

Top tips in choosing your dream wedding venue

FOR most people it's one of the most important and best days of your life.

So along with choosing the dress or the bridesmaids, it's crucial you make the right decision when it comes to WHERE to get married.

There are so many more options now it's no longer restricted to a church or a register officer.

But wedding planner Helen Burns has a host of tips and ideas to make sure you get it right and pick the right place to make your big day positively perfect.

And the very first thing any bride and groom needs to do is sit down and think!

"The average wedding can now cost around £21,000," says Helen, "and with a recession to think about, it's important to sit down and discuss your budget as soon as possible.

"It sounds obvious, but eliminate venues that are out of your budget immediately. Venues very rarely move on price.

"And if a venue is reluctant to provide costs when you initially enquire, tell them of your budget before arranging a meeting. This will save you time, effort and, quite possibly, heartbreak!"

Once the budget is decided and you have worked out what you can afford and where you can afford there are many more considerations to make.

THE GUEST LIST:

Decide on a first draft of numbers and draw up a list. "It might be wise to have both sets of parents with you when you do this," says Helen, who runs Bespoken Dreams Wedding Design and Consultancy. "Of course this won't be the final cut, but you will need a rough indication before you can research and confirm your venue.

"Capacity at a particular venue will dictate whether you host dinner for 80 or an evening cocktail reception for 120."

Many venues, adds Helen, insist on minimum numbers to guarantee profit, meaning you have to pay for the shortfall. So bear this in mind.

LOCATION:

Again, it sounds obvious, but if your wedding ceremony is at a separate venue, take into account the logistics.

Is transport required for guests? Will the route be busier on the day of your wedding? Are there any local events on the day of your wedding that could obstruct traffic?

Check the signage on the roads is suitable too.

Adds Helen: "Consider your evening guests too. And if your venue is a hidden gem tucked away then you should consider transport for them too."

AVAILABILITY:

If you have your heart set on a fashionable venue, book it yesterday!

But don't be too down-hearted if it seems impossible. "Think about seasons. If it's more popular in summer then why not consider a winter wedding?" says Helen.

"Also think about topical events; FA Cup finals, the forthcoming Olympics, they all have knock on effects on cost and availability."



EXPERT:
Helen Burns,
wedding planner with Bespoken Dreams Wedding Design and Consultancy

instantly comes to mind.

And if you don't already have anywhere that's on your perfect wedding list, then you need to look around.

Says Helen: "If you don't have a venue in mind, shortlist your own venue menu and make sure you visit between three and five places until you find your perfect location that reflects the day that you're both visualising."

GO FOR SUNDAY LUNCH!

The best way to suss out a venue is to 'mystery shop' on a particularly busy day like Sunday lunchtime. Here you can sample the food, service, cleanliness and toilets without any of the hard sell.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Accessibility – "Note whether the reception, bar, dance floor and toilet facilities are on the same level or same room," stresses Helen. "If not, are there lifts available for elderly or disabled guests?"

ACCOMMODATION:

If the venue does not have on site accommodation, suss out local hotels as an alternative to guests. Ask about a

'bridal dressing area' to allow the bride and groom to freshen up throughout the day.

"If accommodation is available, enquire whether group bookings for guests can be discounted and ask about check in and out times."

Helen continues: "The venue as a backdrop is important too.

"Photographs are the keepsake memories of your day to treasure forever. So it is worth considering whether the venue has an attractive backdrop for photographs?"

"It might be a sweeping staircase or magnificent grounds, so bear this in mind when viewing too.

"And don't bank on it being a dry, sunny day if your dream shots are outside. Always have a Plan B!"

DÉCOR:

If you have a colour scheme or design in mind for the day, be mindful of the venue's décor. Clashing colours are a no-no!

And Helen says there are some crucial questions to ask to make sure that the venue you choose is the right one for you.

Says Helen: "Some venues have a list of preferred suppliers meaning you can't use any you've sourced yourself.

"Sometimes this is for safety or insurance purposes (fireworks, entertainment, catering), or because the venue receives commission from the supplier."

EXCLUSIVITY:

Enquire whether your wedding will be the only one on that day. Some venues offer exclusivity at an additional cost, so be aware.

NO DANCING!

Historic floors in country properties need protecting from dancing feet, especially in four inch heels! Some venues may stipulate a no dancing rule which means you would have to hire a marquee for the evening reception.

CARRIAGES:

And if you are planning on leading the Love Train into the wee hours, check beforehand what time the venue closes.

"Venues in residential areas may have an early finish of 11pm, and if there is a wedding on the next day, the venue may wish to set up the night before. So make sure you find out beforehand to avoid any disappointment on the day."

And finally:

ALWAYS READ THE SMALL PRINT!

"You love the venue and have deemed it 'the one'. But before signing any contracts, read the small print to ensure you have any unwelcome surprises boxed off," says Helen.

"Hidden costs or quotes exclusive of VAT discovered after the ink is dry will alter your budget and could be the difference between champagne and cava!"

But when you have done all of that, finally: "Go with your instincts.

"Just like your betrothed, you will know when you've found the right one."

