



UNIT-2

Types of Wedding Ceremonies

Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Become Familiar with Religious & Traditional/Formal Wedding Ceremonies.
- ✓ Investigate the Destination Wedding and the Benefits of this type of Wedding
- ✓ Analyse the Themed Wedding

Unit 2

Different Types of Wedding Ceremonies

One of the first things a couple must decide is what type of wedding ceremony to have. Both civil and religious weddings have been conducted for centuries with positive and negative outcomes. Each religion, country and culture has its own marriage ceremonies and traditions. Below, some of the different types of wedding ceremonies are outlined.

Religious

The most common type of wedding ceremony is the religious one. It remains extremely popular. Religious weddings are a mark of two people's commitment to each other and their willingness to share a life together. Traditional religious ceremonies will be held in a place of worship – a church, temple or mosque.

Traditional/Formal

The most common type of wedding is the traditional, formal, religious kind. Couples tend to marry in churches of their own faith as couples usually have a religion in common. However, a growing number of couples today do not share the same faith. Despite this, inter-faith couples can still have traditional wedding ceremonies. Many religious officials will accommodate couples of different faiths.

Usually, formal or traditional weddings will follow specific norms. These would include elaborate invitations, beautiful flowers, designer dresses, bridesmaids, groomsmen in tuxedos, limousines, and fine dining as well as entertainment at a reception hall.

Double Weddings

A double wedding occurs when two wedding parties decide to get married in the same ceremony. Usually it is two siblings who are both getting married and have decided to share the ceremony with each other. This may be beneficial for several reasons: the expenses can be shared and large families are spared the difficulty of convening for two separate ceremonies that may be held close together.

White Wedding

In many Western cultures, 'white wedding' is the term used to describe very formal occasions. It is also used to describe a wedding where both bride and groom are getting married for the first time. The tradition of brides wearing white on their wedding days began with Queen Victoria who chose a white dress in order to show off the detailed lace on her gown. A photograph of her wearing the dress went around the world and the tradition began.

Civil Ceremony

A civil ceremony takes place in a non-religious venue, usually in a large garden or a town hall. It is performed by a government officer or elected official or someone who has a licence to marry people. Sometimes it is held in a judge's chambers with witnesses.

Destination Weddings

In a destination wedding, a couple decide to have their wedding in a country or place where neither of them lives. This is often in a popular or exotic tourist destination, and the wedding will then merge into a honeymoon. As destination weddings involve travel, it is necessary to allow more time and such weddings usually continue over several days. These types of weddings afford the couple space to make their own rules. When weddings are held in people's hometowns they tend to follow a predictable pattern and are often influenced by parents and budget, which can sometimes expand more than was anticipated.

Couples who tend to be more independent will not follow any 'shoulds' but will make their own choices based purely on what they want. Destination weddings tend to be more casual, modest and relaxed occasions. Ceremonies may not be followed by a formal reception; instead, the couple and guests will enjoy a trip on a sailing ship, a trail ride or a beach barbecue, for example.

Paying the Price

The amount of money that hometown weddings cost often gives couples the incentive they need to look further afield for a cheaper place to wed. Weddings away from home tend to be 40% less expensive than traditional, hometown weddings.

Quality over Quantity

Destination weddings are popular for another reason: the couple have the luxury of inviting only the people they really want to be there. Not everyone will be able to afford to travel; hence, the guest list will be shorter. This, in turn, usually ensures more intimate events and ideal settings.

Benefits of Destination Weddings

Location

A destination wedding usually includes overnight travel and a setting chosen for its scenic appeal. Sometimes, in exceptionally beautiful settings, couples can save money on decorations and flowers as the destination itself provides the atmosphere.

More Time to Celebrate

A hometown wedding will usually last for around three to five hours. Sometimes it may be a little longer if there is a break between the ceremony and the reception. In contrast, destination weddings will take place over a few days.

Lower Cost

Even though destination weddings tend to last for days, they are actually cheaper than hometown weddings.

Casual versus Traditional Celebrations

Hometown weddings are usually more traditional, predictable and often 'stodgy'. This is a consequence of their formulaic agendas. People who choose destination weddings have the luxury of dispensing with conventions they don't like. They can make their wedding as laid-back and casual as they want, and most people will choose ease over formality with destination weddings.

No Hard and Fast Rules

No hard and fast rules exist in destination weddings, apart from obtaining a wedding licence and making sure that the person who performs the ceremony is also licensed.

