

THE CUPCAKE BRIDAL HEADQUARTERS

PARTY PLANNING TIPS

for memorable Weddings & Bridal Celebrations

from Professional Wedding & Event Planner, Alison Hotchkiss

SO YOU'VE JUST SAID "I WILL!"—NOW WHAT?

Alison's Top Ten Tips for
the newly engaged couple

1 SAVOR THE MOMENT

You did it! You've just made the decision to spend your lives together! Take a deep breath and savor this special moment with a celebratory glass of bubbly Cupcake Prosecco before you embark on the amazing journey ahead. Once you've toasted your good fortune together (and caught your breath), change your status on Facebook to "engaged"!

2 SET A DATE

The first big step is choosing a date that will work best for your schedules, taking into consideration your guests as well. If folks have to travel long distances, a holiday weekend might actually be appreciated. If you're getting married at a seasonal resort, consider a date in the "shoulder" season rather than at peak times, as you may find more affordable rates for guest rooms, site fees and other wedding costs.

3 DETERMINE YOUR GUEST LIST

Create a list of friends you'd like to invite and then sit down with each of your families to determine an appropriate and fair number for each side to invite. Remember, the larger the list, the less time you will have to spend with each guest individually, so be thoughtful about your choices, selecting people that have been important to you in your lives thus far and who you can envision in your future life as a married couple. Expect some streamlining or additions to your guest list as your budget and venue capacity become clearer. As a general rule of thumb, 15-20% of those invited will not attend. For a destination wedding, where distance, travel times and greater expense are a factor, that percentage may increase to as much as 20-30% – which can work in your favor if you're trying to keep numbers in check.



4 ESTABLISH YOUR BUDGET

Early on in your process, it's important to establish a budget that is comfortable for you! Talk to your parents to see what they are able to contribute, add in your own savings, and be realistic about what you can ultimately afford to spend. Once you've arrived at a figure, there are lots of ways to get creative to keep costs in line and still have a memorable event.

Standard wedding expenses include:

- Catering Food and Beverages
- Paper Materials (*save the date, invitation, day-of materials*)
- Venue Site Fee
- Ceremony Site Fee and/or Officiant Fee
- Music (*ceremony, cocktails and dinner*)
- Photographer and/or Videographer
- Florist
- Wedding Cake (*from a reputable baker specializing in weddings*)
- Rentals (*which can include lighting, tenting and portable restrooms*)
- Transportation if needed
- Wedding Attire

5 LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Choosing your location is perhaps the single most important—and personal—decision you will make (aside from your decision to get hitched), and it will set the stage for many decisions to come. Are you looking for something modern, sophisticated and urban or a more casual, garden or rustic setting? Some couples opt for a place that has special meaning for them – the bride's family cottage by the beach, the groom's cabin by the lake, the city or college campus where they fell in love. For others, a sense of adventure takes over and they choose a far flung location that has special appeal. Whichever locale and venue you select, factor seasonality, guest capacity, accessibility, travel time to the site and the end time that's set by the venue into your decision. I advise my clients to confirm their location contractually at least 10-14 months in advance of the wedding—especially at resorts where the venue may be in high demand (i.e. the Caribbean, Amalfi Coast, Napa Valley or any popular seasonal destination).

6 MAKE IT "OFFICIAL"

If you will be married in a church, hotel or other private indoor or outdoor space, be sure to lock in the site at the same time you are confirming your reception venue. This may require additional fees above and beyond your reception site. Regardless of where your ceremony takes place, you'll also need an officiant (a minister or justice of the peace) to perform the marriage. Be sure, too, to check the legal requirements in the city, country or island where you will wed, including how far in advance you will need to get your marriage license, when it expires and any residency requirements.



7 PICTURE YOUR BIG DAY

Good wedding photographers and videographers in your area may be in high demand. I generally recommend locking in talent 8-12 months in advance. Wedding blogs, websites, magazines and word of mouth are all great resources! Once you've uncovered a few names that consistently keep coming up, check them out online and talk to them in person to see if their style fits your personality. Get competitive bids from finalists that spell out what each wedding "package" includes and weigh costs alongside aesthetics in making your final decision.



8 PLAN YOUR PLAYLIST

Music is an essential ingredient for a memorable event. Start checking out and listening to local bands or consider a DJ to save costs. Or, mix it up with a classical quartet for the ceremony, followed by a jazz band for cocktails and dinner and a DJ for dancing the night away. Together, these may actually cost a lot less than hiring a large band.

9 DRESS TO THRILL

Start researching your dress options. Experiment by trying on different silhouettes to find which will be most flattering for your body type. Be sure to consider the venue: An intimate wedding on the beach versus a lavish affair at a 5 star hotel are going to strike two entirely different tones. You'll want a dress that suits the vibe of your surroundings. Order your gown at least eight months in advance.



10 CHOOSE A CATERER

It's important to like the style of food your caterer offers, and also the level of service they can provide. Aim to meet prospective caterers in person if at all possible (even for long distance destination weddings). Always ask for references (and check them)... and that goes for any vendor you are considering, especially if you don't have a wedding planner who can vouch for them.



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