

Determining those wedding day dress codes

Wedding invitations do more than merely announce that a celebration is on the horizon.

Invitations provide key information about the ceremony and festivities to follow.

Many details, including the location, time and date of the wedding, are spelled out on the wedding invitations.

However, invitations can sometimes leave guests confused about the appropriate style of attire for the occasion.

Even though wedding invitations rarely offer specific information regarding attire, chances are the wording will provide clues that can help guests interpret the desired dress code.

Casual

If the invitation mentions casual attire, it's important to realize that

everyday casual is different from wedding casual. Jeans, shorts and tank tops are unacceptable unless otherwise noted. Err on the side of caution and go with business casual, which includes chinos, slacks, a polo shirt or button-down shirt for men. Women can wear a sundress or slacks or a skirt and an attractive blouse. If the invitation mentions beach casual, shorts and even sandals are likely acceptable.

Semiformal

Semiformal dresswear, sometimes referred to as "dressy casual," is a step up from casual clothing. Cocktail dresses or a more elegant skirt and top are the norms. Gentleman generally wear a suit and tie. Coordinate the colors of clothing to the time of day. Fabrics should represent the season. For example, a

linen suit will not pass at a winter wedding.

Formal

Formal attire is the default dress code for the majority of weddings. When the invitation does not specify a dress code, it is safe to assume formal attire is expected. Men can choose among a dark suit and tie or a tuxedo. Women can opt for a formal cocktail-length dress, a classic suit or a long dress. Select among tones that are gray, black or brown.

Black tie

Black tie events also require formal attire. Black tie typically goes hand-in-hand with an evening wedding. Black tie is more rigid for male guests, who should wear a tuxedo, black bow tie, cummerbund and patent leather shoes. Women have a little more leeway with their attire at such

gatherings. A long evening gown might be preferable. However, a chic cocktail dress also can be acceptable, and darker, neutral colors are most appropriate. Some invitations may reference "Black Tie Preferred." While men may opt for a tuxedo, a black suit also can be worn.

White Tie

The most formal of occasions will request white tie attire. Ball gowns and tuxedos with tails are the norm, as are dramatic jewelry and hairstyles. White tie attire is akin to what one might see worn at awards shows.

When attending a wedding, it is always better to be overdressed than underdressed.

Guests can consult with fellow guests or the bride and groom if they are unsure of the dress code.



LOOKING GOOD — Black tie weddings require men to wear tuxedos.

How guests can cut costs and still attend a loved one's wedding

Couples and/or their families can expect to spend tens of thousands of dollars on their weddings before saying "I do," making weddings one of the largest expenses for a couple apart from buying a house or new car. But brides- and grooms-to-be are not the only ones who may have to invest quite a great deal on wedding days.

Guests, including bridal party members, may also be responsible to pay a substantial sum. According to the 2016 American Express Spending & Saving Tracker, Americans expected to spend an average of \$703 per each wedding they attended in 2016. Few people are willing to miss the wedding of a beloved family member or friend, even when the costs of attending the wedding can be high.

Fortunately, there are ways for wedding invitees to attend the festivities without breaking the bank.

- Shop around for lodging. Many couples arrange

for discounted hotel rooms for their out-of-town wedding guests. But guests might be able to save even more by shopping around for their own discounted rates at hotels and other lodging accommodations. Websites like Orbitz and Hotels.com can compare rates at all the hotels in a given city, letting wedding guests explore all of their alternatives in a single search.

Guests who are especially patient can use the Hotel Tonight app, which allows users to book heavily discounted rooms no more than seven days in advance of their expected occupancy. Guest also can try finding affordable lodging on the popular home-stay network Airbnb.

- Book travel early. Many travelers insist the best flight deals can be found as late as six weeks before the desired departure date. But there's no guarantee that waiting that long to book flights will benefit wed-



EVERYONE'S HAPPY — The costs of attending a wedding are growing. But savvy guests can save money in various ways.

ding guests. If the patient approach does not pan out, guests might be forced to choose between costly flights or not attending the wedding. Budget-conscious travelers may find it less

stressful to book flights as early as possible. Doing so allows guests to find flights at the times they most prefer to fly, and it also makes it possible to spread the cost of attending a wedding

out over a longer period of time.

- Say no to joining the bridal party. While it's an honor when brides or grooms ask certain friends

or family members to be in their bridal parties, guests should not feel compelled to accept that invitation if they cannot afford it. If money is tight, explain the situation to the bride and groom, who might even offer to help cover some of the costs of the wedding. Even if couples cannot afford that gesture, they will understand if friends or family members cannot cover the additional costs associated with being in a bridal party.

