

THE WEDDING PLANNER

How to Set a Wedding Budget to
Avoid Wedding Debt



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When you get engaged, the last thing on your mind is money. But now, as you and your future spouse begin to think about the actual wedding ceremony, the financial reality may start setting in.

Weddings can be very, very expensive. The average cost of a wedding is \$28,000. While most couples begin with a budget of around \$23,000, many end up spending \$30,000. To put that in perspective, \$30,000 is only a few thousand less than the average student loan debt in the United States.

The last thing you want is to go into debt for your wedding, especially if you both already have debts of your own. This guide breaks down the cost of various wedding items and where you can cut costs. There's also a sample budget chart you can use for your planning.

Remember, even though they say "love don't cost a thing..." Weddings definitely do.

The cost of the engagement

Before any wedding planning takes place, you will likely get engaged. This may sound like the financially easy part. However, there are still costs and logistics to consider.

Planning for a ring

There is a lot of societal pressure to buy a big, expensive ring. Fifty percent of significant others who propose spend more than \$5,000 on an engagement ring. But there are ways to reduce the cost without sacrificing the jewelry's beauty.

For example, though 86 percent of engagement rings feature diamonds as their main stone, there are less expensive stones that can look just as good (and show a little more personality). Moissanite, a stone that looks nearly identical to a diamond, has become especially popular. Sapphires, rubies, and emeralds are some more colorful options. You could also consider buying a cheaper ring now and replacing it with an expensive one later.

No matter what type of ring you buy, try to avoid long-term financing plans. Many jewelers will attempt to reel you in with promises of low monthly payments but saving for a ring and paying cash helps you avoid debt before wedding planning even starts.

The proposal

You may also be tempted to go over-the-top with the proposal, whether you are the one doing the asking or the one dropping hints about what they want. Just keep in mind that you can create a moment without a huge price tag.

Think of moments that were special between you, music, locations close to home. If you are already planning on taking a vacation together and want to propose, it could be the perfect opportunity. But avoid setting a vacation up just to propose unless you can afford to pay for the trip in cash.

The long haul

On average, an engagement will last 15 months. However, there's nothing wrong with prolonging your engagement. The longer you wait for the wedding, the more time you have to save money for the ceremony and reception of your dreams.

Discuss these plans with your future spouse. How long can you both reasonably wait before you say your vows? Make sure to explain that this is a money-conscious decision and you're not suffering from cold feet. After all, it's a beautiful thing to start a marriage on solid financial ground.

Reviewing average wedding costs

On average, over 5,000 weddings occur every day in the U.S. The wedding business is booming, and the prices reflect that.

These are the average costs of some popular wedding items according to The Knot, a prominent wedding planning website:

- Photographer: \$2,400
- Venue: \$10,500
- Event planner: \$1,500
- Reception band: \$3,700
- Reception DJ: \$1,200
- Florist: \$2,000
- Videographer: \$1,800
- Wedding dress: \$1,600
- Catering per person: \$70
- Wedding cake: \$500
- Transportation: \$800
- Favors: \$400



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- Rehearsal dinner: \$1,900
 - Engagement ring: \$5,900
 - Invitations: \$590
 - Hair stylist: \$110
 - Makeup artist: \$100

That totals up to \$35,070. Review that list carefully—together as a couple—and think about what is important to you. More importantly, decide what you can do without, so you can focus on what really matters to you without overspending.

Money-saving wedding tips

Cash is king

Your goal should be to pay for the entire wedding in cash. This means you need to save and save as aggressively as possible.

Putting 20 percent of your income away each month may sound like a lot, but if you cut out extra costs you'll be surprised how easy saving can be. For example, over the next year, if you brown-bagged it three days a week, saving about \$15, you'd be \$860 richer.

Another way to save is to set a stringent entertainment budget for your engagement year. Limit yourself to one movie a month—renting movies or streaming is a lot cheaper—and have your friends over instead of going out.

