



“It was worth every penny”

Newlyweds and the UK's top planners reveal their secrets for savvy spending.
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DON'T SKIMP ON YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY AND MISS GREAT SHOTS LIKE THIS

why. Bridal Life Coach Lesley Stratton-Hughes (**gettingmarriedinsideout.co.uk**) helps brides to remember why they are getting married in the first place, so they can create a wedding day that is true to themselves. "Everybody is different," says Lesley. "I encourage brides to be discerning and work out the important elements that have real value to them, rather than having the things they feel they should have."

Wedding planners and *Wedding Ideas*'s regular agony uncles Ant and Dick (**antanddick.com**) use a similar tactic: "If we are advising couples on how to save money, we say pick three things each that you cannot imagine having the day without and be prepared to compromise or lose the others."

It's possible to save in almost every area of your wedding, but it's important for you to spend money to get right the elements that matter most to you. Real bride Nicola Norris (aka MrsLeeToBe on the *Wedding Ideas* forum) says: "We have saved a great deal of money by taking advantage of offers when we see them, which has enabled us to splash out on other things we wanted, like photography and chair covers."

However, more expensive doesn't always mean better, as Lesley Stratton-Hughes points out: "It's not how much you spend, it's how you spend it." So finding a good supplier is just as important as the money you spend on their services. This is where wedding planners can be worth their weight in gold – they will have lists of good suppliers and can often negotiate deals to save you more money than they cost. Plus, they will save you time and stress, allowing you to really enjoy the day.

The top five

Laleh Afshar from Shooting Star Weddings says that injecting personality into your day is always worth the money: "When your guests attend your wedding, you want them to leave with a sense of who you are as a couple."

After seeing hundreds of weddings here at *Wedding Ideas*, we would recommend setting aside a good chunk of your budget for the 'top five' – and what are they? Read on to find out...

The food

- **Spend:** It's usually the biggest cost of the day, so spend your money wisely. Event organiser Trisha Dash-O'Toole says: "Don't be afraid to make your preferences known when planning the menu, rather than simply accepting what the caterer or venue offers. And be sure to try before you buy!"
- **Save:** There are also plenty of savings to be made on food, says planner Laleh Afshar: "If you want to seat guests for a meal, it's going to cost at least £15-20 per person, but having a buffet keeps the cost down as well as reducing the number of waiters needed to serve you on the day."

Whatever your budget, all brides have difficult spending choices to make. A lot of your planning will involve guesswork; time spent trying to figure out what you want on one special day, several months from now. So what are the things worth spending money on, and where should you be making sensible savings? This month, we reveal all and who better to offer such advice than those with real big day experience: wedding planners and the newlyweds themselves...

Be true to you

When you're planning and making all those choices – when, where, what and how much – it's easy to forget the

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1 Photography

The consensus among brides and wedding experts is that photography is the top priority for your budget. Wedding planner Helen Lord (loveandlord.com) explains: "The one thing not to skimp on is photography – this is your record of the day and what your memories are based on. Good wedding photographers are able to capture key moments of the day and then put together the whole story in a stylish album – they are worth every penny." Agony uncles Ant and Dick agree: "When the cake is gone and the dress is put away, the photographs are all you have left of the day – as well as a gorgeous husband of course!"

If you're not convinced, planner Sonia Abrams (sparkleandwow.co.uk) has this warning: "I worked on a wedding where the couple fell in love with a stunning venue that was over budget, so crucial elements, like the photography budget, were reduced. They found a photographer who was far cheaper than I'd recommend. After the wedding, they received 50 or so prints with crucial shots missing and most out of focus. Later, we found out that it was his first attempt at a wedding and the

pictures on the website were not his." However, price doesn't always guarantee quality, says Lesley Stratton-Hughes: "I know couples who were unimpressed with the mediocre wedding photos they paid excessively for. Photographers vary wildly in skill and experience, and seem to offer a confusing array of packages."

So how do you spend wisely and find a good photographer? Award-winning planner Beverly Pearce (brideandbeautiful.co.uk) advises: "Get recommendations from friends who have married recently, check testimonials and look at several past clients' images." Laleh Afshar adds:

"The photographer should be someone you are comfortable with and whose style suits you and your personality."

