

The dress dilemma

Of all the elements involved in the planning of a wedding, the selection of the bridal gown can be one of the most time consuming. The search for the perfect dress usually gets underway soon after the engagement has been announced and continues for weeks and sometimes months afterward. If you have recently gotten engaged, here are some tips to help you with the search.

Start early

The sooner you start looking for a wedding dress, the better chance you will have of finding just the right one and the accessories to go with it. You will also have

plenty of time for alterations. And should you choose not to buy a gown off the rack and customer order one instead, you won't have to worry about it not arriving in time.

Be open

Don't pick the dress. Let it pick you. Go ahead and page through all of those bridal magazines. The more you know about what's out there, the better idea you'll have of what you want. But don't limit your shopping to any one style, color or designer. Just because a particular style of dress looks good on the page does not mean it will look good on you at the

store. You want a gown that not only appeals to your tastes but flatters your figure.

Bring a guide

Find a friend or family member willing to go shopping with you and help you decide. You need someone who can give you an honest opinion of each dress you try on, good or bad. Choose someone who will tell you what they think, not what you want to hear.

Shop around

Take several days to check out the selection at various bridal shops and try on as many styles as possible. Ask if you can take pho-

tos of the gowns that really interest you. If not, bring a notebook so that you can jot down the name of the gowns you like best and where to find them. Don't trust your memory to keep track of what you like and where to find it.

Keep at it

Continue your search until you find the perfect gown, and when you do, stop! Purchase the dress right then and

there and turn your attention to the other tasks on your to-do list. Don't continue to shop on the off chance you will find something better. Chances are you won't, and when you return to the store to purchase the dress of your dreams, someone else may

have already beat you to it. Shopping for a gown can take a lot of time. While some brides come upon the dress of their dreams within the first few hours of shopping, most don't. Prepare for the task to take a while and enjoy!

Honeymoons on a dime

While some newlyweds can still afford to cap off their big day in grand style with a trip for two to someplace exotic, there are many that can't. Once they've paid for the wedding, there is little left for a honeymoon. Fortunately, you can still have a great honeymoon on a shoestring budget. Here's how.

Leave at a later date

Who says you must leave for your honeymoon immediately following your wedding reception? Enjoy your big day and postpone the honeymoon of your dreams until you can afford it. Wait six months or a year to book the trip. You'll have more cash to spare and more time to find the best deals.

Book way in advance

Generally, the earlier you book your honeymoon, the cheaper the rates will be. Start looking for a destination long before your expected departure date and shop around for the best deals.

Cut costs where you can

You don't have to go all out to have a good time on your honeymoon. Think about your plans and find ways to save. Choose less expensive accommodations, especially if you intend to be out and about much of the day. Pack lunches instead of eating out. Take advantage of all free or low-cost activities.

Go during the off-season

Off-season prices are far cheaper than peak season prices. Schedule your honeymoon during the off-season, and to save more cash, consider going to a less popular destination. The rates will be cheaper, and there will be less people to contend with.

Stay close to home

If you are really short on cash and can't afford to go away, stay in. Check out the deals in your area and arrange for a mini staycation. Book a room at an inexpensive hotel and spend the day checking out attractions and activities you've never had time for. If you can't afford

a hotel room, stay at home and have a candlelit dinner. It doesn't really matter where you are as long as you are together.

Honeymoons don't have to break the bank. You can still have fun and celebrate the beginning of your life together on a shoestring budget. It just takes some advance planning and creative thinking.



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