Consultants will inevitably work with couples who choose a destination wedding. The couple are highly likely to want the consultant present at the destination to ensure that everything runs smoothly. The consultant will have to ensure that any travel, meal and accommodation expenses are written into the contract. These, while separate from the consultancy fee, are still necessary as the couple's decision to have a destination wedding requires the consultant's attendance. Wedding planners are not at the destination to relax; they are there to work. As such, they must be compensated accordingly. Some planners do not accept destination weddings as they prefer to be close to their families and other clients. Some really enjoy destination wedding planning and will gladly go along. As a wedding planner, you must decide for yourself whether you are willing and/or able to accept a destination wedding.

If you are a planner (or thinking about becoming one) and you already live in an area popular for destination weddings, make sure you are prepared to market the services you provide to any visitors who may be preparing to marry. If someone wants to get married in Oxford, for example, but lives in London, he/she would find it beneficial and practical to hire a wedding planner from Oxford as they would be more knowledgeable about vendors and venues etc. in Oxford. This would also cut down on extra travel costs that would have to be paid for. For budding wedding planners, the destination wedding market is an avenue for building a business.

Important Things to Consider when Planning a Destination Wedding

Political Unrest

A wedding planner whose clients have chosen a destination wedding will need to keep an eye on the news to ensure that the destination in question is not experiencing any instability or natural calamity.

Know the Law

Certain nations have laws which prohibit the use of photographers or other professionals who are not locally based. Make sure you check this out beforehand.

Military

If one member of a couple is enlisted in the Armed Forces, they may choose a military wedding. In this case, the groom (or sometimes bride) will wear his (her) uniform. The guests should be formally dressed and often many of the groom's friends will also be military people who will also wear their uniforms.

Traditionally, the ushers will also be in the armed forces and will form an 'arch of steel' with their swords. This is done at the end of the ceremony when the bride and groom will walk through the arch. Only those who are active-duty servicemen can take part in this as they are the ones allowed to carry a sword or sabre. The couple will decide whether they also want civilian ushers to stand in the arch as well.

The Location for Military Weddings

Military weddings will often take place on academy grounds or at military chapels. In most cases, military chapels are as much in demand as other wedding ceremony sites. It will be necessary to reserve these about a year in advance. A written application to the chaplain's office may be necessary. Sometimes, there will be no charge for the use of a military chapel except for a donation to the chapel fund. Various rules exist regarding the decoration of military chapels. However, all flowers, candelabra and some other forms of décor will be the same and will be arranged by the Chapel Altar Guide. In some cases, the couple must decorate the chapel themselves.

The Sabre Arch

When the ceremony is complete, the newly-wed couple will walk through an arch formed by the sabres of the military guests at the wedding. In a Naval wedding, actual swords are used. It is not obligatory to have an arch but it does add a lovely touch to the day and is a memorable experience. Many bases have sabres available for weddings. The arch will usually be formed outside the chapel as swords should not be unsheathed in religious sites. Not everyone is permitted to bear sabres or swords. Only commissioned officers are allowed to carry them and take part in the ceremony.

The Reception

Academies or bases will usually hold military wedding receptions, and receptions can take place at officers' clubs or other enlisted clubs on the premises. Sometimes, the reception will be held at a more traditional restaurant or hotel. Military guests will be ushered to their seats according to their rank. One of the highlights of the reception occurs when the bride and groom cut the cake with a sword or sabre. If the groom owns a sword or sabre, the couple will use this to cut the cake. The groom will present the sword to his new bride and, with his right hand resting over hers, they will cut the cake together.

Themed Weddings

Themes can be assigned to all types of weddings, including military and more traditional ones. The notion of a theme refers to the use of a certain concept or pattern which will guide the overall ceremony. A theme is created by the use of certain colours or historical symbols, for example. The theme might also be anything the couple holds dear, specific music, additional objects, pets, or anything that is deemed acceptable for sacramental ceremonies. Mediaeval themes might involve the newlyweds and/or guests wearing mediaeval clothes and the venue being decorated in that particular style, including entertainment and food.



It is necessary to remember that themed weddings don't have to become costume parties since, regardless of the theme, the main point of the ceremony is sacramental and full of cultural values and beliefs. Guests are not required to engage with the theme in the same way as the wedding party. It is mostly for the couple and the guests to create a memorable day.

Themed weddings are becoming more and more popular, in particular among those who can afford outlandish themed weddings. Currie (1993) states that a theme in a wedding can serve as the core of the ceremony or 'a trunk from which all of the ceremony's branches or activities grow.' Due to this unique

feature, a themed wedding has a vital role, beginning with the wedding preparations and moving on to the wedding itself and the celebrations.

Another positive aspect of themed weddings is their ability to prevent the wedding celebrations from appearing disjointed or as having being planned arbitrarily. Thus, one can conclude that a theme can play a vital role in creating a very memorable occasion.

