



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

Different Types of Wedding Ceremonies

Deciding what type of wedding ceremony a couple will have is one of the first things to determine. Both civil and religious weddings have been done for centuries with positive and negative outcomes. Every religion, country, and culture has different marriage ceremonies and traditions. Below you will find some of the different types of wedding ceremonies.

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 happen 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 usually couples share a religion. 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 are co-operative with 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 decide they will share the ceremony with each other. One of the reasons this is done is for the sharing of expenses, or it may be difficult for large families to get together for two separate occasions that may be held close together.

White Wedding

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

Civil Ceremony

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

Destination Weddings

A destination wedding is one where couples decide to have their wedding in a country or place neither of them live. 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 for more time and it usually is a multi-day affair. 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 blow out more than expected.

Couples who tend to be more independent will not follow any 'shoulds' but make their own choices based purely on what they want. Destination weddings tend to be more casual, modest and relaxed affairs. Ceremonies may be followed not by a formal reception, but by the couple and guests going off 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 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 get to invite only the people they really want to be there. Not everyone will be able to afford to travel so the guest list will be smaller. This in turn, usually means 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, with exceptionally beautiful settings, couples can save money on decorations and flowers as the destination itself provides the atmosphere.

More Time to Celebrate

The usual time a hometown wedding will last is around three to five hours. Sometimes it might 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 because of their formulaic agendas. People who choose destination weddings have the luxury of tossing out 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 with destinations except for getting a wedding licence and making sure the person who performs the ceremony is also licensed.

Consultants will inevitably work with couples who choose a destination wedding. It is highly likely that they may want the consultant present at the destination to ensure that everything runs smoothly. The consultant will have to make sure that any travel, meal and accommodation expenses are written into the contract. These, while separate to the consultancy fee, are still necessary as the consultant wouldn't have to be there if the couple wasn't going there. Wedding planners are not at the destination to relax but rather 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. If you are a wedding planner, you must decide for yourself if 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 might be preparing to marry. If someone wants to get married in Oxford, for example, but is from London, it would be a good idea and practical to hire the person 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 will have to be paid for. For budding wedding planners, the destination wedding market is an avenue to build your business.

Important things to Consider when Planning a Destination Wedding

Political Unrest

If you are a wedding planner and have a couple planning a destination wedding, it will be necessary to keep your eye on the news to ensure that the place your clients have chosen is not experiencing any instability or natural calamity.

Know the Law

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

Military

If one part 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 the 'arch of steel' with their swords. It will be done at the end of the ceremony and the bride and groom will walk through the arch. Only those who are active duty servicemen can do this as they are the ones allowed to carry a sword or sabre. The couple will decide if they also want civilian ushers to stand at the arch as well.

The Location for Military Weddings

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

The Sabre Arch

When the ceremony is complete, the newlywed couple will walk through an arch made from the sabres of the military people at the wedding. In a Naval wedding actual swords are used. It is not obligatory to have the arch, however, it does add a lovely touch to the day and is a memorable experience. Many bases have sabres available for weddings. The arch will be formed outside the chapel mostly, as swords are not unsheathed within religious sites. Not everyone can use the 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 officer's clubs or other enlisted clubs on the premises. Sometimes they will go to 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 is the bride and groom cutting the cake with a sword or sabre. If the groom owns one of these that's the one that will be used. 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 given to all types of weddings, including military and more traditional ones. This 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. Other things can be anything the couple holds dear, specific music, additional objects, or pets, anything that is deemed acceptable for sacramental ceremonies. Medieval themes might comprise the newlyweds and/or guests wearing medieval clothes and the venue decorated in that particular style, including entertainment and food.



It is necessary to remember that themed weddings don't have to become costume parties because despite any theme, the main point of the ceremony is sacramental and full of cultural values and beliefs. Guests are not required to team with the theme like the wedding party does. 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 from the wedding preparations and moving on to the wedding itself and the celebrations.

