



Grand Occasions
TURNING DREAMS TO REALITY

PLAN THE PERFECT DAY

How to make sure you're legally married.

This section is designed to give couples hints and tips to help you through the process of dealing with wedding suppliers and issues. If you would like further information then please do not hesitate to contact one of our team of wedding coordinators.

To be legally married in the UK, you must fulfil these requirements:

- You and your partner must be at least 16 years old. In England and Wales, if either party is under 18, written consent to the marriage must be obtained from the parents or legal guardian.
- You must not be closely related.
- The marriage must take place in premises where marriage can be legally solemnised. These include register offices, premises that have been given a civil license by the local authority, parish churches of the Church of England and other churches that have been registered by the Register General for worship and marriage. There are exceptions for military marriages or for those who are detained, or housebound.
- The ceremony must take place in the presence of a superintendent registrar, a registrar or an authorised person.
- The ceremony must take place between 8am and 6pm (except for Jews and the Society of Friends).
- Two witnesses must be present to witness the ceremony.
- You must both be free and eligible to marry.

SEATING PLANS.

Wedding reception seating can be a bit of a minefield.

Here's what to think about if you go for a seating plan...

Should you have a seating plan or not? If you do, who do you sit where? It sounds complicated, but just takes a little imagination and some careful planning.

Planning Protocol.

The seating plan for the wedding breakfast is based on the idea of intermingling the two families, but many people organise their seating plans so that guests have familiar faces around them. The top table usually has the bride and groom in the centre, with the leading members of the wedding party flanking them. Whether you split the parents and put them with each other's partner or not, is up to you. It's less and less common to have a formal seating arrangement on top table, so go with what everyone will be happiest with.

It's fairly crucial to have a top table, but the rest is up to you. If you're having a relatively small wedding and your guests all know each other, you may feel that a seating plan is unnecessary and that they will be happy to sit where they please. Alternatively, you might decide to tell people which table they are on, but then leave it to them to choose where to sit on that table.

If, however, you're having a larger wedding, it's a good idea to tell people exactly where to sit. That way, people will be seated more quickly and you can be sure to separate any people who possibly won't get on. It's also a way of introducing people who know few other guests, and making sure they sit with a friendly, welcoming group.

Seating to Suit.

Sorting out the seating plan is not an easy task and requires tact and a good knowledge of the guests. It's worth remembering that weddings can be a reunion for friends and relations who normally do not have an opportunity to meet, but is also where old enemies may come face to face again!

The layout of your tables is a personal choice. Some like the idea of an elongated top table, where extensions are added at either end, set at right angles to the top table. Guests can be seated on both sides of these side tables. Alternatively, individual round tables can be arranged for the guests. You should discuss the layout of the tables with

your wedding coordinator and agree the seating plan well in advance.

On the day, place the seating plan on an easel for the guests to see as they come in for the meal, and place corresponding place cards on the tables. If you've invited a lot of guests, we can set up several easels so that everyone can check their seat number easily without causing a crowd to build up.

CHOOSING A WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER.

Your wedding photographs are the lasting images of your special day and are likely to be the best and most looked-at photos of your life, so it's important to find the right person to take them.

Word of mouth.

Recommendation is by far the best way to find a photographer. Ask local friends and family who have recently married who they used and whether they were happy with the service. Ask to see the photos to make sure you like the style -- your friends may have liked their photographer because their style was very formal while you may be looking something different. Personal recommendation from someone who's tried and trusted a photographer is worth its weight in gold.

Beware of amateurs.

Be aware that asking a friend to take on the photography could lead to disaster. Unless they have had some sort of experience or training, you might be left with no decent lasting photographs of your big day and you could regret not spending the money after all.

Qualifications count.

It's wise to check whether your photographer is a member of the MPA (Master Photographers Association), BIPP (British Institute of Professional Photographers) or Guild of Wedding Photographers.

Be prepared.

Start your search for a photographer early, as good photographers get booked up a long time in advance.

Look around.

Before you make your final choice, try to visit at least three photographers -- check out their studio and staff and don't be afraid to ask questions. Ask to see full wedding

album samples and make sure that the photographs are the work of the photographer who will be taking your wedding pictures -- not simply the best photos from the studio.

Term time.

It helps to have some understanding of photographic terms before you meet photographers.

