

New  
Hampshire

# Bride & Groom

Quarterly guide to the perfect wedding

**Wedding  
Registry**

**Modern  
Wedding Trends**

**Wedding  
Checklist**

# Tips for brides and grooms on budgets

Between the thrilling proposal and the pre-wedding whirlwind, setting the date, finding the perfect wedding dress, planning the honeymoon, weddings should feel joyous and romantic.

But after the wedding, couples should enjoy their newly wedded bliss, not panic about digging themselves out of debt.

According to the Association for Wedding Professionals International, the average wedding costs between \$18,000 and \$21,000.

In these difficult economic times, couples might need to minimize the cost of their wedding. But brides on budgets do not need to whittle their guest list from 200 to 10. Here are some affordable and tasteful measures couples can take to stay within their budget.

What eats up wedding cash? Wedding receptions usually account for half of a wedding's cost. Dinner and drinks add up, especially if couples pay for a full or open bar.

To save money on the bubbly, couples should nix the mixed drinks. Soon-to-be-marrieds can serve champagne during the toast, then offer beer and wine for the rest of the evening.

Give clumsy guests white wine, not red,



and the evening should progress with fewer mishaps at a lower cost.

For dinner, couples should think outside the catering-company box. Local restaurants might make better deals. Classy catering can come from unexpected places. Boston Market restaurants provide full-service catering options with elegant entrées like roasted sirloin, turkey or rotisserie chicken, and a selection of gourmet sides. The cost? From \$14.99 to \$21.99 a head. After the reception, photography and videography are the second largest budget-breakers.

Couples can hire a photographer and videographer for the ceremony, then leave reception photographs to friends, family and digital cameras.

To avoid the cost of a live band, brides and grooms can opt for MP3 playlists, customized CDs and speaker rentals over pricey bands.

Finally, hiring a wedding coordinator can save time, manage stress and get better deals.

So, here's a toast to tweaking old traditions to make a dream wedding financially attainable and to save enough money for a long, relaxing honeymoon. Cheers! (NewsUSA)



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# Honeymooners opting for romance, adventure of cruises

There are 2.5 million weddings in the United States each year, and the weddings business is a \$40 billion annual industry, including the ceremony, reception, bachelor(-ette) parties and honeymoon.

Increasingly, newlyweds are opting for a cruise for a cost-effective and carefree honeymoon. About 5,000 weddings and vow renewals happen on cruises every year, and cruises now account for 15 percent of all honeymoons.

The inclusive nature of a cruise is a leading factor in the decision. A cruise provides a week of great food, pampering and entertainment for about \$2,500 or less per person.

Most newlyweds say they prefer a week in a fun-and-sun destination. That makes cruises doubly attractive, since they visit several ports and offer a selection of shore tours.

Though the Hawaiian Islands remain the all-time favorite honeymoon destination, many newlyweds are choosing cruises in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean.

And there's no more romantic way to experience the wonders of the Med or Caribbean than a weeklong voyage aboard a tall ship. Star Clippers' three sailing ships only carry



up to 170 or 227 guests, and visit some of the world's most exotic destinations. Aboard Star Clippers, newlyweds can experience the luxury of a private yacht while sailing to smaller, lesser-known destinations big cruise ships can't visit.

Star Clippers' relaxed yet elegant shipboard atmosphere is the perfect antidote to months of wedding planning. Yet, the emphasis on beach time and water sports, and the array of soft-adventure excursions offered provide

opportunities for couples to share new experiences as they start their life together.

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# Wedding bands to fit every personality

It's one of the toughest decisions for any bride and groom -- and, no, we don't mean where to seat feuding relatives at the wedding reception. We're talking wedding bands, symbols of eternal love, and the most important pieces of jewelry a man and woman will ever own.

In the search for the perfect wedding bands, many couples turn to platinum to ensure they are getting the best value for their money. With a bevy of styles and a range of prices -- a platinum band can be purchased starting at \$1,000 -- it's easy to find a ring that best suits the bride's personality.

"No matter what 'type' you are," says style expert Michael O'Connor, "you're guaranteed of getting the best possible ring for the price because platinum, being naturally white, will not fade or change color, lasting over a lifetime of wear."

