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Wedding planning advice

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Now that my wedding's all planned out, here's my advice to other potential victims of the bridal industry:

The dress: Hit the designer stores that are NOT bridal stores first. You never know what you'll find and it could save you thousands. Don't just look at the websites, they have plenty more in store that they're not putting online. Try Lisa Ho, Akira, The Vintage Clothing Shop, Leona Edmiston, Allannah Hill and Fleur Wood. Alex Perry is also going to release a ready-to-wear collection ("in March-June" - not sure what that means). Also try the larger Myer and David Jones stores. Avoid bridal stores like the plague - they're terrifying. ESPECIALLY avoid bridal stores that require you to make an appointment - these will be hideously expensive.

Expect to pay: \$600 - \$1200 at designer stores, \$1200 - \$3000 at bridal stores, \$4500 - \$7000 at GOOD bridal stores, \$7000+ for couture.



Photographers: Unfortunately, you do generally get what you pay for with photographers. Push for what you want, if they won't give it to you then move on to a different photographer. Many of them will try to make you buy an expensive wedding album. Ask about negatives, reprints and the number of hours they will stay at the venue. Ask to see photos taken at night if you are also having photos later at the reception. Book early - if you want a good photographer you'll probably need to book AT LEAST 8 months in advance.

Expect to pay: \$1000 - \$2000 for reasonably good happy snaps, \$2000 - \$4000 for good quality photographs, \$4000 - \$7000 for very good photography and artistic shots. Extra or albums usually add thousands more to the price - an album is usually included in the cost.

Cakes: Find out where your money's going - into the size of the cake, the quality of the cake or the decorations. If you're getting cupcakes, go to <http://www.fancy-flours.com> - there are fantastic cupcake wrappers there that will lift your cakes from "kid's birthday

party” to “wedding”.

Expect to pay: For approx. 100 guests, anywhere from \$400 to \$1500. Shop around, find a bargain.

Wedding night: Look up the fanciest hotel in the area and pick the 3rd best room. It will still be nice, and half the price. Stay 2 nights, who wants to check out at 10am the next day?

Expect to pay: \$400 - \$500 a night should be enough for decent wedding night luxury.

Venue: Your venue will be restricted by the amount of guests you are having - ring places in advance and ask how many they can comfortably accommodate. Some of them will have enough space but not enough chairs. Think about privacy - do you get the place to yourself or are the people in the pub nextdoor going to be watching too? Think about having the ceremony and reception at the same place - it saves on transport, but it does make it awkward if you were planning on inviting some people to the ceremony but not to the reception afterwards. Hotels will often throw in a free wedding night to sweeten the deal, but other venues also have special deals with hotels so it is worth looking around.

Expect to pay: It will depend on what kind of reception you are having, where the venue is, what inclusions there are and how many guests there are. I couldn't even put an estimate on it. Devote a few days to shop around.

I kind of lucked out first time with the celebrant, DJ, hair and makeup artist, florist and jeweller, so I really don't have any advice on them. I guess some more general advice would be:

- Once you've found a good supplier, ask them if they know any good suppliers for the other things you haven't booked yet.
- Go to free bridal expos and get all the free bridal magazines. Cut out all the photos you like and save them to give your photographer so they know what sort of shots you're looking for. Cut out all the photos of hairstyles and makeup you like and give your favourite to your hair and makeup artist.
- Get [Marziplanner](#). It's awesome.
- Milk your rellies for all they're worth - surely somebody knows how to make a veil?
- Scrounge around for stuff at home that you can use, like brooches, jewellery, ties, etc. The picture for this post is of a brooch type thing I found at a sale ages ago, I'll probably use it as a hair accessory.
- Men don't know what a bonboniere is. Just give them chocolate.
- Don't leave stuff too late or all the good stuff will be booked already. Especially if your wedding is in September!