

## Wedding Planning

This planning guide covers 'finding the venue' and 'finding the dress'. It includes a lot of information that you can use to ensure that your wedding day is as good as it can be.

### a) Finding the Venue

This should be the starting point for any bride. Choosing your venue will determine your date if you don't have a specific one in mind, or you'll need to find a venue that's available on a particular date if there is one that's special to you. It will also determine your colour scheme, guests, food, dress, flowers and really the whole feel of your day.

First, decide which country/county/town you want to get married in, and the type of venue – there's so many available now beyond the traditional stately homes, hotels and more modern but popular barns. Begin your search online - through google searches, [hitched.co.uk](http://hitched.co.uk) and (perhaps the most useful source) recommendations from local wedding suppliers you are also shortlisting. Request quotes and narrow down the list to the ones that fit in budget.

So here are my tips for all of you that are venue hunting:

- **Do your research and get quotes** to find out what will be in your budget! I was honestly surprised how much some venues charge for room hire alone, and often it was those that I expected to be cheaper that wanted to charge a premium. I found that newer venues also cost more – probably as they need to reclaim their costs.
- **Only go and visit the venues that have your date free, and are within your budget.** There's no point visiting something and falling in love with it to find out you can't have it.
- Consider the **difference in price between seasons and days of the week** - some venues choose different months as their 'peak' season, though most will run from May to September, and then also push up prices around Christmas. Saturdays are obviously the most popular days to get married so these will cost more than other days of the week. If you're on a budget steer clear of these as you can save thousands by getting married on a Friday and even more outside the peak months!
- **Assess how flexible the venue is with your plans.** Can they do ceremonies at any time of day? Will they allow you to bring in your own food? Are there extra charges for the little details you want to include to make the day yours?

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- **Some questions to ask:**

- What dates are available in the month I'm considering?
- Is it possible to provisionally hold a date? For how long?
- How many people can the venue accommodate (for ceremony, if you're holding it there, and evening)?
- When would I need to confirm final numbers?
- If you do wish to hold the ceremony there, ask if they are licensed, and where the registrar comes from. Confirm the registrar is available at the time you need on that particular date before you confirm your booking.
- If the ceremony and wedding breakfast are due to take place in the same room, how fast can they turn it around (i.e. how long to you have for photos).
- What is the venue hire fee and what is included? Some places charge extra for table linens and chair covers, plates and cutlery, glassware etc.
- If you're hoping for an outdoor wedding, what is the weather contingency plan?
- How long is the venue hire for? Is there an overtime fee for staying longer?
- Can I decorate the space to suit my taste? Are there any guidelines? (We found candles and confetti often had restrictions i.e. only LED candles and biodegradable confetti to be used on the grass only).
- Do I have to set up on the day of the wedding or can I set up the day before? If only on the day of the wedding, will the venue help? And what time can my vendors have access on the day of the wedding?
- What time do I need to clear everything out the next day?
- Do you have an in-house or preferred caterer? Can I see a sample menu and cost? Can we do a food tasting before finalising our selection? Can we bring our own cake?
- And if I wanted to bring in my own caterer, is this a possibility? Would they have access to the kitchen? (It's worth noting that some venues are very fussy about health and safety and allergies, and one venue we looked at wanted to know EXACTLY what was in food we might provide, like a full list of ingredients, otherwise we would have to sign a disclaimer claiming it would be our responsibility if anyone got ill. Do you want the hassle of that?)
- What are the drinks prices like? Do you charge corkage on drinks we bring ourselves? (Note; corkage can be around £10 per bottle, so you need to work out whether it's cheaper to go with the venue's options or bring your own plus corkage).
- Do you have an in-house DJ? Can I use my own? Are there any restrictions on type of music played or until what time?
- Do you have a preferred vendor list for photographers, hotels, flowers etc? Is there a discount for using them? Do I have to use these or can I use my own?