Themed weddings need not conflict with traditional wedding protocol as the theme is only an enhancement of the mood of the events. There is no intention for the theme to replace the religious or cultural context of the wedding.

Challenges of Themed Weddings for Planners

There are several aspects which must be taken into account when organising a wedding. Ideally, the couple and the guests should be entirely satisfied with the final outcome.

Nutt (2007) states that it all begins with the setting of a date. This is often easier said than done. Planners must select a date that is convenient for the bride and groom as well as most of the guests. Weddings are supposed to be once-in-a-lifetime occasions; hence, the assumption is that people want to have their wedding witnessed by and shared with all the people they wish to invite. The particular type of ceremony must also be decided upon early as this will indicate what type of wedding it will be, i.e. large, small, formal, semi-formal etc.

Another aspect that needs to be decided early is the budget. This should reflect the ceremony and celebration accordingly. Zazulak (2008) mentions the budget as being extremely important as it keeps the wedding costs under control and prevents the family from experiencing future financial problems. After the budgeting has been decided upon, the planner must start shopping around for suitable vendors.

A wedding planner must be intelligent and creative. Setting up difficult aspects of wedding celebrations, such as the venue in which the reception will be held, must be done perfectly to ensure that the entire experience is enjoyable for couples and guests. This is not just a matter of food and drinks at the venue; the entire environment should be elegantly designed.

With regard to the reception venue, Riggs (2005) highlights these details as important:

- i. Distance of the reception venue from the wedding ceremony site
- ii. Distance of suitable accommodation for out-of-town guests
- iii. Maximum number of guests the facility is able to comfortably hold
- iv. Ample parking for vehicles
- v. Is there valet parking and what is the cost?
- vi. Is there a time limit for the reception venue or any additional cost should the event exceed that time?
- vii. Does the venue have adequate restroom facilities?

- viii. Is the banquet package all-inclusive, such as tables, dinnerware and chairs? Be careful, as sometimes it is not.

If the planner or consultant does not pay attention to detail, these factors may be overlooked and this will cause problems later on. This is why it is important to consider everything. It is also the planner's job to alleviate any pressures that might arise from the demands of a themed wedding.

As a wedding planner, you must be prepared to incorporate a broad range of options when it comes to themed weddings. People may ask you for something that hasn't been done before and you must rise to the challenge in this regard. Clients' creativity is sometimes a challenge for planners since they may have an idea of what they want but have nothing visual to show the planner. When this occurs, a planner must obtain as much detail as possible from the clients and work out how to turn their concepts into a physical event. Therefore, wedding planners or consultants must have a broad understanding of the creativity they are required to have and use. The planner or consultant will be required to make the connection between a romantic and a dramatic metaphor of a client's idea to create a satisfying theme for a wedding. Generally speaking, themed weddings tend to be a little more demanding in terms of their management because they require a lot more collaborative creativity and thought between the clients and the planner.

Common Themes for a Themed Wedding

Themed weddings have emerged from people's desire to add their own specific ideas; the single goal is to create one wedding out of numerous favourite ideas. Certain themes are more prevalent in themed weddings today. These include edible weddings, candle weddings, and practical weddings. Napolitano (2007) claims that the huge number of unique themes indicates a high level of creativity that complements the level of a couple's feelings for each other. Unique themes include Christmas weddings, firefighter themes, and monster-truck-themed weddings.

One of the fastest growing themes in the wedding industry today is beverages. This theme is popular because of its potential to satisfy both guests and couples. Palladino (2008) states that coffee is one of the ideal beverages for weddings and it comes with many advantages, such as the following:

- i. almost everyone will like coffee because all over the world people have been drinking coffee for centuries in order to refresh themselves, especially during special occasions such as weddings,
- ii. coffee themes can be easily matched to other wedding themes such as autumn, the beach, or Christmas, because coffee is one of those drinks that can be enjoyed in virtually any season, occasion or lifestyle,
- iii. coffee is a distinctive colour and can be matched to a colour-orientated theme for weddings,
- iv. a coffee wedding can remain within a certain budget because it is affordable no matter how big the wedding party, and
- v. couples can have coffee served as a wedding souvenir.

Another very popular wedding theme is the garden wedding. Some people think garden weddings are the least expensive of all wedding themes (Naylor, 2001). However, some authors such as Zhou (2005) have found that garden weddings can in fact be expensive, especially if the couple's specific desires require more spending. This spending may arise from things such as the following:

- i. Separating the wedding garden into different styles, such as east and west, and
- ii. Creating the garden landscape with certain architectural designs, plants and stones; hanging things on pillars in the east garden, for example, and giving special emphasis to the southern style, lawn and couplet, and many others.

