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Avoid A Queen-Size Wedding Tab

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Wedding Facts & Figures

Key average costs and other statistics as of 2010

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Wedding cost | \$26,984 |
| Costliest city | Manhattan, N.Y.: \$70,030 |
| Cheapest region | Utah, \$13,214 |
| Wedding dress | \$1,099 |
| Number of guests | 141 |
| Cost per guest | \$194 |
| Most popular month | June, 15% |
| Ceremony site | \$1,393 |
| Reception venue | \$12,124 |
| Florist/décor | \$1,988 |
| Cake | \$540 |

Source: TheKnot.com

Getting married soon? Costs can be daunting. But at least you don't have to cover the price tag for Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton.

A widespread estimate is that the royal bash cost \$34 million.

On this side of the pond, the average cost of a wedding is \$26,984, according to TheKnot.com.

There are many ways to save big bucks on the big day. Here are some key ones:

- Trim the guest list. This is the easiest saver, says Carley Roney, editor in chief of TheKnot.com.

"Eliminating one table at the party can save \$1,000 to \$2,000," Roney said. "Best of all, by itself this step does not reduce the standard of the occasion. You don't reduce overall spending per guest."

- Change the date.

Schedule your wedding for a Friday or Sunday instead of Saturday night.

Moving away from the most popular night can save you 20%.

Check in advance that your guests can arrange their schedules to attend a Friday or Sunday event.

- Shift to the morning or midday. Events held early in the day cost less than evening affairs.

"A brunch wedding instead of an evening wedding and celebration means guests are likely to drink less," Roney said.

And brunch food can cost less than dinner meals.

- Simplify the meal.

One approach is to eliminate a course. Dropping soup, for example, can save \$10 per serving. Guests may not even notice its absence between appetizers and the main course.

And why pay for dessert in addition to your wedding cake?

Another tack is to serve food family style. Let guests help themselves from platters brought to each table.

That takes less food than serving guests individually.

It also lets you cut the number of servers and the amount of space needed for staging plates, food and so on.

- Use a smaller cake.

One option is to order a cake that is half the usual size. By that time of the celebration, people are full from eating and distracted by dancing. "No one will notice that servings are half-size," Roney said.

Another option is to make only the cake's top tier real for the photo. Lower tiers can be fake.

Serve most guests from a simple, far less costly sheet cake sitting discretely out of camera view.

- Limit your bar.

Instead of offering several premium liquors, stick to one label.

Even simpler, serve only beer and wine.

Or serve two or three signature cocktails, such as a Jim & Jane-tini.

- Avoid expensive cut flowers.

Consider a location that has a garden or vineyard so you don't need many flowers.

Another tactic: Reuse flowers by transporting them from your ceremony to the reception.

Third tactic: Use the same site for your marriage and celebration.

Fourth tactic: Use less expensive flowers such as dahlias instead of roses. Or use herbs and colorful fruit instead of pricey bouquets.

"Select a color theme, such as red, and tell the florist to use inexpensive blooms," Roney said.

- Be clever about attire.

Find out when local bridal shops hold sample sales. Dresses may have been tried on, but not worn to a wedding.

This can save you 30% to 80%. Alteration costs are relatively cheap.

Sales are typically in April and May, then October and November.

If you go the custom-made route, you can save thousands of dollars by asking the designer to refrain from lavishing bling on the skirt.

Yet another tack: Rent your accessories, bag or dress. Increasingly, you can find renters locally and by looking online.

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