What's your ring type? Read on:

**\*Down-to-Earth.** This no-nonsense bride has been planning her wedding for years -- with the stacks of bridal magazines to prove it -- and knows exactly what she wants. Ring type: Instead of anything too delicate or dainty, look for a heavier, more solid design. A simple platinum band or one with a bezel set diamond ensures a timeless look.

**\*Adventurous.** She's a risk-taker who's feeling so daring about her nuptials that she may

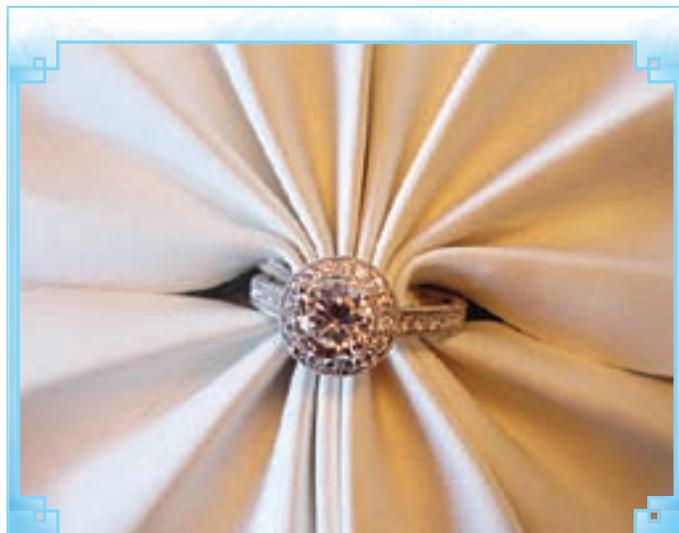
even have considered eloping. (Well, at least a destination wedding.)

Ring type: A dynamic personality requires a stand-out ring, so go for a platinum band set with colored stones or intricate engraving.

**\*Social butterfly.** This people-pleaser loves to entertain and wants to ensure that her wedding day is special for every single guest. Ring type: A small, discreet gemstone, like a single solitaire, displayed in a flush cut on a platinum band will provide just the right adornment.

**\*Quirky.** This bride is looking for ways to inject her and her partner's personalities into every aspect of the wedding day, whether through DIY details or a choreographed first dance. Ring type: A platinum tension setting with an unconventional gemstone creates a unique look.

Lastly, wedding bands are important symbols of your lifelong commitment, so even if your band styles don't match, at least look to share the same metal. To learn more, visit [www.preciousplatinum.com/designgallery](http://www.preciousplatinum.com/designgallery). (NewsUSA)



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# Wedding Registry 101

For engaged couples, it can seem as if there are a million things to accomplish before the big day arrives. One essential piece of the wedding puzzle involves creating a registry that makes it easy for guests to celebrate your union with gifts that reflect your personality as a couple.

## Before Building Your Registry

Here are some helpful pointers from Macy's to help you get started on creating a perfect wedding registry:

**\* Meet with a Consultant:** These trained professionals are on site to assist and discuss everything you want and need. It's a good place to start if you have questions on what items to include and what brands are available.

**\* Look for Special Programs:** Some stores offer special features, such as Macy's, whose Dream Fund allows guests to contribute any amount to the ultimate gift card, so the bride and groom can later choose exactly what they want.

**\* Start Early:** Most couples like to register 4-6 months before their wedding date, which allows more time for choosing items, planning for showers and meeting other deadlines.

**\* Register Together:** Whether it's in-store, online or both - make a day of it and have fun

selecting all the things that will be part of your new life together.

**\* Choose Different Price Points:** Guests will appreciate a varied list that has many gift options to fit their personal budget.

**\* Create a Registry That Reflects You:** If you're a laid-back, easygoing couple, consider registering for a more casual dinnerware pattern that you can use every day, then mix in some fancy pieces to use for those special occasions. If you enjoy entertaining friends and family, be sure to choose a range of serveware and barware.

