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How to host a socially distant wedding

It’s likely that few people heard of “social distancing” prior to 2020. That changed as the novel coronavirus COVID-19 spread rapidly across the globe and the world found itself in the midst of a deadly pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines social distancing as keeping a safe distance of at least 6 feet between yourself and other people who are not from your household. Public health officials continue to champion social distancing while acknowledging the fatigue that many people have experienced as the pandemic stretched on for months. Though much of the world hit the proverbial pause button, life went on during the pandemic. Perhaps nowhere was that more evident than at the altar, where many couples still tied the knot, albeit in scaled back ceremonies that adhered to social distancing guidelines in their communities.

Engaged couples who have yet to tie the knot no doubt recognize that planning a socially distant wedding will not be the same as organizing more traditional ceremonies and receptions. While planning a socially distant wedding presents some unique challenges, couples can take certain steps to ensure their big day is memorable and safe.

· Spread the socially distant word. Let guests know what they’re in for should they decide to take part in the festivities. Many people have strictly followed social distancing guidelines, while others have been reluctant to do so. Couples intent on keeping themselves and their guests safe from COVID-19 should emphasize that their weddings will be socially distant affairs so there’s no confusion come the big day.

· Stream the wedding online. Stream the wedding online for those guests who won’t be in attendance. By the end of 2020, millions of people had already “attended” weddings via platforms like Zoom, so loved ones may be experienced virtual guests by the time couples walk down the aisle in 2021. Couples who may need some help planning virtual affairs can visit the virtual wedding coordinators at Wedfuly.com, who recently partnered with Zoom to help couples bring their ceremonies online.

· Cut down the in-person guest list. Couples who planned large weddings prior to the pandemic can still invite all of their loved ones to witness the festivities online, but pare down the in-person guest list to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. Limit in-person guests to immediate family and those people who are part of your social distancing bubble.

· Plan a party for down the road. Couples can still celebrate their nuptials with family and friends down the road. Plan a post-pandemic reception and let guests know you will fill them in on the details once social distancing restrictions have been lifted.

Socially distant weddings may require couples to take some unusual steps as they try to tie the knot while keeping themselves and their loved ones safe.
Experts and couples agree that playlists should be a mix of classics and new wedding songs. Music is a personal choice, but couples may benefit by considering who will be in attendance at their weddings. In so doing, couples can ensure the music played at their weddings reaches as many people as possible there:

- **Wedding processional song:** The wedding processional is the moment the wedding party walks down the aisle. Music may be a traditional hymn, classical music or a favorite contemporary song.
- **Bridal processional song:** In many traditional wedding ceremonies, the bride walks down the aisle separately, with her father or both parents. She customarily will have a different song from the rest of the wedding party. While “Bridal Chorus/Wedding March” is a traditional choice, some brides may prefer a different tune.
- **Wedding recessional song:** Again, depending on the ceremony location and choices, the recessional may be a classical piece or a hymn. Some couples choose an upbeat song for their first official promenade as a married couple.
- **Wedding party entrance song:** Couples can ask their music vendor to put together the majority of the songs for their reception, but they may want to choose their own wedding party entrance. This song typically is a fast-paced, upbeat song that gets the crowd pumping and ready for a fun night. Think “Dynamite” by Taio Cruz or “Can’t Stop the Feeling!” by Justin Timberlake.
- **First dance:** The first dance song is another personal choice for the couple. Slow songs traditionally are chosen, but couples who want something a little different have increasingly selected faster songs and paired them with rehearsed choreography. “Thinking Out Loud” by Ed Sheeran has become a popular first dance song.
- **Other songs:** Couples also will select songs to complement dances with their parents, cake cutting, garter toss, and any other special traditions or moments. They also can make requests to include songs of different eras to appeal to guests of all ages.

Music is an important component of wedding celebrations and deserves some extra consideration to ensure everyone has a great time while cutting a rug.
Couples should carefully consider which guests should be given option of bringing a date

Compiled by Sharon Stone

Making a wedding guest list is seldom an easy task. Couples often find that many people are worthy of an invitation, which can make creating a guest list tricky for those with budgets in mind.

