

## Trim Your Wedding Costs

Written by Jason Alderman  
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Weddings have always been big business, but I was shocked to see how expensive they've become in the 17 years since my wife and I got married. According to the annual Real Weddings Study, the average wedding in the U.S. now costs \$28,427, and that doesn't even count the honeymoon.

Wait, it gets worse.

Among the more than 17,500 surveyed brides who got married in 2012, the average amount paid for a wedding dress was \$1,211. On average they also spent \$204 per wedding guest and dropped \$12,905 for the reception venue.

There are many ways to rein in wedding-related costs while still having a memorable event. Here are a few suggestions:

Create a budget. Unless you're a professional wedding planner, you'll probably be floored by how many expenses weddings can amass, including: wedding and engagement rings, invitations, postage, marriage license, clergy and location fees, flowers, bridal gown and groom's tuxedo, rehearsal dinner and reception, photography, catering, DJ or band, limousine, parking attendants, tips, gifts for wedding participants and honeymoon expenses.

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Shop around. Bridal expos are a good way to meet a lot of vendors and gather ideas. Just don't get caught up in the excitement and commit to anything before you've done follow-up research. Some tips:

- Bring along someone from the wedding party as well as a trustworthy friend who isn't emotionally and financially connected to the wedding.
- You may feel pressured by vendors to sign contracts or put down deposits, but it's probably wiser to take their contact information and research them first.
- Create a separate email account for wedding vendor communications. Once you sign up for one offer or contest, believe me, your inbox will be swamped.

After you've settled on vendors, get signed contracts that specify dates, products, prices, deposit and payment terms, cancellation policies, liability insurance and whether tax and gratuities are included.

Here are a few suggestions for trimming costs:

- Date flexibility. You'll get more bang for your buck offseason – a June wedding might cost 20 to 30 percent more than one in April or October.
- Have your florist use in-season flowers.
- Daytime weddings are often cheaper than evening events.
- Instead of a hotel, consider less-costly alternative reception venues like community centers, museums, city park clubhouses or other public facilities looking to earn extra income. Ask whether they have their own tables, chairs, sound and lighting systems; if not, add equipment rental costs into the equation.
- A buffet dinner reception could save you \$15 or more per guest compared to a plated dinner, because you're not paying for table service. Save even more by hosting an afternoon reception and serving lunch or hors d'oeuvres.
- If you're hosting a large reception, have a smaller display cake for the cutting ceremony, with a sheet cake stored in the kitchen.
- Serve wine, beer and one signature cocktail, instead of offering a full bar.
- Consider renting or buying a second-hand wedding dress from a consignment shop, or an online specialty site. The same goes for grooms wear.
- Hiring a disc jockey instead of a live band will save hundreds of dollars; plus you get a broader selection of music and a built-in emcee to move things along.

One last budgeting tip: Limit the number of guests to ensure you can have a meaningful interaction with each. Remember, spending just one minute apiece with 300 guests would take

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five hours.