Be smart about where you save

If you already have a few thousand or more put away to pay for your wedding, don't just leave it in a standard savings account, earning 2% interest or less. Instead, try to put your money in

Certificates of Deposit (CDs) that are available at all banks and credit unions.

CDs are short-term investments—normally one month to one year—which means you put down a certain sum, usually a minimum of \$1,000 and the bank will tell you just how much you'll earn after the CD matures.

Shop around because CD interest rates also vary widely. CD rates vary with how long you invest the money. The longer you leave your funds in, the higher the interest rate.

There are two disadvantages with CDs, you can't add funds to them as you save more and you're penalized if you dip into the money before the maturation date.

For someone starting with \$3,000 or more though, this may be a good option, since you can lock \$2,000 away for the bill-paying month before the wedding and keep \$1,000 in your bank account as an emergency fund. Another option is a Money Market Account (MMA). Rates are better than savings accounts and you get to write checks! Shop around as rates vary widely, as do restrictions. For example, some accounts limit the number of checks you are allowed to write each month and there may be minimum balance requirements.

Work more

If money isn't readily available, consider getting a second job to supplement the wedding budget. Or, simply cut the budget.

Set limits

Invite 100 guests instead of 150. Set a limit first and then create a list that falls within those guidelines. For example, first cousins may be invited, but second cousins are not.

Have two bridesmaids instead of ten. Serve three courses instead of five.

Do it yourself

Enlist the creative talents of relatives and friends who can help you make your wedding gown, create floral arrangements, or even bake your wedding cake for you. Coordinate the alcohol, make the favors, and address your own envelopes.

Loosen up

The less formal the affair, the more affordable. Instead of a sit-down dinner, go for a casual brunch or barbecue. Get rental cars instead of limos. Choose a morning or afternoon wedding; they're less expensive than evening affairs.

Pick and choose

Indulge in a designer dress but go barefoot or in sneakers. Ditch the hors d'oeuvres and spend your money on exquisite entrees. Serve a great cake and skip the dessert table.

Coordinate with others

If another wedding is being held within a few hours of yours in the same location, perhaps you may be able to share some of the costs of flowers and decorations.

No holidays

Holiday weddings are more expensive because you are competing for catering services, wedding and reception sites, DJs, limousines, photographers, and more. During holidays, these types of services tend to be more expensive.



Wedding budget planner

Use the following charts to estimate and record your expenses. Put your ideal price in the “Envisioned Cost” column and what you end up spending in the “Actual Cost” column.

And remember, you don’t need to have everything on these lists. If something is not important to you both, then agree to cut it.

Invitations and stationary

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Engagement Announcement	\$	\$
Invitations/reply cards	\$	\$
Other Inserts	\$	\$
Thank You Notes	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Ceremony costs

CEREMONY	COST
Location Fee	\$
Officiant Fee or Donation	\$
Subtotal	\$

CEREMONY	COST
Ceremony Accessories (Chuppah, Candles, etc)	\$
Flowers and Decor	\$
Subtotal	\$

Wedding attire

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Bride's Wedding Band	\$	\$
Groom's Wedding Band	\$	\$
Wedding Gown	\$	\$
Alterations	\$	\$
Veil	\$	\$
Shoes	\$	\$
Lingerie	\$	\$
Jewelry	\$	\$
Other Bridal Attire	\$	\$
Groom's Tuxedo or Suit	\$	\$
Shoes	\$	\$
Cufflinks	\$	\$
Other Accessories for the Groom (Tie, Clip, Socks, Undergarments, etc)	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Memories

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Photographer's Fee	\$	\$
Photo Duplication	\$	\$
Videographer's Fee	\$	\$
Video Duplication	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Music

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Marriage Site Musicians	\$	\$
Cocktail Hour Music	\$	\$
Band or DJ for the Reception	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Reception