According to data from the online wedding resource The Knot, the average wedding catering cost per guest is roughly $70. However, catering costs will vary depending on the reception venue, the number of guests, the foods chosen, and the region of the country where the wedding takes place.

When creating their guest lists, couples may wonder if they have to offer all guests the option of bringing a “plus one” to the occasion. As with other wedding day etiquette questions, the plus one concept is not set in stone.

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How to approach travel for that destination wedding during an uncertain summer

Compiled by Sharon Stone

Many individuals and families postponed or canceled their summer travel plans and weddings in 2020. Restrictions on travel and concerns about safety drove those changes. Though the pandemic is ongoing, the development and distribution of various vaccines has reopened the possibility of travel for millions of people across the globe.

It could be safer to travel in the summer of 2021 than it was a year ago, but travelers should still take a cautious approach before heading off for parts unknown in the months ahead.

• Monitor vaccine distribution. In early March, the three pharmaceutical companies behind the vaccines that had been approved up to that point, Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson, updated their projections regarding the availability of vaccines. Estimates suggested the three companies would be capable of providing hundreds of millions of vaccines by the end of July 2021. That would seem to suggest that travel should be considerably safer by mid- to late-summer 2021 than it was a year ago. However, those were just projections. Travelers concerned about COVID-19 can monitor how many vaccines have been distributed by visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at cdc.gov.

• Prospective vacationers who hope to travel domestically can even utilize the CDC’s interactive map to determine how many vaccines have been distributed in the areas they hope to visit. Such knowledge can help travelers make the most informed decisions as they ponder whether or not to travel this summer.
Flowers and their various meanings

Make a statement of your love through colorful arrangements — from simple to extravagant

Compiled by Sharon Stone

Flowers play a prominent role in many and holidays, perhaps none more than Valentine's Day, where roses are the go-to flower.

As wedding season, as well as cut-flower season is upon us, each type of flower conveys its own unique message.

Flower growers note that the following are some popular blooms and the messages those flowers are traditionally associated with.

- **Amaryllis**: This flower is symbolic of splendid beauty and can be used to indicate worth.
- **Roses**
- **Tulips**
- **Calla Lilies**
- **Lily of the Valley**
- **Hydrangeas**
- **Peony**
- **Ranunculus**
- **Stephanotis**
- **Sweet Peas**
- **Gardenia**

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10 OF THE BEST BRIDAL FLOWER BOUQUET OPTIONS

- **Roses**
- **Tulips**
- **Calla Lilies**
- **Lily of the Valley**
- **Hydrangeas**
- **Peony**
- **Ranunculus**
- **Stephanotis**
- **Sweet Peas**
- **Gardenia**

Source: theknot.com

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Questions to ask before booking a photographer

Review past photos, find out what package includes, ask about experience and style

Compiled by Sharon Stone
Various components combine to make weddings beautiful and memorable. Couples rely on photographers to capture the smiles and moments that helped make their events unique and to ensure the big day is remembered for years to come.

The trusted wedding resource The Knot notes that an internal study found that, among 27,000 couples who got married in 2019, an average of $2,400 was spent on a wedding photographer to document their big day.

Couples who want to find the best photographer for their wedding day can ask several questions before making their final decision.

**What style do you specialize in?**
Photographers may be able to shoot various styles of photos, but may specialize in a specific type. For example, some photographers specialize in photojournalism, while others may excel at portraiture. Going with a photographer who has the most expertise shooting the style you prefer will help produce the desired results.

**Who will be shooting my wedding?**
Certain photography studios have several photographers working under one roof. Just because you meet with one does not necessarily mean that photographer will be on site, unless it is specified in the contract.