Garden weddings are considered expensive because the planners, or anyone involved in organising the venue, know that the aim of a garden wedding is to highlight the importance of said venue for the celebration. In order to achieve this, more often than not, some changes in terms of architectural design and landscaping must be made. Nash (2008) suggests that a wedding can be driven by anything the couple is interested in, and this must be transformed into a wedding theme. An example would be famous romantic characters such as Antony and Cleopatra.



Decorations

Themed weddings are made even more effective by proper arrangement of decorations. This will convey the intended atmosphere to the couple as well as the guests (Nash, 2008). The decorations might be made from any preferred materials. Lanterns, fresh flowers, and other materials imported from London, Paris etc. might be used. Artificial decorations are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by brides as well as being used in the event itself. The money-saving aspect is obvious in this case since fresh flowers, for example, are much more expensive than artificial flowers. Fresh flowers also have special requirements in order for them to remain fresh and beautiful throughout the entire event, especially in hot weather. Another advantage of artificial flowers is that they are available all year round and are not limited to specific months.

Invitations

When opting for a themed wedding, another aspect that must be decided upon is the wedding invitations. These can be seen as the window to the main event. The appearance of the invitation will make the theme of the wedding apparent. If the wedding theme, for example, follows a royal type of 'prince and princess' theme, the invitations must also be created according to the theme. They will need to be elegant and regal. Whatever the invitations look like, however, they must be informative and contain important information regarding dates and times, clothing and footwear, and the venue's location.



Dress

Another indicator of themed weddings is the dress code for the day. This concerns not only the bride and groom but also the other participants. Nash (2008) states that themed weddings allow not only the bride and the groom but also their guests to relate to their chosen theme. They are able to match the theme with whatever clothes they feel are appropriate. It's not compulsory for guests to fully co-operate with the theme but any attempt to be part of the event, which occurs only once in a lifetime, is usually appreciated by the couple.

Being part of a themed wedding does not necessarily mean going to great expense. The bride's dress and those of the guests only needs to match the theme using certain colours suitable to the theme. It's not necessary to go to a specialty store, for example. With just some simple creative touches, everybody can fit in with the couple's created world.

Music Preparation

Music is important in weddings. It brings a certain vibrancy and life and also communicates to the guests the event's worth. The Wedding Organisation (n.d.) states that music is a major part of mood-setting for weddings, in particular the reception's theme song played as the bride and groom have their first dance together. Music is an area in which wedding planners and couples may disagree. After all, music is a very personal thing. However, it is often the wedding planner who must make choices for the music, ensuring that it meets the couple's criteria as well as fitting with the theme of the wedding.

It will be necessary to identify the final outcome as this will help everything else to fall into place. Many themed weddings today are actually destination weddings, and ceremonies are held in numerous different places.

Wedding Menus

It is indeed true that the planning of weddings today has become more complex, in particular because of current trends and innovative thinking. In some cases, wedding themes demand more than the time zones or seasons can provide. For example, making preparations for a themed wedding that is winter-based will be quite difficult to manage in summer. Props will be needed and certain foods that may not be in season may have to be specially organised. In some cases, only specific hotels or restaurants will be able to provide all this. Themed weddings also inspire higher expectations from the guests, especially if either the bride or the groom or both come from a wealthy background. The food is no exception.

Some trendy expectations that guests might have include the following:

- i. Changing from a set menu to an a-la-carte menu, as this will provide more choice, especially for those with specific dietary requirements;
- ii. A later wedding breakfast as well as a smaller evening buffet menu;
- iii. No commonplace menu items such as soup, turkey or gateaux. The focus is placed on unusual requests or themed-type menus;
- iv. A smaller wedding comprising many courses; and
- v. Not serving a traditional cake but having one that might also serve as a dessert for later.

Additional Touches

Prevalent themes come from pure creativity and add a special touch that will enhance a themed wedding. These touches add a richness to the theme. For example, all the people at the event will be taken into an imaginary world if the bride arrives like Cinderella in a coach pulled by horses and the groom arrives on horseback. With a huge increase in the number of themed weddings, more changes are appearing and transforming such weddings.

Entertainment

Entertainment is often one of the highlights of a wedding. Without entertainment the celebration is likely to be flat and uneventful. This entertainment can now include events before the ceremony, during the reception and after the reception. It also includes the music for the bride's entrance, the couple's first dance, and music for the guests. A special touch is sometimes added which involves guests being able to request certain songs or music during the reception. This personalises the event even more for everyone.