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- If there is accommodation on site, do they offer accommodation for multiple rooms? And would you need to bulk book before the wedding?
- Is there parking on site? Is there a charge for it?
- How many toilets are there? (Believe me, from previous wedding experience you need enough toilets!)
- Do you offer on-site co-ordination? What would be managed or supervised?
- How much is the deposit and when is it due? What is the cancellation policy?
- Can I see a copy of your terms and conditions?
- Do you have liability insurance?
- Is the site handicap accessible?
- Do you have a cloakroom for guests? (Especially important if they don't have rooms and guests need to stay elsewhere that evening)
- Is there anything you can do on price? (Tip: if they won't reduce the price, see what they will throw in instead!)

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## b) Finding the dress

This might just end up being your favourite part of the planning process. A whole day with your favourite ladies, sipping champagne and trying on beautiful dresses that sculpt you in all the best ways... What's not to love?

Here are some top tips for making sure you enjoy your search:

### 1. Be organised

Book your appointments in advance. Don't just show up and expect to have your pick of the gowns or the attention of the assistants - you won't be given the time you need or be looked after as you deserve to be because you're not expected.

Generally, an appointment will last for 1hr 30mins so don't book more than 3 in any one day.

Remember, you also need to factor in travelling time between shops, lunch and other breaks - it's exhausting stepping/ diving into and out of those dresses! Also designate a driver if you're intending on taking advantage of free bubbly 😊.

### 2. Be open minded

Make sure you do your research beforehand but don't get your heart set on a particular dress you see in magazines/online... until you know the price!

On the day, keep your mind and eyes (and heart... It's emotional...) open to everything.

Let your friends and family pull a range of different styles and shapes of gown for you while you pick some you like too. Their choices may suit you better than your own so have a little fun - try on the princess dresses, the fishtails, the pink and the plain. You might be surprised!

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## 3. Accessorise

I advise to wait until you have sorted your dress to buy ANY accessories, but make sure you do take accessories with you if you have already bought them, especially if you found them online. You may discover veils are the wrong colour, belts don't sit right and shoes clash but it's best to find out early!

If you haven't got accessories already, make sure you factor extra into the budget. The shop assistants will 'jack you up' as they say on 'Say Yes to the Dress'. It's their job to sell and upsell, so be prepared to fall in love with veils, belts and shoes too - they really do complete a dress in some cases. I'd build in an extra £200 or so if you're happy to buy from the bridal shop, but you can always find them online for a better price - just make sure you jot down the item name/ number.

## 4. Stick to your budget

Decide one, stick to it and don't even try anything above that number. That floaty gown you've fallen in love with might just be out of your budget. Don't even entertain the idea of trying it just in case.

Remember to factor in money for the following:

- Accessories (as above)
- Alterations (around the £150-200, mark depending on what needs to be done). Some bridal shops include alterations in the price of the dress but the majority don't, so you might want to ask a reputable but cheaper independent seamstress.

## 5. If you can't imagine walking down the aisle in it, it's probably not the one

Everyone says it, but it's true... you will know when you find the right dress. You'll see yourself walking down the aisle towards your fiancé. You won't feel self-conscious, or like you can't move or sit down. You will feel as though you can wear it for a full day and look stunning right through until the party finishes!

## 7. Don't be pressured!

Do take a small number of friends and family with you; but remember, it's your decision. Not your Mum's choice, or your best mates' or your Sister in Law to be's, and most importantly not the shop assistants. They are all there to offer opinions but you are allowed to ignore them!

You don't have to visit 7, 8, 9.... shops, but there's nothing stopping you if you haven't found the dress you like yet. Although there is some overlap, most bridal shops within a local radius will carry different stock (they have to compete somehow). Some will specialise in 50's numbers, some may import from international designers like Watters or Anna Campbell. If you find your dress in the first shop – fantastic. If you need another weekend or two to search, then so be it.

## 8 When you find the one...

Ask your group to take a couple of snaps of you in your dress (but make sure your fiancée won't see them) for a memento and a reference point for other accessories, suits etc.

You may be worried that you'll still want to look at other dresses after you've paid your deposit but this is unlikely if you've found something you love, and also remember how you felt in it, as well as how you looked. You can look great in a number of dresses but only a few will make you feel how you want to feel in your wedding day 😊.