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**Ask The Right Questions Before You Book Your Wedding Reception**

**By Blake Kritzberg**

Think saying "I do" is going to be the most emotional moment in your wedding? Probably so, but putting down a deposit on your wedding venue could be a close runner-up.

Reception costs consume almost half the budget for the wedding, which these days means you can expect to lay out almost \$13,000, including food. And the venue you select can not only limit your choice of caterers or bakers, it's sure to affect how much you spend to "cover up" its weak spots or accent its highlights. Most stressful of all, the popular venues book far in advance, forcing brides to make the big decision almost as soon as they set the date.

For that reason, the savvy venue-hunter wants to know what questions to ask before she walks in the door, much less signs the contract. Here are a few ideas:

Do you have a pre-set list of caterers I can use, or can I choose my own?

Some venues — high-end ones with their own catering staff, or small-town ones with little competition — require you to use the in-house caterers or choose from a small list of "approved" vendors. It can be difficult to get taste-tests or otherwise put this type of vendor through its paces. If you're stuck with such a list, search high and low for brides who have "been there, done that" and can give you their honest opinions.

Any restrictions on decorations?

Many venues have them, but rules vary widely from place to place. Common restrictions include: no open flame (or no flame whatsoever), no tape or tacks on the walls, or no confetti. When linens are provided, some halls will prohibit the use of pins. Ask if the hall can provide any decorations themselves, especially around holidays. Useful centerpiece items such as hurricane lamps or Eiffel vases are not uncommon.

Can we bring our own liquor, is there a "corkage" fee, and do we need a license?

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If the liquor's to flow freely at your wedding, you'll save an immense amount of moolah by bringing your own. But some venues prohibit this and require you to buy from them. Even worse is the venue that says "yes" to bringing your own alcohol, but charges you a mandatory "corkage fee" to serve it — which typically starts at an unbelievable \$10 per bottle or more! You'll want to be crystal-clear on the fine print regarding alcohol before you commit to a venue.

As for licensing, many states consider wedding receptions to be an "unlicensed social function," meaning you don't need one as long as you're not charging anyone for the alcohol. But be sure to check your local regulations before moving ahead — and ask your venue if they know of any licensing requirements.

Is there a cake-cutting fee?

Some venues even limit your choice of bakers, but most don't. A more common (and sneakier) tactic is to charge you a cake-cutting fee, which like corkage fees, can really add up — often at \$1 per slice!

### DIY Detective Work

These, of course, are only a few of the questions you'll want to ask a prospective venue manager. A few more tips while you're checking out the place:

- Bring a tape measure. Get the dimensions of the room, the tables, and the distance between any features that might impact your decor, like windows. How many outlets are there and where are they located? What kind of climate control is available to you?
- Check the kitchen. Does it look clean, roomy and suitable for your catering staff to work from?
- Check the hall itself. Where will you put the band, the cake table, the coffee service? Are there coat racks for your guests? Is a sound system available?
- Check out the parking. Is it ample? Is it paved, or can it get muddy in the case of rain? Is there handicap access?

One final thing to get clear before you autograph that contract is your venue's cancellation policy. But hopefully, with these helpful tips, you'll have done enough homework to rest easy in your choice and not worry about having to cancel. Now that you've signed, take some time to sit back and relax ... before you tackle the next task in that thick wedding planner!

Blake Kritzberg is editor at "FavorIdeas.com." Stop by

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for wedding favors,

theme ideas, Save-the-Date eCards, free wedding screensaver, free wedding templates and Bridezilla's weekly adventures.

## **Tips On Choosing Your Wedding Reception Music**

**By George Meszaros**

Because there is such musical variety available to brides and grooms, selecting your reception music might be difficult.

Before you do anything, you should answer the following questions:

What kind of music do you enjoy the most when you celebrate?

What kind of music would your guest enjoy the most? If there is a conflict between what the bride and groom and their wedding reception guests enjoy, a compromise might be necessary.

Do you prefer live music, or a DJ? Can you afford a live band?

You should book your wedding band or DJ about the same time you reserve your wedding reception venue. Why? Because your reception music will greatly depend on your wedding reception venue. If you want to have live music for your wedding, you need to make sure it is allowed by the reception venue. You need to make sure you understand the venue's rules about music before you select your wedding reception venue.

If you elect to go with a wedding band, be sure to book early. Popular bands are often booked more than one year in advance. Saturdays during the busiest wedding months are especially busy for wedding bands, so you might need to book even more than one year in advance.

Before you book your wedding music provider, you should ask the following questions:

How long have they been in the wedding business? You should go with an experienced band or DJ. Experience will usually yield a better quality performance.

Do they have any references? (You should always check references.) If the band is unable to provide references, you should walk.

Do they play live, continuous music for the entire event?

Can they play the songs you want to hear? The more songs they can play the better. Bands usually have song lists of all the songs they can play.

Do they have a demo CD, so you can sample their music? Is it possible for you to see one of their performances? There is no substitute for seeing a band in action.

## Ask The Right Questions Before You Book Your Wedding Reception

Can you communicate with the band, and do you feel comfortable interacting with them? Are they listening to you; are they enthusiastic? Remember, the band is there to make your party fun, not the other way around. You hire them to play the music you like not the music they like.

How many band members do you get and how many are singers?

How long do they normally play, and how often do they break and for how long?

Are they insured? You should demand at least liability insurance from the wedding band or DJ.

Put everything important you agree on in writing. The answers to the above questions should all be part of the written contract, which is an absolute must. You should also include the exact time the band starts and ends playing.

If you have to work with a smaller budget, you might want to book a DJ instead of a wedding band since they are less expensive than wedding bands. An experienced DJ can create a great atmosphere for your wedding reception; so don't be disappointed if you can't afford a wedding band.

Remember to have fun; after all you are planning the most important and joyous day of your life!

George Meszaros

<http://www.sweet-reflections.com>



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