## Making the Right Choices

With all the things needed to properly stock your home, selecting the right ones can seem overwhelming. Here are some tips to keep in mind while adding to your registry:

**\* Select Your Settings:** A five-piece setting is meant to serve one person and includes a dinner plate, salad plate, bread and butter plate, tea cup and saucer.

**\* Factor in Some Extras:** When registering for drinkware, be sure to register for a few extras in each glass size in case some break down the road.

**\* Protect Your Cutlery:** Be sure to choose a sturdy cutting board to protect your knife blades



from chips and cracks. You can keep your cutlery in top condition by registering for a honing steel and knife sharpener.

**\* Stock Up on Kitchen Must-Haves:** This should include a fry pan, saute pan, grill pan, sauteuse (round, deep-sided design for sautting on the stovetop or baking in the oven) and a chef's pan.

**\* Opt for the Basics:** White dinnerware allows you to transform the look of your table year-round by changing the decor and accessories around it. Visit [www.macys.com/registry](http://www.macys.com/registry) for a full registry checklist, helpful tips and more information on Macy's Dream Fund. (Family Features)

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# Modern wedding trends building new traditions

## *New times, new traditions: Modern wedding trends from stock-the-bar parties to social networking sites*

October is the new June. More and more, weddings are taking place in the height of fall foliage, heart of winter and prime holiday season, including the ever-popular New Year's Eve ceremony to ring in the new year. But it's not just the wedding season that has drastically evolved over the past decade, it's everything from roles and responsibilities to gift-giving.

As you gear up to celebrate the union of your beloved family or friends - or even your own - know what to expect from the changing tides of weddings. Lizzie Post, co-author of "Emily Post's Etiquette, 18th edition" and great-great-granddaughter of Emily Post, helps couples navigate the new traditions of weddings. The Post name has been synonymous with proper etiquette and manners for the past 80 years.

As decades pass, so will traditions, but proper etiquette is timeless. Be prepared for the next wedding you attend and know what to expect from changes in the wedding landscape

with these important pieces of advice:

### **Pay it forward**

Finding the right gift for the newlyweds can be difficult. While registries help to point guests in the right direction, many couples are getting married later in life and already have all the household items that are common wedding gifts. To provide the couple with a small nest egg to use however they wish, a check is always a great and safe gift idea. Several financial institutions, like Bank of America, offer mobile check deposit through their banking app, allowing the couple the flexibility to deposit checks on-the-go to help cover outstanding vendor payments or use on their honeymoon. Another new-age trend is contributing to a couple's honeymoon fund.

### **Temper tech use**

Even weddings are going hi-tech. There are numerous websites available that can help the couple to organize the process, communicate with guests and share photos after the ceremony. But a few things - like a handwritten "thank you" note - should steer clear of the hi-tech lure. In a gadget-driven society, everyone is carrying a smartphone. Couples can post a tasteful notice at the entrance of the ceremony location or in the program to remind guests to

turn off their cell phone ringers and refrain from use during the ceremony. Some couples may actually encourage guests to take photos and share images via social media, but guests should respect their wishes and use phones only as a camera and upload images after the ceremony.

### **Respect personalization**

Couples want their special day to reflect who they are and what is important to them. While previous generations traditionally wed in places of worship, many modern couples choose to tie the knot at a sentimental location, like where they had their first date. The decor, music and even the food and drink served at a wedding may have a personal story behind it. No matter how nontraditional the element may be, guests should eagerly partake in the festivities, acknowledging and respecting the couple's individualization.

### **Be all-inclusive**

In the past, bridal showers were strictly for the bride and bachelor parties were a men-only affair. Nowadays, these festivities are no longer gender-specific. Showers can be thrown for the couple in unison and include creative themes like "stock the bar" or "time of day." Bachelor and bachelorette parties can also be conjoined ▶

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to involve the entire bridal party in a destination event. And while these events are a celebration of joy, expenses can add up quickly. If you use a rewards card, like the BankAmericard Travel Rewards credit card, you can earn points on purchases to pay for all or part of your trip. This is great for both the bride and groom and guests traveling to the wedding.