Medium format: This refers to the size of the film and therefore the size of the camera used and will dictate the style of photographs. For versatility and speed of photos, 35mm film is more than adequate and can be blown up to a good size. Using 35mm film can be less obtrusive as there is no need for a tripod.

Proofs.

These are the initial photos that will be produced and will usually include every photo taken during the day. It is from these photos that you will choose which selected photographs go into your album.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CAKE BAKER.

Selecting the right person to bake your wedding cake is very important to ensure that you get exactly what you are looking for in a wedding cake. Depending on who you choose to bake your wedding cake, you could considerably reduce the cost of your wedding cake too. Here are some questions to ask prospective wedding cake bakers, which will help you in making the right choice.

Ask for a Tasting:

Ask the confectioner if they are willing to offer you a tasting before you order the wedding cake. Many bakers will let you taste the various frostings used for wedding cakes, and some will even go as far as making a small groom's cake for you to taste.

Ask about Custom Cakes:

Find out if the baker can design a cake from your design or from a picture. Also ask if they charge any extra fee for such a service. These questions are important only if you want a custom designed wedding cake.

See the Portfolio:

Ask the baker to show you a portfolio or pictures of wedding cakes that they have previously made. This will help you to determine if you like the baker's style and also give you an idea about their creativity.

Cake Preparation:

Ask the baker when they will be baking and icing your cake. Although this is done days in advance, you still don't want your wedding cake to be baked more than 10 days prior to the wedding. The icing on the cake should be done no more than 2 days before the wedding, as this ensures the freshest of cakes.

Delivery and Set-up:

Ask the confectioner if they only deliver the cake or do they even set it up. Caterers do not like the added responsibility of setting up wedding cakes that have not been ordered through them. Also inquire if there are any additional charges for setting up the cake.

Additional Charges:

Ask the bakers if they are going to charge you any kind of deposit for items such as cake tops, pillars, or columns, which will have to be used and returned to them. Also inquire about costs if you fail to return the items in their proper condition.

Once you settle on a particular baker, put down everything in writing and have them confirm it so that there is no room for any confusion later on.

WEDDING SPEECH DELIVERY.

For those who really want to write their own speech, there are books to help. They will also give you tips on how to deliver it, which is extremely useful whoever did the writing. For the benefit of anybody faced with the task of making a speech here are a few brief pointers on delivery:

- Read your speech or memorise it? Few people are willing to trust everything to memory. An alternative is to thoroughly familiarise yourself with your speech and then reduce it to a set of brief notes on cue cards. The advantage is that your speech will not sound as if it is being read word for word. But if you do decide to read it, nobody will mind.
- Practice. Whatever you decide - rehearse it. Then rehearse it again - until you are sick of it. That should be about right.
- Slow Down! What ruins more speeches than anything else is a nervous speaker going too fast. He doesn't pause to let his points sink in and doesn't wait for the laughs he wants. His audience is then so busy trying to catch what he's gabbling about that they don't have time to laugh. Oh dear - no laughs. What does our speaker do? Panics and accelerates even more. Result - disaster! Even experienced speakers suffer this urge to speed up. Don't give in to it.
- Body Language. Stand up straight and look confident. Even if you are reading, look up and at your audience from time to time. Eye contact makes them feel you are talking to them, and it will help you with your pauses.
- Laughs. If you expect a laugh - wait for it. If it doesn't come tell people they were supposed to laugh and refuse to go on until they do. That will kick start them. Don't begin again until the laughter has died down - enjoy it. Study professional comedians - you'll learn a lot.
- Interruptions. Enjoy interruptions, especially funny ones. They provide thinking time, and hey... people will remember it was your speech that got the laughs; they won't remember that it wasn't always your lines.
- Drink. Don't drink too much before speaking. You might think it helps, but your audience won't.

Two final important points to remember:

- The audience is on your side. They want to enjoy your speech - give them the opportunity

- If you get a totally unexpected laugh - check your flies
- These basic rules will help you make a memorable presentation. If you're also working with a professionally written speech to begin with - you should be on a real winner.

BEAUTY TIPS FOR BRIDES.

Whatever stage you are at in your wedding preparations, you can improve how radiant you look on the big day with your diet, cleansing routine and general lifestyle. There are also plenty of things you can do on the day itself to maintain that centre of attention look.

A six-month countdown is recommended to make sure you look as radiant and healthy as possible on your wedding day, but brides who only have a few weeks to prepare can still see some stunning results.

Eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly are an essential part of the preparation.

Exercise will give your circulation a major boost and flush away the toxins that cause blemishes in the skin. Aim for 30 minutes of gentle exercise per day.

Eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, drinking around eight glasses of water a day, reducing your alcohol consumption and cutting out smoking will help prevent your skin from looking dowdy and dull. Try to make sure you get a good night's sleep of about eight hours in the weeks or days before the wedding.

However, there's more to looking good on the day than just being healthy.

"It's important to cleanse, tone and moisturise every day to get rid of any impurities," says Joanne Leah, a beauty therapist of six years who's also a member of the British Association of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology.

Facials are also recommended as long as you start having them regularly a few months before the wedding. Trying one a few days beforehand is a mistake, as it could lead to a blotchy face.

Getting your hair in shape is also important.

According to the experts you should wash your hair whenever you feel you have to, usually every few days, and make sure it has a deep condition about once a month. This is where the product is combed through and left on for at least ten minutes.

Massaging your scalp with shampoo while washing will stimulate the blood flow and encourage the growth of healthy hair. And when dry, brushing will again stimulate the scalp and also get rid of any dead hair.

Advice from Vidal Sassoon says you should work out well in advance the way you want

your hair to look. If you want to have it cut, make sure it's done about a week before the big day. This will make sure your style keeps its shape, but also has time to settle.

Your feet and hands shouldn't be forgotten either. Beauticians suggest a manicure and pedicure at a beauty salon every few weeks before the wedding, which normally includes a foot massage to stimulate the skin.

"At home, you should moisturise your hands daily and soak your feet in warm water for about ten minutes, twice a week," says beauty therapist Rebecca Hale.

"This basically leaves your feet feeling very refreshed, particularly if you use some essential oils, such as peppermint.

"When it comes to nails, it's important to file them two or three times a week and maybe push the cuticles back while you're in the bath."

When it comes to choosing your make-up for the wedding, caution is advised. The temptation might be to let a beautician pile on a lot of expensive make-up which may be totally inappropriate, especially for today's more natural look.

It's also important to know your skin colour. This might seem obvious, but you should check whether your skin is yellow or pink toned. Make sure your foundation matches your skin tone exactly, and check it in daylight.

If you are going to be applying your own make-up, beauty guru and professional make-up artist John Gustafson, from BBC's Looking Good Programme, has some sound advice: "Strong, intense shades for lips will be set off by neutral tones on eyes and cheeks.

"Play down eye colours to emphasise your lips. Choose a base eye shade that matches your skin tone and apply all over the eyelid."

He warns against using eyeliner on the top eyelid - it will look dated. And John suggests adding texture to eyes by applying a metallic lustre to the eyelid over a base shade.

Lips are also important on the day itself because of all that smiling, eating and kissing you are likely to be doing.

In order to make your lipstick last longer, apply a layer of foundation and powder to your lips before you put your lipstick on. This will give the lipstick something to grip to.

If you are having a separate evening function, it may be worth reapplying make-up, but don't apply more foundation over old foundation. It will look like rice pudding.

Remove foundation from areas of your face that have seen the most wear and tear.
Reapply lipstick and lip gloss.

Finally, don't go to bed in your warpaint. If you don't clean it off at night you'll end up with stained pillow cases and a bad case of spots, which could well be a blemish on your honeymoon as well.

THE PERFECT HONEYMOON.

We expect so much from our honeymoons - it should be a holiday of a lifetime with your new spouse and, after the stress of organising a wedding, a welcome break from it all.

But as on any holiday, things can go wrong. The best way to prevent this is plenty of forward planning and some common sense - precautions which will help ensure that the honeymoon is a dream come true and not a living nightmare.

The first thing you should recognise is that no honeymoon goes without a hitch and that you will need time to adjust to the circumstances. Often, the biggest problem is that it could be the first time some couples have spent such a long time alone together.

"Being together like that can put pressure on a relationship," says clinical psychologist Leonard Kristal, who specialises in marital and sexual relationships.

According to Dr Kristal, the new situation can make things awkward on a honeymoon, even if the couple has a long-standing relationship. In a strange hotel room, surrounded by unfamiliar faces, people feel inhibited - just the opposite of how it should be.

"Couples have to start by facing the reality that no holiday will come off without a hitch - and the honeymoon is no exception," says Dr Kristal.

