place to stay. But even attendees who live in town may not want to drive

home and prefer to book a room for the night. To save the most money, consider staying with friends or family. But if this isn't an option, ask the bride and groom if they have reserved a block of rooms at a hotel near the reception site. This hotel may, or may not, provide the least expensive rooms nearby. It's important to do research to get the best deal.

Out-of-town guests also may need to rent a car. But before you begin checking rental companies, consider whether you really need a vehicle during your stay. The downside is you may spend your weekend ushering others from one duty or function to the next, particularly if you are in the wedding party. If possible, carpool with other guests. Also, ask the bride and groom if they are providing a shuttle service.

Don't forget to include time off work and possibly child care in your spending plan. If the bride and groom both have relatives and friends with young children, they may be offering child care to their guests. If not, ask a friend with kids to watch yours for the night in exchange for watching his or hers another evening.

Still Struggling to Afford the Big Day?

No matter how much you try to pinch pennies, weddings can be expensive to attend. To make your wedding budget, you may need to cut back in other areas for a short period of time. If you don't go out to dinner for a few weeks, you may be able to save enough money to buy the dress you really want. Maybe you can forgo your daily \$4 coffee for a month to purchase the gift you know the couple will really appreciate.

“Be careful not to overspend for a wedding and jeopardize your financial well-being,” Drori says. “The last thing a bride or groom wants is for a guest to go into debt because of their wedding.”

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