As trends and expectations shift, so will the way major life milestones are celebrated. It is important to celebrate these moments in life with grace and support for the happy couple - after all, it's their day - and it should be as unique as they are. For further etiquette advice on navigating 21st century weddings, visit [www.emilypost.com](http://www.emilypost.com). (BPT)



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# Wedding checklist

Planning a wedding requires organization and attention to the most minute details, and sometimes it can be hard to remember everything that you need to. Below is a checklist which you can use to help keep you organized. Keep it with your paperwork and check off each task as you complete it.

## 12 months or more before the wedding

- Announce your intention to marry to BOTH sets of parents. Arrange to have them meet if they haven't already.
- Determine type (formal, semi-formal, informal), style and theme of the wedding.
- Make a list of what is important to you for your wedding; this will help you determine your budget.
- Sit down with your fiancé and ALL parents and discuss the wedding budget, and who will pay for what.
- Get or make a wedding organizer (a 3 ring binder with pockets works great). Use it to store all your information, contracts, ideas, photos, etc.
- Speak with your clergy/officiant and review synagogue/church requirements.
- Come up with 2 or 3 possible wedding dates and start looking for ceremony and reception venues. If a venue you like is available on one of your chosen dates, book it immediately; many venues will often be booked up to 2 years in advance, so have several choices in mind beforehand in case they are already booked.
- If you are using one, start looking for and book a wedding consultant.

## 9 to 11 months or more before the wedding

- Start looking for and interviewing all the remaining vendors:
- Photographer
- Videographer
- Caterer (if needed)
- Officiant (if needed)
- Florist
- If any vendor you like is available on your date and is within your budget, book them IMMEDIATELY! Like reception and ceremony venues, many of these vendors can be booked up to a year in advance.
- Together with your parents, begin compiling your preliminary guest list. You can always narrow down this list to fit within your size requirements and budget limitations at a late date.
- Start getting ideas by looking through bridal magazines, going to Bridal Fairs and doing research on the internet.
- Finalize your wedding colors, theme and style.
- Select your attendants (bridesmaids, groomsmen, ushers, flower girl and ring bearer) and ask them to honor you by being in your wedding. Make sure they are aware of what their "duties" are.
- Choose and purchase your wedding rings.
- Begin looking at honeymoon options. Discuss where you both would like to go, and if needed visit a travel agent.
- Start looking for a wedding gown, veil, accessories and

your attendants attire.

## 6 to 8 months or more before the wedding

- Start planning ceremony and reception music choices.
- If you haven't already finalize and purchase your wedding gown, veil, and accessories.
- If you are having a prenuptial agreement, take care of that now.
- Finalize attire for attendants.
- Start pre-marriage counseling (if required)
- Start looking at invitations.
- Sign up for your gift registry
- Send save-the-date cards/newsletter



## 4 to 5 months or more before the wedding

- Work with your florist and finalize your arrangements.
- Place wedding announcement in local newspaper
- Order wedding stationery (invitations, envelopes, programs, etc.)
- Start shopping for bridal party tuxedos
- Book limo/transportation
- Start planning the wedding decorations
- Arrange accommodations for out of town guests (book blocks of hotel rooms)
- Select wedding cake (and Groom's cake if you are having one)
- Start making arrangement for rehearsal and rehearsal dinner
- Book calligrapher
- Decide on wedding favors
- If you decided not to use a Wedding Coordinator, consider asking a close friend not in the wedding party to be your Wedding Coordinator/Personal Assistant.

## 3 months or more before the wedding

- Order your wedding cake and groom's cake
- Meet with your officiant to discuss details of the ceremony
- Finalize the guest list
- Reconfirm the rehearsal dinner plans
- Buy the cake knife, guest book, toasting glasses and garter
- Choose gifts for your attendants, parents, helpers.
- Have the male members of the wedding party, including fathers, fitted for tuxedos.
- Reconfirm honeymoon arrangements.
- Start writing your wedding vows, if you are doing them yourself.