Another positive of themed weddings is that they can keep wedding celebrations from seeming disjointed or as having being planned arbitrarily. So, one can conclude that themes can be a vital part of creating a very memorable affair.

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

Challenges of Themed Weddings for Planners

There are several aspects which must be taken into account when organising a wedding. The ideal is when the couple and the guests are satisfied with the final outcome.

Nutt (2007) states that it all begins by setting a date. This sounds easier than it is. Planners must select a date which is convenient for the bride and groom as well as most of the guests. Weddings are supposed to be once-in-a-lifetime affairs so the assumption is that people want to have it witnessed and share it with all the people they want to invite. The particular type of ceremony must also be decided upon early because this will be a sign of what type of wedding it will be, i.e. big, small, formal, semi-formal etc.

Another aspect that needs to be decided upon early is the budget. This should reflect the ceremony and celebration accordingly. Zazulak (2008) mentions the budget as extremely important as it keeps the wedding cost under control and prevents future financial problems within the family. After the budgeting is 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, like the venue in which the reception will be held, must be done perfectly to make sure the entire experience is enjoyable for couples and guests. It is not only food and drinks at the venue, but the entire place should be elegantly designed.

With regards 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. If the banquet package includes everything such as tables, dinnerware, and chairs. Be careful as sometimes it does not.

If a planner or consultant does not pay attention to detail, these factors might be overlooked and this will cause problems down the track. That's why it is important to consider everything. The planner is also the one who reduces any pressure which might come from the demands of themed weddings.

As a wedding planner, you must be prepared to incorporate a broad range when it comes to themed weddings. People might ask you for something that hasn't been done before and you must rise to the challenge that will come with that. Clients' creativity is sometimes also a challenge for planners because they might have an idea in their head of what they want but there is nothing visual to show the planner. When this occurs, a planner must get as much detail as possible from the clients and be able to then manifest 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. Making the connection between a romantic and a dramatic metaphor of a client's idea to create a satisfying theme for a wedding is what a planner/consultant will be required to do. Generally speaking, themed weddings tend to be a little more demanding in terms of their management because they require a lot more creativity and thought between the clients and the planner.

Common Themes for a Themed Wedding

People wanting to add their own specific ideas is where themed weddings come from, with one goal: having one wedding out of numerous favourite ideas. Certain themes are more prevalent for themed weddings today. These include edible weddings, candle weddings, and practical weddings. Napolitano (2007) claims that the enormous amount of unique themes shows high levels of creativity which complements the level of a couple's feelings for one another. Some unique themes are: Christmas weddings, fire-fighter themes, and monster truck themed weddings.

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

- i. almost everyone will like coffee because all over the world people have been drinking coffee for centuries in order to keep going, especially during special affairs like weddings,
- ii. coffee themes can be easily matched to other wedding themes like autumn, the beach, or Christmas, because coffee is one of those drinks which can be used in pretty much 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 is, 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, when checking some findings, like Zhou (2005), garden weddings can actually be expensive, especially if the couple's specific desires require more spending. This spending may arise from things like:

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

Organising a garden wedding is considered expensive because the planners, or anyone involved in organising the venue, knows 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 weddings can be driven by anything the couples are 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 could be made from any preferred materials. Lanterns, fresh flowers, other materials imported from London, Paris etc. can be used. Artificial decorations are fast becoming popular today and are used by brides as well as being used in the event itself. The saving of money 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 subject to only specific months.

Invitations

When deciding on 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 'prince and princess' theme, then the invitations must also be created according to the theme. They would need to be elegant and regal. Despite what the invitations look like however, they must be clearly informative and contain important information regarding dates and times, clothing and footwear, or getting to the venue.



Dress

Another indicator of themed weddings is the dress code for the day. This will be not only for the bride and groom, but also other participants. Nash (2008) states that themed weddings let not only the bride and the groom relate to their chosen theme, but also their guests. 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. The music is an area where wedding planners and couples might 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 with the couple's criterion 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 that happen today are actually destination weddings and ceremonies are held in different places.

