



The Stress Free Wedding Guide

From OAKTREE OCCASIONS

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After years of experience, having organised hundreds of weddings and now running an outside catering business, I have put together some of my thoughts to help you with your wedding and to ensure your day runs perfectly.

First things first....

So that you both have the wedding day of your dreams, sit down together and jot down your thoughts for your perfect wedding day. Remember to write down everything, from colours to venues, cars to guests and anything quirky from your character that you want to include. By doing this you can take ideas from each other and really achieve the day that both of you have been dreaming about.

Budget!

In the early stages of planning you must have the "budget conversation" with your other half and parents, if they are contributing to your day. Do not get caught up in this but have some figures in mind that you all agree on, if you need to have a budget in place.

Shall we begin to book suppliers?

The most important job.... choose your date! If you know where you want to marry and the venue for your reception, book this all ASAP. If you know the caterers you would like and the photographer, book these too. If your day is 18 months away this does not matter you have the important things booked and the stress is off. If you are unsure where to marry and what venue to have then these are the most important things to book as you can then tell all your other suppliers where and when the date is!

Pinterest (www.pinterest.com)

I LOVE THIS! For all kind of ideas on all kinds of budgets, this is a great site that will really get your ideas flowing. Pinterest can help with any details that you are unsure of. For example, do you know how you would like your photos taken? Which cake suits your day? Flowers etc, etc.... Just be warned, you can spend hours trawling through the pretty pictures.

Plan your day!

Have a rough time plan for your wedding day. Ask the vicar/registrar how long the ceremony will be? How much time does your photographer require? What time are you going into eat? A 3 course meal for approximately 100 guests will take 2hrs from being asked to sit. How long will each speech take? Speak to all the people making speeches and ask for a rough time guide, this is especially important if the speeches are before the meal as it will help give the caterer a time frame to work too. By working through your times you will have a schedule to work to.

Choosing Ushers, Bridesmaid and the Best Man

These people can really help your day run smoothly as many of the jobs carry responsibility. By choosing the right people they can really help your day along. For instance, if the photographer is running late and struggling to find the guests for the next photo, the ushers can line them up ready. Do you need flowers moved from the church to the reception venue? Have the ushers lined up so it can be done promptly and with minimal disruption. The bridesmaids will give you advice and keep you calm as well as coming up with little ideas that will create lasting memories. If your best friend is a shy speaker but he is the man for the job, then why not have two best men? That way, the second can make the speech instead.

Venues with small or no kitchens?

Are you thinking about using your granddad's old barn or a quirky village hall for your wedding reception? Are you wanting to have a hot meal and the kitchen is tiny with a domestic cooker or no kitchen at all? This does not have to mean that the venue is unsuitable. Is there a space for a catering tent outside that can become a kitchen for the day? We have no worries about cooking a 3 course meal in a catering tent! Or we are able to advise you on a menu that can work in the venue of your choice.

Decorations

Are you decorating the venue? I have seen lots of decorations over the years, some look amazing but some don't work so well. For example, tall table stands that have a large flower arrangement on the top are quite often at eye level so the guests cannot see each other. Sometimes these are then placed on the floor, making this a waste of money! If you are having sharing food then you do not want a mass of decorations on the table, as there will not be enough room for the food.

Are you making bunting, pom-poms or other decorations to hang around the venue/marquee? If you are making decorations then these can all be prepared weeks, even months in advance. Then, on the eve of your special day, it will only take your helpers a fraction of the time to get the venue ready. **BLOG**

Favours

Many years ago the tradition was always 5 sugar coated almonds in either a bag or a box. These almonds are symbolic and why favours first started. The bittersweet taste of fresh almonds symbolises life, whilst the sweet sugar coating represents hope that the newlyweds will enjoy more sweetness than bitterness in life. Five almonds are presented to represent wishes of happiness, health, wealth, children and longevity.