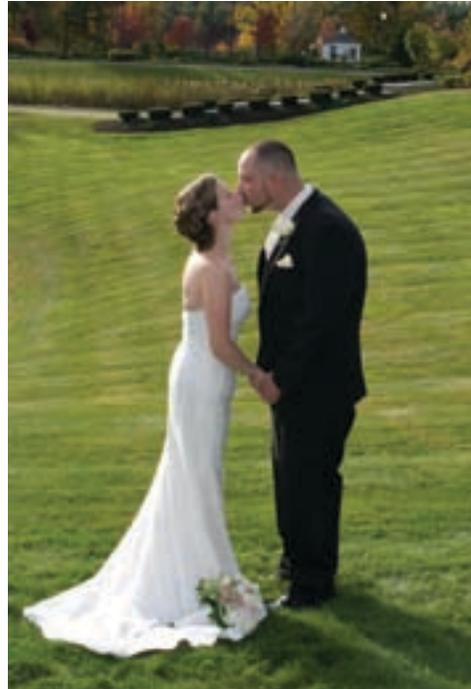
- Start addressing the invitations (or drop them off with calligrapher)

**2 months or more before the wedding**

- Send out invitations
- Schedule a hair and make up consultation to do a trial run.
- Start making/buying wedding favors
- Obtain wedding license
- Schedule your first wedding dress fitting.
- Write thank you notes for any gifts that may start arriving.
- If you are having one, begin putting together your ceremony program.
- Meet with vendors (caterer, florists, etc.) to finalize arrangements.
- If you are changing your name, complete the proper documents.
- Finalize music selections for the ceremony and reception and turn them in to the DJ/Band/etc.
- Have formal wedding portrait taken.
- Finalize music selections for the ceremony and reception and turn them in to the DJ/Band/etc.
- Meet with your officiant to finalize ceremony details.
- Reserve room for wedding night.

**1 month or more before the wedding**

- Confirm honeymoon your reservations.
- Meet with photographer and/or videographer to discuss last minute details.
- Start working on the reception seating chart.
- Have final wedding gown fitting.



- Arrange for a reception babysitter, if needed.
- Finish (and print) the wedding program.
- Finalize wedding vows
- Confirm all final payment amounts with your vendors as well as date, time, etc.
- Pick up marriage license.

**2 weeks before the wedding**

- Finalize reception seating chart.
- Confirm

delivery time and locations with florist.

- Contact any guests who did not respond to the invitation.

**1 week before the wedding**

- Pick up wedding gown, attendants' gowns and all accessories.
- Give final guest count to reception venue/caterer.
- Reconfirm everything with vendors one last time.
- Make sure men get their final fitting for their tuxedos.

**1 day before the wedding**

- Attend rehearsal.
- Attend rehearsal dinner. Give attendants their gifts.
- Have a manicure and/or a pedicure.
- Put together the tip envelopes (for the vendors) and give them to the designated "tip person" (generally the best man).
- Confirm wedding day transportation.
- Reconfirm hair and make up appointments.
- If you have access to the ceremony and/or reception venues, bring everything over there that you may need (decorations, guest book, etc).
- Layout everything you need for the next day in a safe place (marriage license, dress, shoes, etc.).
- Speak with everyone in the wedding party and make sure everyone knows where to be at what time.
- Try to go to bed early and get some sleep.

**Your wedding day**

- Eat breakfast, even if you think you aren't hungry.
- Share a private moment with your fiancé.
- Have your hair and makeup done.
- Give the best man the groom's ring.
- Begin dressing two hours before ceremony is scheduled to begin.
- Spend a quiet moment looking at yourself in the mirror before you walk down the aisle.

**Photos by Gallant Photography**

# Tips for a memorable destination wedding

A flurry of congratulatory phone calls, social media announcements and sparkling ring pictures all mean one thing: engagement season has arrived. With approximately 39 percent of marriage proposals taking place between Thanksgiving and Valentine's Day, engaged couples are taking note of one of the fastest-growing nuptial trends - destination weddings.

These days, one in four weddings is a destination wedding, giving couples - and their guests - a reason to blend the joy of a marriage celebration with a fun and memorable vacation. Planning a destination wedding suitable for all your attendees is easier than you think, thanks to some key insights from Myrtle Beach-based expert wedding planner, Cheryl Cox.