"Expectations have to be realistic - it's not the ideal you read about in books or see on TV."

Once you've got your emotional state right, it's time to concentrate on the practicalities - first, by making sure you are not caught out in the old names-on-passport conundrum.

If you are a woman and changing your name when you get married, your passport is the one document you can get changed up to three months before you get married to show your new name.

However, your new passport will only be valid from the date of your wedding since it will be post-dated. Also, if the country you are visiting requires a visa, check with your travel agent (or the country's embassy) to ensure that a visa can be stamped in a post-dated passport.

If a visa cannot be stamped in your post-dated passport, you will need to travel using a

passport in your maiden name. As a precaution, take your marriage certificate with you if the tickets are booked in your married name.

You should also be aware that some countries will not accept a passport which has not been amended (i.e. it is still in your maiden name), even if you carry your marriage certificate with you. Therefore, you must arrange to have a post-dated passport issued in your married name. Again, clarify this with your travel agent.

Packing comes next. In the run-up to the wedding, your honeymoon clothes may be the last things on your mind, so the sooner you get them out of the way, the better.

Organised couples - those who remember to cancel milk and newspapers - will stow things away through the week. But most hurl their luggage together the night before.

Remember to pack some of your clothes in each other's luggage, just in case one of your suitcases goes missing. Also, put a few essential items - underwear, some toiletries and valuables - in your hand luggage, in case all your other luggage goes missing.

If travelling abroad, you should leave home with passport, E111 medical card, full medical and travel insurance, relevant inoculations, some minor first aid items, travel kettle, plus a plug to fit the local sockets.

You should also have boned up on your destination either by buying or borrowing maps, a Rough Guide, or other informative guides.

The Rough Guide series, detailed and informal, conveys a strong sense of portraying things - warts and all.

Take some cash for when you first arrive at your destination, but also remember to order travellers cheques well in advance.

Once you get to your destination, it will hopefully be a matter of just relaxing and enjoying yourself, but to avoid an upset stomach, you should always ask for SEALED bottles of water. Also, make sure you peel any fruit before eating it and beware of ice cubes - they may be made with tap water that your tummy won't like.

Some honeymooners fail to get the proper immunisation jabs before leaving home, a fact which has caused concern among doctors who fear that British tourists are putting themselves at risk from diseases such as malaria and yellow fever.

Tropical destinations, while attractive to honeymooners, also carry greater risks of disease with malaria, typhoid and yellow fever endemic in many of these countries.

Thomson Prentice, editor of the World Health Report for WHO, says there is

evidence that immunisation scare stories and a basic ignorance of health issues in developing countries has resulted in people failing to get immunised.

"Many travellers believe that as long as they are staying in a nice resort they will be free from risk, which sadly is not the case," he says.

"Many of these diseases can be contracted from person to person and it is not enough just to say, 'Well, I'm not intending to wade through a swamp, so I will be OK'.

GPs need to be contacted up to three weeks before departure, depending on your honeymoon destination. Immunisation prescriptions such as hepatitis A, polio and typhoid will usually be kept in the surgery but others, such as anti-malaria tablets and yellow fever immunisation, may need to be ordered.

Anti-malaria tablets will also need to be taken for approximately one week before departure to make the treatment effective, so don't leave the doctor's visit until the last minute.

Most doctors will not charge for immunisation when the disease is a contagious one, for example hepatitis A or typhoid, but may make a small charge for anti-malarial treatments.

What You Need:

Caribbean (including Antigua, Jamaica, Barbados, Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and Cayman Islands) - hepatitis A, polio and typhoid immunisation recommended. Couples travelling to the Dominican Republic are also strongly recommended to undergo a course of anti-malaria tablets.

Africa (including Kenya, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Kenya and Tanzania) - hepatitis A, polio, typhoid, yellow fever, malaria and meningitis are recommended. Honeymooners travelling to South Africa and Namibia are advised to be immunised against all except meningitis.

Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia - hepatitis A, polio and typhoid recommended.

Asia (including Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and China) - hepatitis A, polio, typhoid and malaria recommended. Newlyweds traveling to India, Nepal, and Pakistan are also advised to have meningitis immunisation, while travellers to Thailand should be protected against yellow fever.

Couples honeymooning in Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and Korea require hepatitis

A, polio, and typhoid only.

South America (including Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) - hepatitis A, polio, typhoid, malaria and yellow fever strongly recommended.