However, you can also cut costs here, as Laleh Afshar explains: "Save money and add personality by buying and making your own wedding album with the professional prints. Ask some of your guests for the photos they have taken – these will nearly always include very funny and sometimes very personal memories."

Bargain honeymoons

It's often the last thing you think about when planning your wedding, but Ant and Dick have this advice: "It would be awful if you went from a wonderful wedding to an awful honeymoon. So find the place you WANT to go, then shop around and see if you can get cheaper flights or accommodation separately." However, resist the urge to overspend – remember, this is a holiday for the two of you to spend quality time together.



Priceless moments

"Make sure you look at your h2b as you walk down the aisle," advises planner Beverly Pearce from All Things Bride and Beautiful. "No matter how nervous you are, there is nothing like a groom's face as he catches the first glimpse of his bride at her most beautiful." Make sure your photographer captures this moment too!



THE DAY WILL FLY PAST BUT A VIDEO WILL HELP CAPTURE THE BEST BITS

2 Videography

If you're paying for a photographer, why have a videographer as well? A wedding video will give you the chance to re-experience the day, sometimes from a different angle. Beverly Pearce says: "Many of my clients have wished after the event that they had hired a videographer to capture the most important parts of the day and also get footage of parts they didn't see! You can also get video messages from loved ones, which is great to look back on."

If your wedding is abroad, a video is even more important, as real bride Beverly Hollis explains: "I usually hate being filmed but I booked this straight away for our wedding because it was in Hawaii. We only had six guests and my nan couldn't go all that way, so the video was mainly for her. The day was a bit of a blur to me, but watching the video brings it all back. I am so pleased I will have this for years to come!"

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Wedding rings

- **Spend:** They may only play a small part on the day, but your wedding rings will be with you forever, so they are worth spending more on. Julie Tooby says: "One of my brides recently told me that the most important thing to her was the wedding rings – they spent a lot on them because they are for life and will be worn every day."
- **Save:** So your rings are an investment in the future, but they don't have to cost a fortune. Trisha Dash-O'Toole has this top tip: "A bespoke design for a wedding ring can cost around the same as a high street chain if you buy carefully."



Money-saving tip

"I particularly enjoy working with brides who have a small budget for their wedding because they derive real pleasure from being creative and resourceful, and involving their friends and family in their day," says bridal life coach, Lesley Stratton-Hughes (gettingmarriedinsideout.co.uk).

FAB IDEA



Top five spends

- 1 Photographer
- 2 Videographer
- 3 The venue
- 4 Entertainment
- 5 Outfit – wedding dress, accessories, hair, make-up

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A STUNNING VENUE MAY MEAN YOU CAN SPEND LESS ON DECORATIONS

3 The venue

It will be your wedding's setting and the backdrop to your photographs, so spending money to get the right venue is vital. Trisha Dash-O'Toole says: "Choosing the right venue can be harder than finding a dress. After all, it's the focal point for the day of your dreams." Planner Julie Tooby (**essentially-you.net**) agrees that the venue is key to creating the right ambience for your day: "One of my couples wanted a fun atmosphere, so we chose an unusual venue with rooms themed on countries around the world. It was amazing and worth every penny."

With good research and personal visits, you can find the right venue for you – Lesley Stratton-Hughes has this advice: "The venue hosting your wedding

and looking after your guests needs to be personable, understanding and professional, and sometimes (though not always) that costs more."

However, there are savings to be made here, says Laleh Afshar: "Having a blessing somewhere cheap or free, like the beach or a beautiful park, will be really special and save you money."

A stunning venue can also cut costs elsewhere, says Helen Lord: "For weddings abroad, we only recommend stunning venues where all the celebrations can happen outside so fewer decorations and flowers are required." Having one venue for every part of the day can also mean saving on transport. Turn to page 197 now for the latest venue news and new locations.