## 1. Plan ahead

Cox says nine to 12 months is the optimum planning time, especially for a destination wedding. Many couples start planning a destination wedding as soon as they get engaged. While the summer months are typically most popular for couples, when choosing a date, Cox recommends considering a Friday or weekday wedding, or planning the big day during the less-crowded but still desirable shoulder seasons (spring and fall).

## 2. Select a destination that caters to all guests

Consider a location with something for everyone. Myrtle Beach, S.C., is the perfect example. The destination offers pristine greens for golf enthusiasts, museums and historic plantations for cultural buffs, delicious Coastal Carolina cuisine for the foodies, fun in the sun with a day at the beach or one of the many water parks, and for brides looking for some quality time with the girls, numerous spas for a day of pampering. Plus, there are plenty of lodging options for your guests including oceanfront resorts, beach home rentals and quaint bed and breakfasts.

## 3. Research ceremony locations

Beautiful and unique ceremony locations are one of the perks of having a destination wedding. "Research wedding venues, travel and accommodation options, and rates, then rank the venues you like best," suggests Cox. As a Myrtle Beach wedding planner, she notes that the area's 60 miles of stunning coastline make the perfect romantic backdrop. Whether you're looking for a beachside wedding outside a charming beach home or at the Myrtle Beach State Park, or a historic location like Litchfield

Plantation or Pine Lakes Country Club, there are countless ceremony locations to choose from. You can even tie the knot 200 feet above the ground on the Myrtle Beach Skywheel. Visit [www.visitmyrtlebeach.com](http://www.visitmyrtlebeach.com) for more information.

## 5. Help guests plan activities

Travel is the foundation for long-lasting memories. In fact, a recent Harris Interactive survey found 62 percent of adults said their earliest memories were of family vacations taken when they were between ages 5 and 10. Help your guests - particularly families with young ones - get the most out of their trip by suggesting activities or even making reservations for dinners, tee times, theme parks, museums, etc., before arrival.

## 6. Hire a wedding planner

Planning a destination wedding doesn't need to be stressful - hire a wedding planner. "Wedding planners know the local wedding professionals and venues including the city regulations for beach weddings," says Cox. The perfect beach wedding can be accomplished with the help of a wedding planner as they know the ins and outs of planning a beautiful beach wedding so couples and their guests can enjoy ▶



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**7. Consider a pre-wedding visit**

"If possible, attend a local wedding show to meet wedding professionals one-on-one or plan a 'wedding planning trip' to visit venues and meet with wedding vendors," Cox suggests. "Remember to take notes so you can recall all the details when you're back home."

**8. Get wedding insurance**

Give yourself peace of mind by purchasing the appropriate wedding insurance. And, Cox notes, "Research to find the best coverage for your wedding - I highly recommend it."

**9. Be mindful of budget**

Start your marriage off on the right financial foot by keeping your wedding on-budget. Many couples planning destination weddings find them to be similar or even more affordable than traditional weddings back home. Myrtle Beach offers a variety of wedding venue options at various price points, so you can have your dream beach wedding and still stay on a budget.

**10. Enjoy!**

This is perhaps the most important step of all. Don't forget to enjoy the experience of planning this memorable day and enjoying the company of your guests. Take pictures, sample cakes, pick out flowers and remember these moments and the beautiful destination you selected. (BPT)



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# How to nab a luxury cruise on a budget

A luxury cruise is one of life's pure joys. Today's modern cruise liners are engineering marvels; floating 5-star hotels that offer the best service, accommodation, cuisine and activities. They visit exotic locales with non-stop relaxation or stimulation, depending on your pleasure.

Over the past few years, cruise companies have spared no expense and literally invested billions in jaw-dropping super ships. Even if you've cruised before, you probably have not experienced anything like these new marvels.

The best news is that due to the slowdown in travel caused by the recession, and the oversaturation of cruise lines in the industry, savvy travelers can now book once-in-a-lifetime cruises at insanely low prices.

How does 80 percent off the brochure price sound? Believe it or not, it's possible through Vacations To Go, one of America's largest cruise agencies.