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Venue	\$	\$
Food	\$	\$
Bar	\$	\$
Cake & Cutting Fee	\$	\$
Centerpieces	\$	\$
Additional Flowers for Site	\$	\$
Additional Decor (Table Linens, Chair Covers, Columns, Artwork, etc.)	\$	\$
Additional Rental Costs (Cocktail tables & seating, etc.)	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Flowers

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Bride's Bouquet	\$	\$
Groom's Boutonnière	\$	\$
Bride's Maids Bouquets	\$	\$
Best Man and Ushers Boutonnières	\$	\$
Mother of the Bride & Groom Corsages	\$	\$
Father of the Bride & Groom Boutonnières	\$	\$

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
The Flower Girl	\$	\$
Bridal Bouquet for the Traditional Tossing	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Transportation

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Bride's Transportation	\$	\$
Groom's Transportation	\$	\$
The Parent's Transportation	\$	\$
Valet Parking at the Ceremony and/or Reception Site	\$	\$
Car Rentals, Guest Shuttle to and from Hotel, Ceremony, and Reception	\$	\$
Bridal or Honeymoon Suite	\$	\$
Hotel or Accommodations for Parents	\$	\$
Hotel or Accommodations for Bridal Party	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Gifts and favors

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Wedding Party Gifts	\$	\$
Parent Gifts	\$	\$
Table Favors	\$	\$
Other Favors	\$	\$
Total	\$	\$

Grand totals

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Invitations and stationary total	\$	\$
Ceremony costs total	\$	\$
Wedding attire total	\$	\$
Memories total	\$	\$
Music total	\$	\$
Reception total	\$	\$
Flowers total	\$	\$
Transportation total	\$	\$
Gifts and favors total	\$	\$
GRAND TOTAL	\$	\$

Planning a honeymoon

What was your wedding budget grand total? Do you know how much you have left to spend on a honeymoon?

On average, 14 percent of a couple's wedding budget is reserved for the honeymoon. The average spend is \$4,466, and the majority of couples cover that cost on their own. Couples who opt for luxury honeymoons spend even more, garnering an average bill of \$9,950.

Don't feel pressured to take a long, expensive honeymoon right after your wedding. There are cheaper options that can be just as fun. For example, you can take a shorter, more relaxed vacation. This is sometimes referred to as a "mini-moon."

Whether you're planning a mini-moon or a luxe honeymoon,

agree on a budget before cementing your plans so you avoid impulse spending. The following chart will help.

	ENVISIONED COST	ACTUAL COST
Transportation (plane tickets, ground transportation fees, etc.)	\$	\$
Lodging costs (Daily rate x Nights staying)	\$	\$
Food	\$	\$
Souvenirs	\$	\$
Miscellaneous expenses	\$	\$
TOTAL	\$	\$

Top financial considerations for newlyweds

When the wedding and honeymoon are over, you have new financial issues to worry about. Here are ten pressing concerns for newly married couples you can cover with your spouse.



1. From the beginning, save 15 to 20 percent of your income. By combining households, you should be able to reduce your expenses and increase your savings. Start saving more to build cash reserves and contribute to your retirement plans.
2. Consider getting joint bank accounts and credit cards. You can still keep your personal accounts and cards, but having some joint money to pull from can be convenient for both of you.

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3. Change all of the beneficiaries on life insurance plans and retirement plans to your new spouse.
 4. Decide how debts accumulated by each individual before the marriage (for example, student loans) will be handled.
 5. Work together on budgeting and tracking expenses. There will be less confusion—and less to argue about—if you are both on the same page.
 6. Discuss your approaches to handling money. Is one person a spender and one a saver? Create some ground rules for handling any differences.
 7. If both incomes are needed to pay expenses, be sure to have adequate life insurance.
 8. Let each other know where important documents are kept. You should both be able to find them in an emergency.
 9. Make a list of upcoming major purchases you want to make together, such as a car or a house, and prioritize them. Jointly decide how you want to spend your money now.
 10. Don't keep money secrets. As life partners, working together emotionally and financially is essential and builds trust.