Local Attraction

It is always advisable for couples, or the wedding planner, to select a destination that has suitable accommodation close by. The bride and groom and their families will of course have to spend a lot of time at the venue(s) but so too will their guests. It is necessary to take their concerns into account as well. Choosing a venue that is suitable in as many ways as possible is a good place to start.

Reasons to have a Themed Wedding

As mentioned before, couples have specific reasons for wanting a themed wedding. The couple are in control of the process and will decide what to include or exclude. Below are the three most common reasons why couples choose to have themed weddings:

- i. Couples believe that themed weddings are a unique way to ensure that even common wedding ideas become a preserved theme for them. They also believe that a theme will make the wedding seem even more elegant even if it is not a high-profile event;
- ii. Couples believe that a themed wedding will impact people's memories more than a 'usual' wedding. They believe this is true for them and for everyone else who will attend. In this way the wedding event will be treasured for a lifetime and cherished; and
- iii. Couples sometimes prefer themed weddings as a way of showing respect and displaying traditions. This is because personalised weddings (i.e. themed weddings) can be a richer means of displaying customs and traditions, such as allocating a lot more time for gestures of thanks for those who attend the wedding.

As well as the reasons mentioned above, Lingao, a wedding event and management director, stated that many couples prefer a themed wedding because it will provide them with an experience that is totally unique to them and will be very memorable for everyone. For the wedding planner, this means that the preparation has to be perfectly executed, from the invitations, to the cake, to the entertainment.

Co-operation

Co-operation is necessary to ensure that all aspects of the wedding are carefully planned around the chosen theme. Moreover, traditions must be taken into account. Many couples like to keep some traditions and want their personal backgrounds to be integrated into the marriage to show respect and honour their individual heritages.

Personality

Couples also want to make their weddings an extension of themselves and their personalities. They want to share their happiness with all their guests. Sharing their relationship and individual personalities with the guests is one way of doing this. Themed weddings give couples the opportunity to customise

everything according to their personalities and preferences. The set-up is actually flexible and it can be adjusted at any time before the wedding.

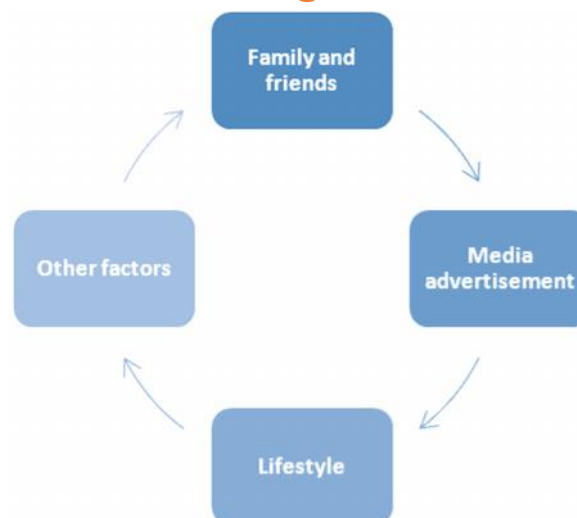
Mood

Finally, themed weddings allow couples to set up a specific mood or atmosphere for their special event. A common example would be the black and white theme. This denotes a more formal celebration. Hence, selecting the mood of the wedding will allow other things to fall into place and reflect the couple's preferences.

General Interest in Themed Weddings

For wedding planners, themed weddings mean something else. Thirteen respondents to a brief survey indicated that themed weddings allow couples to make their own decisions about what to include, such as a certain 'twist' which will make their wedding unique.

Factors influencing choice of themed wedding



Family and Friends

According to the above diagram, most respondents, when planning a themed or a traditional wedding, consider family and friends to be the most influential factors.

Media Advertisement

Media ads were mentioned as an influential factor as both bride and groom acquire ideas from other weddings, whether in printed advertisements or bridal magazines. Advertising exposes couples to the concept of a themed wedding. Media advertising gives clients more ideas about how to create their own wedding and how to make it a special day, regardless of whether they use a wedding planner.

Lifestyle

People's lifestyles actually play a major role in special events such as weddings because they drive the style or theme of the wedding itself.

Other Factors

Lastly, it is necessary to look at certain influences that cannot be ignored. For example, it is difficult for some wedding planners to ascertain certain influential factors if the couples are not very open-minded. The wedding planner must discover the essential information.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *The Complete Wedding Plan* by Charlotte Rees
- ✓ *Wedding Photography: A Guide to Photojournalism* by Kerry Morgan
- ✓ *Diane Warner's Contemporary Guide to Wedding Ceremonies*