

# Maximizing Your Wedding Budget

*Karen Kaforey is one of the most respected wedding and event planners in the South, with more than 14 years of experience. Providing her clients New York knowledge with Southern sensibility, Karen is relatable, approachable and knowledgeable. Here are her latest tips on how to save money on your big day!*

1) Lighting can make or break the overall feel of a wedding reception. Lighting is not inviting when it's too harsh, but when it's soft and warm, it creates a romantic atmosphere your guests will appreciate. Not only can you create the perfect ambiance with something as simple as light, but you will save money! Have your lighting designer up light the room and the focal points such as your wedding cake table, the head table, the entrance, and even have them add your monogram to the wall or the dance floor. Using a lighting designer can help you in cutting costs with the florist significantly, because each arrangement will be highlighted for the guests to notice. It can also influence your linen selections for the dining and buffet tables. Choose cost-effective linen in



a neutral color as opposed to the more expensive textured linen, especially if you choose to have some of your wedding colors used in the lighting. Don't underestimate how much lighting can influence the overall feel of the reception, while allowing you to cut costs in other areas.

2) Your wedding cake is very important; guests are interested in seeing it, finding out what the flavors are, and knowing when you're going to cut it! To keep your cost low, select the baker wisely. This is the last thing your guests will eat and they will notice if it's dry or didn't taste great. Make sure you find a baker that can do a tasting for you so you're assured the taste is fantastic and will go with the menu you have selected for the reception. A great way to keep the cost of the cake down is to select a traditional cake with fresh flowers, because if the baker hand makes the flowers, the cost will go up. Keep it small; you can have a cake that serves half the guests, with more sheet cakes in the back of the same flavor for the other half. Once the servers start serving the cake around the room, no one will be aware that some of it came from the back. Also, consider using a foam layer for the base of the cake, covered with icing and flowers. This will elevate your cake one tier and give the appearance of a larger cake. It's not the size, but the look and taste of the cake your guests will remember, and it's a great way to cut costs without anyone knowing.

3) Cut the guest list; only invite people you really want to come to your wedding, not everyone you've ever known. The day of the wedding you will only focus on the people who mean the most to you. You will want to share quality time with them and have them witness your



exchanging of vows. Don't get caught up in how many people you have attending, but the quality of the guests that are there on this special day. You can do so much more when the guest list is smaller and save money in the process.

4) Minimize the amount of flowers you use at the ceremony; remember you are only there for a short time and usually the churches and wedding venues are so beautiful themselves in the first place. Focus on your bouquet and attendants' flowers. Consider only doing one or two arrangements on the altar and see if the church or venue has candles you can borrow. If you need to mark rows for the family to sit, keep it simple by just using ribbon. When decorating the tables for the reception, only use flowers on half the tables and the other half can consist of candles in beautiful containers. Select focal points in the room to decorate and don't overdo it; less is more, especially when you have great lighting. Once the room is full of people, it will come to life and your guests will appreciate what you have done.

5) Invitations set the tone for the wedding and reflect the overall feel for that day, whether it is black tie, semi-formal, cocktail, or casual. There are lots of ways to cut costs without sacrificing quality. Consider doing the more affordable printing as opposed to having the invitations engraved. Research online companies, where you can often

find less expensive invitations than you would at specialty stores. Never be afraid to ask for a discount or incentives when ordering; most representatives are willing to throw in something to win your business. Once you have your invitations, consider asking a friend that has great penmanship to address them, instead of hiring a calligrapher. If you have the time and good handwriting, do them yourself to give them a personal touch. Don't forget to order some extra envelopes; there will be some mistakes when addressing them. Better safe than sorry!

6) Wedding photographs should last a lifetime, so choose carefully when selecting the person that will be capturing the memories of your wedding day. Research and do your homework. Talk to friends and look at all the websites you can find of local wedding photographers; try to avoid having to fly someone in. You need to love their images and you must connect with their personality. They need to be able to keep everyone relaxed during the picture process; you don't want someone that will make you and your families feel uncomfortable. Once you have found a person you're willing to consider, make sure to ask whether you will own your images after the wedding. Having them burned to a CD after the wedding gives you much more flexibility than having to purchase each reprint from the photographer. You may want to have them do your album, but if you own the images, you can do the album yourself. You will be amazed how much you can save.

7) When selecting the music for the reception, consider a DJ instead of a band. Think about your venue and if whether a DJ would be great in that space. You can save a lot of money and have more variety in your music selections with a DJ. Wedding DJs have come a long way, and are more progressive and high tech these days. They should be willing to play anything you want and stick to that play list, both songs that you do and don't want played.

8) Wedding favors are an easy item to take out of your budget, unless you

have your heart set on having them. The only time you are 100% certain every guest sees your favor is if you're doing a formal dinner and put them at the place settings, and even then they may forget to take them home at the end of the night. Often guests don't see the favor at a buffet dinner, and some just opt out of taking one, leaving you with leftovers. Although favors are a wonderful gesture, guests will likely remember the food, cake, and music more clearly.

9) When choosing transportation for the bride and groom, consider companies that have great limos and

vintage cars and ask if they are willing to do a "transfer." This means they only take you from the ceremony site to the reception, which is usually a one hour rental compared with having it for the night or a three or four hour minimum. You can still do a grand exit from the reception and have the guests witness it for pictures by hiring the car for an additional hour at the end of the night. Having the car at the church for one hour and at the end of the night for one hour can cut your transportation cost by more than half. You will still have the impact and the pictures without having a car sitting idly for most of the evening. •