Almonds are no longer the most popular favour, and now you can have anything from chocolate, jam pots, port and wine bottles to plants, biscuits and even lottery tickets. Another favour which can be suitable is a charity lapel pin, such as cancer research. These are generally £2 each for different styles and are presented on a standing piece of card for each of your guests. There are many different pins available, or donate to your chosen charity and place cards on the table to inform your guests. **BLOG**

Getting married at 1pm - how about canapés?

You need not spend a fortune on canapés, but if you are getting married at lunch time or having more than a one and a half hour gap between the ceremony finishing and the Wedding Breakfast starting, then canapés are a great filler from a hunger point whilst giving your guests something to talk about. You need not have posh little mouthfuls of joy if your budget does not allow, anything goes so here are some ideas: dainty finger sandwiches served with tea (gives the alcohol a rest), a cream tea, or mini steak and potato pasties for the true Cornish amongst your guests! If it's a nice sunny day, why not have miniature ice creams? Remember anything goes...

Arrival Drinks

This is an area of the day which needs some thought. The more choices you offer, the more staff you will need to ensure a professional service. I always like to have a member of staff walking around the guests and topping up their glasses. Therefore, keep the choices to a minimum or consider offering a bar for those looking for something more.

Typical arrival drinks include Champagne, Pimms, Prosecco, Bucks Fizz and a soft drink, these work very well. Other drinks that are now fashionable are Champagne Cocktails, Fruit Punch, Cocktails, Elderflower Presse, Cider Cocktails and some bottled beers for the boys.

Orange juice can be classed as old fashioned for the reception drinks but if you have to dispose of all your bottles after your wedding then orange juice boxes are far easier to dispose of and less time.

For the 'WOW' factor we always dress our glasses with fresh fruit, edible flowers and Vintage straws! **BLOG**

The Wedding Breakfast

Why is the reception meal called the Wedding Breakfast? It is the first meal after you become husband and wife, therefore it is called the "Wedding Breakfast"

Choosing your Menu Style and Service for your Wedding Breakfast

Menus for weddings have changed vastly in the last ten years and no longer can you assume that if you go to a wedding you are going to be served a plated hot meal. Fifteen years ago I served a choice of roast beef and a chicken breast for the main course, pretty much every week at the weddings I organized. But now any type of meal and service can be offered and guests are now seeing "fun" elements on the menu.

When you start to think about the type of meal you would like, also think about the style of service and whether you would like to offer a pre order to your guests. Sharing options are now extremely popular, this is where a selection of foods can be placed in the centre of the guests tables for them all to help themselves. This option can work well if you know your guests are the type of people that will delve in and share the foods



around. You are able to do this with many different types of foods, we have served homemade pies, curries, rich casseroles, roasted joints to be carved, joints sliced, barbecue foods, to name a few....

Festival weddings are on a similar line to the sharing, although you may want food stands placed around your venue so that guests can go and help themselves, great for mixing and mingling! But be careful what foods you choose as most guests will stand and eat while they chat to other guests.

The plated option is still very popular and we do serve many different foods now, along with the traditional roast beef. Buffets too have their place and I think that people do enjoy a well stocked buffet table as they can pick and choose their foods to suit themselves, however your guests do need to leave their seats. **BLOG**

Choosing your Menu for your Wedding Breakfast

It's your day so have what you want! Once you have chosen your style of menu you can choose the foods that you would like. Bear in mind, however, that if your favourite dessert is a chocolate and salted caramel tart and your hubby's is a sticky toffee pudding, then one of you may need to think again as both these desserts are heavy and sweet. You also have to think about your guests, so why not let hubby pick his favourite starter, allowing you to pick your favourite dessert. We as caterer can help advise you on other choices to contrast with your dishes, allowing your guests to make their choices from a balanced menu, this applies for any type of menu whether it be a plated meal, sharing menu, buffet or festival style. You would not want to serve all beef options for the main course, for example.