**Have you ever worked at my venue before?**
Photographers may be familiar with several local wedding venues and houses of worship. A photographer who has experience working in the locations where couples will tie the knot and subsequently celebrate might produce the best results, but lack of experience with particular venues need not exclude other professionals.
FLOWS
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• Aster: The aster symbolizes patience, elegance and daintiness.
• Calla lily: This bloom symbolizes magnificence and beauty, as well as purity and innocence. That is why Calla lilies are often the flower of choice in wedding bouquets.
• Carnations: These are one of the most popular flowers in the world and are generally symbolic of love and fascination.
• Daffodil: Daffodils symbolize regard and chivalry. They also can be indicative of rebirth, new beginnings and eternal life. A single daffodil can signal misfortune, while a bunch expresses joy and happiness.
• Gerbera daisies: With large, beautiful blooms in a wide assortment of vibrant colors, gerbera daisies are a favorite flower for cheerful sentiments.
• Gladiolus: These tall, striking flowers are eye-catching and make great gifts for significant others. The gladiolus symbolizes honor, infatuation and strength.
• Iris: Irises represent faith, hope and wisdom and are cherished for their big, beautiful blooms.
• Peony: This flower, which resembles a rose, symbolizes a happy life, happy marriage, prosperity, and good health.
• Rose: Roses symbolize love in its various forms, and different colors of roses symbolize different things. For example, yellow roses represent care and friendship, while pink roses are given as a token of admiration.

Choosing a flower that best represents the feelings of the occasion can incorporate even more meaning into a bouquet or basket.

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• Learn about restrictions prior to booking any trips. Restrictions at your ultimate wedding destination are another factor to consider before booking a venue. The CDC, however, also makes it easy to learn about such restrictions within the U.S.
• Read the fine print before signing on the dotted line. In 2020, many people learned the hard way why it’s so important to read the fine print on vacation contracts. Pay particular attention to cancellation policies and whether or not they’re flexible. Travelers have every right to be concerned about traveling during a pandemic, but they may have no right to refunds if they signed contracts with inflexible cancellation policies. Travelers who suspect they may travel this summer but aren’t entirely sure about safety should only sign contracts that allow them to cancel trips without paying any penalties. In addition, before booking hotel rooms, ask which amenities will be available to guests. Chances are you will spend more time at the resort than normal, so access to pools, restaurants and other amenities takes on heightened importance.

Traveling in the summer of 2021 will be unique. Would-be vacationers and destination wedding planners should do their homework and consider a host of factors prior to booking a trip.
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PHOTOGRAPHER
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Can we see a full gallery of a recent wedding?
According to Brides magazine, unlike an album or a highlight gallery, a full gallery provides a better sense of a photographer’s style and attention to detail.

Will photos be color balanced and retouched?
Skilled photographers are capable of capturing winning photos. But photos can be enhanced further in the studio with retouching software to bring out specific effects. Some photographers will polish all proofs, while others only will work on the images ultimately ordered. Confirm retouching details before signing the contract.

What’s included in the photo packages?
A detailed price list helps you compare one photographer to another and decide which elements are covered. Additional prints, having a photographer’s assistant, ordering albums for the parents, or ordering a large framed print can alter costs significantly. Explore all prices to ensure you’re getting the best value. In addition, consider how many hours of event coverage are included in the price.

What is the payment timeline?
Photographers may accept deposits for their services but expect a different timeline of payment. Some may require payment in full before the wedding, while others may offer a payment plan that includes a final payment when picking up proofs or albums. Wedding photography is one of the essential elements of a wedding and helps tell the story of couples’ special day. Asking key questions can help couples find a photographer who will produce the desired results.

‘PLUS ONE’
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Any guest who is married
It’s typically standard to invite a couple as a whole to the wedding, even if you’ve never met the spouse. This often comes up when inviting work friends. Even if you have never interacted with a coworker’s spouse, etiquette dictates that all married guests be allowed to bring their spouses along.

Any guest who is engaged or is in a serious long-term relationship
It can be challenging to know the relationship status of everyone who will be invited to the wedding, but chances are you’ll have a good idea of those people closest to you. Include a plus one for guests who are engaged or in long-term relationships.

Consider guests who may not know others
Weddings often are times when childhood friends reconnect, or people who haven’t seen each other in a while come together. If there’s a good chance someone who is single and is invited to the wedding may not know anyone else there except the couple, extend a plus one as a courtesy.

Include the wedding party
All members of the wedding party should be offered the option of bringing a date to the wedding.
Apart from these guidelines, couples can establish any other rules, such as no plus ones for guests under a certain age or those who are not in serious relationships. The Knot also says it is polite to find out who the plus one will be so that wedding reception seating cards include that person’s name instead of “and guest.”

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