Wedding Menus

It is indeed true that planning weddings today has become more complex, in particular because of current trends and innovative type thinking. In some cases, wedding themes demand more than the time zones or seasons can provide. For example, making preparations for a themed wedding which is winter based will be quite difficult to pull off in summer. Props will be needed and certain foods which may not be in season might have to be specially organised. In some cases, only specific hotels or restaurants will

be able to pull it off. Themed weddings also inspire more expectation from the guests, in particular if one or both the bride and groom come from a wealthy background. The food is no exception.

Some trendy expectations that guests might expect include:

- i. Changing from a set menu to an a-la-carte menu because this will provide more choices, especially for those with specific dietary requirements;
- ii. A later wedding breakfast as well as a smaller evening buffet menu;
- iii. No straight-forward menu items such as soup, turkey or gateaux. The focus is placed on unusual requests or themed type menus;
- iv. A smaller wedding comprising a lot of courses; and
- v. Not serving a traditional cake but having one which can 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 are taken into an imaginary world if the bride arrives in a coach pulled by horses like Cinderella, and the groom arrives on horseback. As there is a huge increase in themed weddings, more changes are appearing and these transform existing themed weddings.

Entertainment

Entertainment is often one of the highlights of a wedding. Without entertainment the celebration will most likely 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 personalizes the event even more for everybody.

Local Attraction

It is always advisable for couples, or the wedding planner, to select a destination that has suitable accommodation close by. Not only will the bride and groom and their families have to spend a lot of time at the venue(s) but so will the rest of the guests. It is necessary to take in their concerns as well. Choosing a suitable venue 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 they want a themed wedding. The couple really has the control and will decide what they will include or not include. Below are the three most common reasons that 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 think that a theme will make it 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 so 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 (what themed weddings are) can be a richer method of displaying customs and traditions, like 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 themed weddings 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 make sure that all aspects of the wedding are carefully planned around the chosen theme. Secondly, the 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 to do this. Themed weddings give couples the opportunity to customise everything according to their personalities and preferences. The setup is actually flexible and it can be adjusted at any time before the wedding.

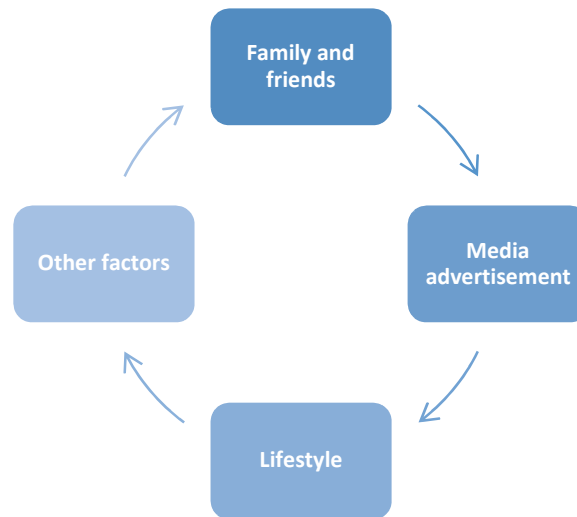
Mood

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. So, 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 quick survey showed that themed weddings were something that allows the couples to make their own decisions about what they should include, such as any kind of a twist which would make their wedding more unique.

Factors influencing choice of themed wedding



Family and Friends

Going by what is shown above, most respondents view the most influential factors of a wedding to be family and friends when planning a themed or traditional wedding.

Media Advertisement

Media ads were mentioned as an influential factor as both bride and groom would be getting ideas from other weddings, whether in printed advertisements or bridal magazines. Advertising is a way for couples to be exposed to the concept of a themed wedding. Media advertising helps clients to get more ideas about how to create their own wedding and how to make it a special day, whether they use a wedding planner or not.

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 which 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*