Founded more than 25 years ago, Vacations To Go realized that a cruise vacation was a new experience for many. They set out to build an online service to help people learn everything they need to know to find the best cruise vacation at the best price.

Vacations To Go is now home to an extensive



selection of top-brand cruise vacations, and in-depth information about every cruise line and cruise ship. Customers can browse the latest in promotions and offers, shop by category and easily compare prices.

But, what about the discounts?

Because of the huge costs involved in building and operating today's luxury ships, cruise lines want their ships to sail with as few empty cabins as possible. So, they turn to trusted partners like Vacations To Go to sell this "excess" inventory at deep discounts, allowing the cruise companies to still get full fare on the travel packages they sell directly.

The discounts they authorize Vacations To Go to offer can be as much as 80 percent off the full-price fare. What it means for you: Simply put, it is the opportunity to take a luxury cruise for a price that's affordable on any budget.

Vacations To Go has also developed a Best Price & Service Guarantee that ensures they will meet any other authorized price.

If you are not ready to book your discount cruise now, sign up for Vacations To Go's free newsletter to help you stay informed of all the spectacular discounts as cruise lines seek to fill all empty cabins before their cruises depart.

This year, it seems like everyone is cruising. After several years of austerity, people are realizing that a cruise vacation is now one of the great values in travel. To check out what Vacations To Go has to offer, visit [cruise.howlifeworks.com](http://cruise.howlifeworks.com). (NewsUSA)



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## Before you marry, meld and merge a perfectly accessorized home

Forget Mars and Venus. Men are from the planet of mismatched furniture and floor coverings, while women accessorize their home with as much care and finesse as they do their wardrobes. Ideally, decorating a first home together begins with the furniture and accessories near and dear to both the bride and groom.

Designer Home collections make it easier than ever to meld female and male sensibilities in home decor by offering products to suit a variety of styles. Bedding, furniture, fabrics, area rugs, flooring, storage accessories, table linens and window coverings are all designed to work in traditional and more updated settings. Here, florals and neutrals work remarkably well together, and tactile fabrics add depth, style and colorful nuance. No matter which room is the newlyweds' favorite, bedrooms, baths and living rooms all can be decked out in style. For the latest in designer styles for the home, couples can check out the Liz Claiborne Home collection on [www.jcpenney.com](http://www.jcpenney.com).

**\* Setting the tone.** Choose a color scheme together, and creatively arrange furniture and accessories around it. Find a neutral ground to meld his love of earth



tones, for example, with her love of soft fabrics. A m&eacut;lange of colors and fabrics -- on everything from comforters to window valances -- will inspire looks ideal for both Mr. and Mrs.

**\* Splish, splash.** Create an understated, clean look in the bath for him, but add accessories with a dash of color to satisfy

a bride-to-be's lively outlook. Bold shower curtains, wastebaskets and vanity items inject freshness and personality.

**\* Boudoir basics.** Usher in a new home with a fresh set of bedding; couples can look for a variety of styles and colors designed to be dressed up or left as is for a classic look. Decorative pillows, shams, coverlets and throws complete the look and are a great way for wedding guests to add to the couple's cozy love nest.

**\* Staples of style.** If he loves a more modern style, but she wants a retro feel, furniture options in leather, fine fabrics, hardwood and wicker can readily mesh both personalities.

**\* Merging moods.** She's a homebody; he likes beaches and picnics. For bedrooms and living rooms, couples can combine sensibilities with bedding and furniture lines that bring the outside in, and vice versa. Try mixing a table from one line with a chair from another -- mixing it up is a playful way to punch up the personality of a room.

Just like in the corporate world, mergers can either run smoothly or be a headache. Creating a first home together can be one merger full of fringe benefits. (NewsUSA)

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# Brides trim bill with destination weddings

Tying the knot isn't what it used to be. The wedding industry is as profitable as primetime football, celebrities compete for the shortest, most gimmicky marriages (72 days or less?) and the exotic appeal of a romantic getaway has led to the widespread popularity of destination weddings.

One in every 10 weddings features an exotic locale, or at least a location neither the bride nor groom calls home. While there's no absolute explanation as to why destination weddings have started a bridal takeover, the hefty price of typical weddings is reason enough for many -- especially if Daddy isn't footing the bill.