- Split expenses. Another way for guests to save money is to split certain expenses with fellow guests. Single guests can share hotel rooms with fellow guests attending solo, and even couples can join up with other couples and split the cost of double rooms. Sharing expenses such as rental cars and trips to and from the airport is another way for guests to coordinate their efforts to save money.

Incorporate flowers in various ways for your wedding

Weddings are special moments for couples and the guests they invite to share their happiness on their big days.

Beautiful weddings require substantial planning, as every last detail must be considered for couples to enjoy the wedding of their dreams.

Flowers play a big role in many weddings, and couples can add beauty and ambiance to the event by using floral arrangements in various ways. Modern floral arrangements are stunning, and many couples may not know that herbs, spices and flowers have been used in weddings for centuries.

Today, flowers are used to decorate wedding venues, impart sweet fragrances and complement formal attire, but in ancient times they were used differently.

Flowers were used to bestow good luck on the couple and keep bad omens

away. Brides carried aromatic flowers and spices to keep evil spirits from spoiling the festivities, and some even tucked bulbs of garlic into their bouquets. In ancient Greece and Rome, both the bride and groom wore garlands made out of strong-smelling herbs flowers around their necks or heads.

These wreaths were considered gifts of nature, and thus extremely appropriate for a wedding. Traditionally, bridesmaids would be responsible for fashioning these floral components. In ancient Sweden, young girls would carry small bouquets of fragrant herbs down the aisle and the groom would put thyme in his pocket. These aromatics were thought to help keep trolls at bay.

Besides warding off spirits or hungry trolls, flowers also served more practical purposes throughout history. During the Middle Ages,

people bathed less frequently than they do today. Bathing might only have occurred twice a year, once during summer and then again at Christmastime. Because many weddings took place in the spring, flowers were used to mask bodily odors. Not only were flowers and herbs carried, but they also would be sewn into clothing.

Modern brides and grooms may no longer see their wedding days as times for opportunistic evil spirits. But that doesn't mean that couples cannot borrow from ancient traditions and incorporate flowers into their weddings in various ways.

- Wreaths and garlands: Ask the florist to weave small flower buds, berries and vines to a headband, wreath or piece of twine so that the bride and groom can wear these flowers in the way they were worn by ancient Greeks and

Romans. When coupled with Grecian-styled wedding gowns, brides can look like beautiful goddesses on their wedding days.

- Fragrant favors: Tuck dried rose petals and other fragrant flowers into sachets that are embroidered with the wedding date and couple's names. Guests can use these sachets to keep clothing smelling fresh in drawers or as subtle air fresheners around the house.

- Edible flowers: Ask the caterer to make meals flower-friendly by including some edible blooms in the salad or as a garnish on meals.

- Raining petals: In lieu of bubbles or birdseed, guests can shower the newlyweds with rose petals after the ceremony.

- Memorial: Some couples like to honor departed family members. Floral arrangements with small placards can make for fitting memorials.



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Ways to make every anniversary count

Wedding anniversaries provide opportunities for couples to reflect and relive the excitement of their wedding days.

Anniversaries can easily be forgotten amid the hustle and bustle of daily life, but many couples are making concerted efforts to ensure their anniversaries are celebrated as the special occasions they are.

A first wedding anniversary is a special one.

Some couples celebrate their first anniversaries by enjoying a piece of wedding cake that has been properly preserved in the freezer.

Couples may also dance to their wedding songs or enjoy a nice dinner at a favorite restaurant. The first anniversary also is a time to pull out the wedding video or photo album and reminisce about the wedding day.

Anniversaries are a great way for couples to celebrate their time together by stepping away from emails, text messages, work obligations, and even mundane everyday tasks to once again remember a day and moment that changed their lives forever. Those who may need a little inspiration

celebrating their anniversaries can consider these suggestions.

- Have dinner at your reception site. Find out if the reception site, which may be a catering hall or restaurant, serves dinner or brunch. Make a reservation and enjoy celebrating in the spot where the memories all began.

- Take a second honeymoon. Honor wedding memories by booking a second honeymoon at a special location.

- Throw a party. Use your anniversary as an excuse

to have friends or family over for a party. Be sure to include your wedding song on the music playlist.

- Create a romantic evening. Rekindle the romance by pulling out all the stops, complete with a nice home-cooked meal, candles and mood music.

Wedding anniversaries present ideal opportunities for couples to reminisce about their trip down the aisle and all the entertaining moments from the wedding. They're also opportunities to connect as a couple and focus on each other.

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