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How to have a great wedding for \$7,000 (or less)

It can be done! Here's how.



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(Image credit: Andriy Bezuglov / Alamy Stock Photo)



BY DORI ZINN PUBLISHED MAY 1, 2017

First comes love, then comes marriage. Then comes ... wedding debt. Getting married costs an average of \$35,000, and for many couples, that means racking up credit card debt or putting out family members in order to host a dream wedding. But can you have a great

wedding without going broke? Definitely. I got married for \$7,000 and it was the best day ever. Here's how you can save on your big day just like I did.

1. Negotiate everything

Brush up on your haggling skills. If you've ever had to negotiate a salary or buy a car, your proficiency will come in handy when planning your wedding. Having a party can be quick and cheap, but the second a vendor hears the word wedding, the cost can double or even triple. Make sure you're well-versed in going rates and average costs of everything you're buying — from venues to caterers to photographers — and never settle for the first place or product you see.

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2. Book a non-traditional venue

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Your venue will be your biggest expense. When scouting for locations, I looked for outdoor, rustic settings, like farms. We eventually settled on a bed and breakfast that was perfect for our 90-guest, brunch reception. Because it was during the day, we even saved some cash, paying \$2,500 for four hours instead of the regular \$4,000 fee.

3. Be flexible with dates and times

Weddings are typically extravagant affairs, but they don't have to be. Venues will always be cheaper if you break the traditional mold. While on a Saturday, our brunch reception was cheaper because it was during the day. If you're set on an evening event, think about having one on a weekday. Trust me: The people you love will do their best to be there

regardless of circumstance.

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If you do pick an outdoor place, be sure to [check the Almanac](#) to see past weather conditions. It'll help you narrow down your dates and times if you know when it will be least likely to rain.

4. Cut down catering costs by going amateur

I used [Thumbtack](#) to find a caterer near me, but I wish I would've done what some others have, and explore culinary institutes. Chefs in

training, like any good professional, are looking for ways to expand their resumes and build up a solid list of clients to show off their skills. Because they're still in school, you could score a better deal on catering costs than if you went with someone that has, say, 20 years of experience and charges top-dollar.

As I had a brunch wedding, breakfast and lunch costs were significantly less than dinner. We ended up paying less than \$1,500 for our caterer. *TheWeddingReport.com* says evening food service averages more than \$4,600.

5. Separate ceremony and reception locales

While considerably less hassle, having your ceremony at the same place as your reception could make it more expensive. It could also limit your choices to wedding-specific venues (which can be costlier). If religion is playing any part of your ceremony, look to having it in a church, synagogue, or temple, then head over to your separate reception party. This will give you many more options on where to have your reception and you could save a ton in the long-run.

6. Make do-it-yourself invites

Couples can spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars on invites, save the

dates, reply cards, thank you cards, and postage. We opted to make our own invites (the rustic, outdoor theme helped), use traditional envelopes and postage, and then bought general thank you cards after the fact. In total we spent \$150, with most of that going toward postage.

7. Narrow down your guest list — and then do it again

If you're at the beginning of your wedding planning and you're starting to realize the cost of your perfect day, think about inviting only the most important people. You can nix the very distant relatives, no matter how hard your mom pushes for it. Having a smaller wedding lets you interact more with each guest. How many times have you been to a wedding and the couple doesn't even stop by to say hello? I had a smaller party, but I still have people tell me two years later how much fun they had at our wedding.

8. Set a timeline

Having a lot of do-it-yourself tasks and no wedding planner meant my husband and I were doing wedding-related projects every weekend up until the big day. We made a schedule about what had to be done when,

and what we needed to do the day of and week of the wedding. Down to every personal invite, handmade centerpiece, and chalkboard sign, we made sure we devoted enough time to each task with plenty of time beforehand so we weren't too stressed in the days leading up to the big day. Having a schedule and staying organized may single-handedly save both your bank account and your sanity at the same time.



Dori Zinn

Dori Zinn is a digital freelance writer and editor based in Fort Lauderdale. Her work has appeared on *Money Talks News*, *Realtor.com*, *Debt.com*, *Quartz*, and others.

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