"If done correctly, destination weddings can be a cheaper alternative for everyone. Guests don't have to buy expensive gifts, just a ticket. All the money spent on the wedding party, venues, refreshments, cake, reception and decor is significantly reduced if not cut altogether," explains Nini Pardo, wedding planner at Stay in Costa Rica, an accommodations and rental management company.

The author of "Destination Weddings for Dummies," Susan Breslow Sardone, says



the traditional American wedding costs an average of \$28,082, whereas destination weddings average around \$20,600.

"Some of the cost difference is definitely a result of resorts and hotels capitalizing on the trend. Many now offer the full wedding

package with wedding planners, musicians, photographers, etc. We employ full-time wedding coordinators, like myself, to craft intimate weddings at our Los Suenos Resort," Pardo adds. "We've found it really appealing to budget-conscious brides."

Budget-conscious brides have become a trend as well, according to Patricia MacArthur, executive director of WeddingStar.com -- a go-to authority on all things wedding-related. MacArthur says more brides are trimming expenses by taking the DIY route for guest favors and some decorative elements.

For tropical weddings especially, many of the cheaper, DIY options are more easily packed into suitcases. For instance, colorful fabric is being used to replace flowers and native delicacies are replacing towering cakes.

An extra tip from the experts, when considering the perfect setting to make your vows and possibly trash the dress: look at locations that are one flight away from you and most of your guests. Direct flights tend to be cheaper and less hassle. To learn more about saying "I do" in Costa Rica, visit [www.stayincostarica.com](http://www.stayincostarica.com). (NewsUSA)



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## How to make your 'I Do' last forever

Jewelry and style expert Michael O'Connor has a few tips that are sure to help you find matrimonial bliss when it comes to ring selection:

**\* Create a budget.** There are many details to consider when planning a wedding that can quickly drain your budget. It is important to set aside money for a lifelong symbol like your wedding bands. Not sure how much to budget? Consider that in 2006, couples spent an average of \$2,079 on wedding bands, according to the CN American Wedding Study. And since the age-old rule for purchasing an engagement ring is to spend two months salary, plan to spend one month's salary for the two wedding bands. Check out the "Budget Calculator" at [www.TheKnot.com](http://www.TheKnot.com).

**\* Shop together.** It is a good idea to shop for rings together. In fact, 80 percent of couples do, which isn't a surprise since your rings, which don't have to match, should reflect your personal styles and tastes.

**\* Plan ahead.** Don't wait until the last minute to go shopping for your wedding bands, they're simply too important. Plan to start shopping for your rings six months prior to your "I do's." Not only do you need time to research and shop, but you also need to allot time for custom orders, sizing and engraving.

**\* Invest in quality.** Because you want your ring to last a lifetime, it is important to put thought into the quality of metal you choose. Platinum 950 is the most durable precious metal and will last a lifetime. It's 30 times more rare than gold, and for wedding bands set with diamonds, its natural whiteness will ensure the diamonds sparkle and stay secure. It is no wonder that Hollywood's A-list designers such as Tacori, DeBeers, Ritani and Kwiat are all choosing Platinum in their designs. (NewsUSA)

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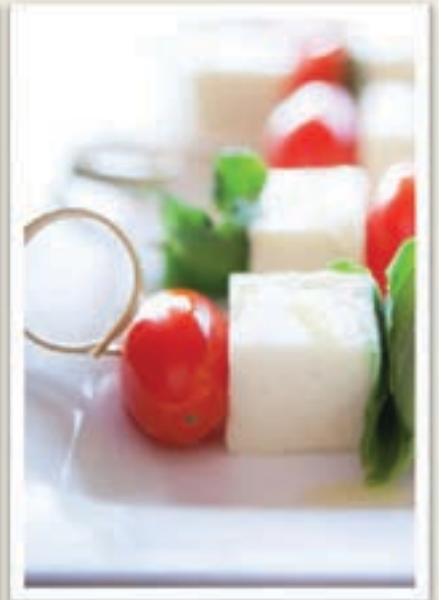


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