Pre Order for the Wedding Breakfast

This can be done quite simply by putting a copy of the menu in with your invitations and a tick sheet so that each guest can mark their choices. Once you receive your replies, create a spreadsheet or a list with the information and let us, your caterer have a copy, highlighting any dietary requirements and/or children's meals etc... By doing this you will help to ensure that you have a professional service from your chosen caterer on the day. **BLOG**

If you do not want the hassle of a pre order, there are a couple of things you can do. How about sharing platters for starters with a vegetarian option included, placed on the table for people to help themselves? Have a buffet for the main course and dessert, or how about a set meal with a trio of desserts. The only detail you then have to worry about is any guests with special dietary requirements.

Special Dietary Requirements

There are 14 food allergies that are recognised by law, as well as many others, so it is always best to check with your guests before your day. As caterers we are always aware of allergies such as coeliac, lactose intolerance, vegetarian, vegan, dairy free and wheat free. Some guests can also have reactions to nuts, seafood, tomatoes and various other foods, so it is important that your caterer is made aware of this. We ask that you put a note on your invitations with the menu, then on the day we will ensure that your guests will be enjoying safe and tasty food!

Drink Service and Bar Opening Time

People have different ideas about bars and drink service. Sometimes the bar is open from the guests arrival, whilst at other times it does not open until the evening reception starts. Some people have a free bar, others just have beer, wine and soft drinks. There are no rules and no wrong answers here. The best idea is to think about your friends and family, what they drink and in what quantities and work out what best suits you, your guests and your budget. Free bars are not so common anymore so do not feel obliged to provide one.

Wine service

Nowadays many bride and grooms buy their own wine as this is far cheaper. Some caterers charge for corkage, whilst others (like ourselves) do not. The wine can be poured by the waiting staff or placed on the tables for the guests to help themselves. When I am managing a wedding breakfast, I always ensure that wine bottles are replaced and water jugs replenished before they run empty. I also rotate bottles between tables where one group may be drinking more of a particular type of wine than another, therefore keeping wastage to a minimum.

If you are planning on serving your own wines, champagnes and even a bar in the evening you will require refrigeration as no guest will want to drink a warm beer or white wine on a beautiful sunny day. If you are having a large wedding then a fridge trailer is the best form of refrigeration for the volume of beverages, however if you have a small wedding of 60 people or less and are only supplying wines and maybe beers on arrival then a fridge and lots of ice to cool drinks down in buckets can work fine.

Sweep Stake/Games

Unsure about your seating plan as you have lots of guests that do not know each other? How about running a sweep stake on how long the speeches are going to last, just to help break the ice? Everyone puts £1 in a pot on each table and the closest to the answer wins. This also gives the best man a little extra for his speech to answer the times! It's a catalyst that will get your guests to interact.

Cutting the Wedding Cake

The tradition of serving the cake with coffee at the end of the wedding breakfast no longer applies. Some people still do this whilst others serve the cake with the evening food. If you have lots of people attending and you do not want to have the expense of a 4-tier wedding cake, then how about having a cutting cake. This is a cake that is iced but not so intricately decorated, so your guests will think they're eating the original wedding cake and only the person cutting will know the difference.

A wedding cake can now be either sponge or fruit cake, again there no longer is a tradition for the cake.

Want your evening guests to turn up on time?

Why not leave the cake cutting until the evening? This will involve the evening guests and on the Wedding Invitations you can write "You are invited for the cake cutting at 8pm" This will ensure a few more of your guests are there promptly to help with catering numbers and fill the dance floor.

Planned Photography

Always think about what photographs you would like before your day. Think about a shot with someone special or at a special place. If you have time, how about the two of you stop at a special place for some time out on your own and some great photos of just the two of you. Would you like a photo with your pet? Plan these and speak to your photographer. Give them a list of the photos you would like taken and ask for the approximate time they will take. This will help you plan your itinerary for the day.

Planning lots of photos and worried about your guests?