4 The entertainment

You can't just rely on food, drink and a great venue to entertain your guests – musicians, a magician, a casino and a toastmaster can create a wedding your guests will remember. Sonia Abrams agrees: "So many couples leave choosing the entertainment to the last minute but a great band or DJ can make or break the party atmosphere. A good band does not have to cost the earth." With a vast range of musical groups and performers out there, a bit of research will turn up one to suit your budget.

If you're a little shy of the attention you'll get on the day, live music can really help, says Beverly Pearce: "Guests will be listening to the band and watching them perform, so will take some pressure off you, especially during your first dance."

But don't just stick to musicians, other performers can be just as entertaining as Ant and Dick explain: "Recently we worked on a wedding where they had a hilarious drag act! He was amazing and was followed by karaoke and a disco!" Of course, you could cut costs by creating your own musical line-up using an MP3 player, but consider using



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the money saved to hire a toastmaster. Danielle Watson says: "Toastmasters are money well spent, as long as you meet them first and get testimonials." It's also important to spend money keeping children entertained, says Laleh Afshar: "Young children tend to get bored and tired, which can lead to temper tantrums. Couples hosting a wedding with large numbers of children should really consider hiring a professional mobile wedding crèche to entertain children in a safe environment, targeted to their age group."

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5 Your outfit

The way you look on your big day will be captured forever, largely thanks to the wonderful photographs and wedding video that are now top of your list! So it's vital to spend money getting the right dress, accessories, hair and make-up, to achieve your timeless look. Beverly Pearce agrees: "Looking and feeling good on your wedding day is so important and being able to think 'I look amazing' is worth spending money on!"

Danielle Watson is more specific about what's important: "In my experience, it is all about the dress. I've never had anyone say they wish they had spent less on the dress!"

Trisha Dash-O'Toole, founder of Indigo Sky Events (indigoskyevents.co.uk) agrees: "I've known brides travel miles to source the wedding dress of

their dreams. One of my brides actually went all the way to Paris for her dress!"

So it's worth spending on your dress, but you can save big-time on accessories, according to Ant and Dick: "We know of a bride who spent a fortune on her dress, but got a great pair of shoes at Asda. It's a case of shopping around and mixing and matching." Real bride Nicola Norris agrees: "My shoes were £18 in the Office sale, and the bridesmaid's shoes were £12 at Peacocks! I'm a great believer in a bargain!"

Hair and make-up are also worth splashing out on, according to Danielle Watson: "Make-up artists can provide the most suitable make-up for you, with a flawless finish, and ensure that you will look your most beautiful on the day and in your photographs." They can also take a lot of stress out of the day too.

"I want to save on..."

- **The cake** – "These can be expensive and although they look gorgeous, the truth is, after the cutting, it is often forgotten about in the excitement of the first dance. So consider a smaller cake and serve it as dessert," says Beverly Pearce.

- **The flowers** – "We're trying to cut down on flowers because I'd rather spend more on photos that are kept forever than flowers that will only die!" says real bride Vicky Goulding. Another bride, Nicola Norris, agrees: "I got silk flowers from a fab company online, which were made into bouquets by a friend – so I only spent £73!"

- **The favours** – "Brides spend hours trying to find the perfect favours and are disappointed when many are left on tables at the end of the evening. If you have the budget, choose something different that guests will want to take home or give the money you would have spent to a charity," says Beverly Pearce.

- **The decorations** – real bride Nicola Norris has focused on cutting these costs: "The centrepieces are cube vases (£1.49 each) filled with silk roses, and I got 120 fab napkin rings in my local pound shop for £15. My biggest extravagance is chair covers (but at £3 per chair, we got a good deal). I felt strongly that if I was colour co-ordinating the whole day in pink and white then purple velvet chairs at the venue were a no-no!"

- **The stationery** – Sonia Abrams says: "I had a bride who wanted bespoke stationery that would cost thousands. The bride and I had a meeting and she decided to have a wedding website built instead and use plain white cards. The money she saved paid for a sky lantern display."

- **Drinks** – "Set limits in advance for drinks at the reception and don't be tempted to exceed it – the toast and a limited free bar will be enough for guests," says Trisha Dash-O'Toole.