If you are planning lots of photos and worried about your guests during this period, think of some ways to entertain them. Canapés are great, they fill a hunger gap, can slow the flow of alcohol down and if they are WOW they can be a great talking point. How about a musician or if there are lots of children a short trick magician or large garden games such as garden "Connect Four". If your photos are going to take more than an hour then a little something for the guests will be appreciated. Or if you are marrying in the Summer months, how about having your family photos after the wedding breakfast, before your evening guests arrive?

Photos, need to hide.....

Need to hide your mum's broken leg or your bridesmaids tattoo on her arm?

Speak to your photographer about what you want to hide, by placing the person carefully in the shots your photographer will be able to hide it and the person will never know! Hide your mums cast amid the skirt of your dress. Angle your bridesmaid so that her bad tattoo is always hidden. Where there's a will, there's a way...

Lots of children at your wedding?

Have you got lots of children coming to celebrate your special day? Are you worried about them running around when you are trying to make a speech? Just before the speeches start give each child a colouring pack or a toy making kit. This need not be expensive and will keep them entertained and more importantly quiet, while the speeches are taking place.

Master of Ceremonies (MC)

To a lot of people this conjures up the vision of a man in a red coat. Well yes, it can be the full works or it can be a friend who is used to public speaking. As a wedding planner at a prestigious hotel, I was taught to MC and it is still something that I do today. Many people would instantly say no, but the one huge benefit of an MC is they can keep your day to a schedule so time is not wasted or lost. For example, minutes can easily be lost if you have a shy MC or the ushers go round asking people to sit, as guests start chatting to other guests on their way. A good MC will command the room so those precious minutes are not wasted. An MC will be watching the clock instead of you, leaving you to relax and enjoy your day rather than worrying about the time. **BLOG**

Line Up - to have or not to have?

OK, so many people think a line up is "old hat" and if you have the full line up with parents, bride, groom, best man and chief bridesmaid it can take 45 minutes for a 100-120 guests to pass through. Well, this is all well and good, but there is one huge pro reason to have a line up. If you have your great auntie Bessie coming who you only see once a year and some business friends of your dads, then you can say hello and thank you to ALL your guests and then the rest of the free time is yours to spend with the guests you want to spend time with. If you are also aware of the time element but would like a line up then why not just have the Bride and Groom, you can see 100 guests in 15 minutes if just the two of you are in the line. Or go completely informal and have no line up, the choice is yours.....

Speeches - before the Wedding Breakfast after or even in between?

There are no set rules with this one any more. Years ago the tradition was to always have the speeches at the end of the Wedding Breakfast, however I have seen many meals wasted as the boys are so nervous and cannot eat. On the flip side of this a bit more wine has been drunk, everyone has eaten and are fully relaxed so the speeches flow easier and the laughs are louder.

The main reason for weddings to have the speeches first are so the boys can make their speeches and are then free to enjoy the rest of the day. Alternatively, why not mix the two and have a speech between a course? I would not advise to have a speech before a hot meal or a speech that is likely to be more than ten minutes long but a friend that just wants five minutes, then this could be a good option.

You must go the way that best works for you, every wedding is different so never worry about the order you choose.

Traditional Speeches

To be honest the speeches are one of the few things that have not changed over the years. 99% of the time the Bride's Father goes first, followed by the Groom and the Best Man last of all. If the Bride would like to make a speech, a friend or bridesmaid, I think this should be done after the Best Man as no one will expect it, making it a surprise and a small twist on tradition.

Call a comfort break

If you announce a comfort break for 5 minutes just before the speeches start, everyone will instantly know that they have to be in their seats for speech time and you will not have anyone stray or be waiting for guests that are talking in the toilets or out having a cigarette.

Evening Reception Food

Finger buffets are no longer the compulsory meal of the evening, however they are now seeing a revival. Nowadays, anything goes and the more fun the better. Bacon butties, gourmet burgers, a taco bar, bowl food buffet such as chilli and curries, pies and pasties, hog roast or beef rolls, cheese boards (or a 'cheese cake' - a tiered selection of cheeses that look like a cake) and the wedding cake are just a few ideas. We encourage something a little different as your guests will go away talking about it and quirky evening food often works out far cheaper than an evening buffet. My favourite is miniature fish and chips. **BLOG**

Tables

Tables come in all shapes and sizes, and all seat different numbers. Many people like round tables because they are social, but I personally think the 6ft round tables are too big. You can sit 9-12 people on these but seating anything less than 8 and your guests will feel like strangers to each other. If you have 5ft 6 round tables you can sit 6-11 people (at a push) and your guests will feel more comfortable. There are also 5ft round tables but I personally think these are too small.

Trestle Tables are seeing a resurgence, a 6ft trestle table will seat 6 people, or 3 people if being used for a top table with place settings on only one side. Trestle tables are not a good idea for sharing platters as they are quite narrow (2'6), however there are now some plank trestles that are fast becoming popular that are slightly bigger.

Always think about your food when ordering tables. If you are having share platters then the bigger tables may help, but trust me when it comes to a table plan you nearly always end up with a table of 7! **BLOG**



Food for your suppliers?

Do you have to supply food for your suppliers? Many photographers, videographers and bands require food and some even state hot meals. Ensure that your caterer knows about this and if you are on a budget then sandwiches are perfectly acceptable.

Floor Plan

If you can it is a help to have a floor plan, if you are having a marquee then the majority of companies will give you a copy. Draw out locations for the cake table, gift table, bar, buffet and any other bits you may have, such as a photo booth. If you have a friend that can do a "to scale" drawing then even better. Put your table plan with this and all your helpers and caterers can work more efficiently the day before when setting up, making life easier for you as there will not be so many questions....

Bad Weather...

If you get to the day and it's sadly pouring with rain, be prepared that all your timings will come forward. For example, your guests will not stay at the church watching the photos being taken and chatting as they will want to find somewhere dry and warm so are likely to arrive at the venue early. Check that your caterers will be prepared for this!

Always have a B plan for photos and arrival drinks if you are planning on having these outside, it's better to be prepared!

If you are having a marquee wedding that is high on a hill with beautiful views but is open to the elements then have some ideas to hand that you can implement if you have consistent, heavy rain! For example, find out where you can get some wood chip that can be laid the day prior to act as dry paths for your guests to walk on, or ask the marquee company if they will be able to lay additional matting. Have the toilets parked closer to the marquee, may be at the back but where a side can be opened for easier access. I always find that if you have some B plans organized you are likely not to need them!

Be Organised

Wedding planning will stress out even the most laid back person, especially when all your nearest and dearest are stressed too! The best way to avoid this is organise like you never have before. Many things can be done months in advance, such as providing your photographer a list of the formal photos you would like, deciding roughly what time you are going to cut the cake and asking a person (be it the caterer or a friend) to cut it up. Tell them how much to cut and how you want it served. Buy the alcohol and soft drinks a month before, all glass hire can be arranged well in advance. Your friends will love to be involved so give them jobs and let them help you. The more you are organised the less stressed you will be, trust me!

The best piece of advice I can give is to organise as many details as you can in advance.

So many of us have grandiose ideas of how we're going to do everything ourselves and in doing so feel a deep sense of pride in our accomplishments while saving boatloads of money, for example the flowers for the table centre pieces! Here's my cautionary note – **DO NOT TAKE ON TASKS THAT REQUIRE YOUR PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT ON THE DAY OF YOUR WEDDING** or for the three days prior! Either ask friends or family that you can trust or pay a supplier to take all the stress away.

Look at our blog for some more hints and tips. Good luck planning.....

If you book your wedding with us at Oaktree Occasions, I can provide a personalised itinerary of your day including timings which will allow me to co ordinate on the day, for you. **If you book with us, either myself or one of my trusted team will be with you on the day as your very own wedding co ordinator!**