



How guests can honor their budgets in peak wedding season

By AMANDABARROSO | NERDWALLET

It's a banner year for weddings, with industry experts at the Wedding Report predicting that more than 2.5 million couples will tie the knot — a 40-year high. But you might find your finances aren't quite ready to take on the costs associated with being a wedding guest.

Half (50%) of Americans say they plan to attend a wedding in 2022 — but less than a third (31%) have built attendance into their budgets, according to a new survey.

"I think guests are going to start looking at all the things that they never really looked at before and determining, 'Is it really worth me attending this event?'," says Sheavonne Harris, a wedding planner based in New York City. In some cases, they may just decide to send a nice gift in their absence, she says.

Before you RSVP, weigh important factors — from airfare costs to your relationship with the couple — and consider these ideas for fitting attendance into your budget.

Think about saving on travel costs

Among the top factors Americans consider before attending a wedding are how far it is from home (47%) and the cost of travel and lodging (43%), according to a NerdWallet survey of more than 2,000 people conducted online by The Harris Poll.

Airfare or driving costs plus lodging can add up. Using miles or points you've earned can help reduce travel expenses.

Getting around town once you arrive is another cost. "Each wedding is a few hundred dollars to rent a car when you're there for a weekend," says Elliott Appel, a certified financial planner in Madison,

Wisconsin. Consider sharing rental-car or ride-share costs with other guests to save some cash.

Most couples are still providing hotel room blocks at a discounted rate for their guests, Harris says. Make sure you don't miss the deadline to catch that deal. You might also consider sharing a room or splitting a vacation rental with other guests.

Appel also suggests making the trip do double duty if you have nearby family or friends who you were planning to visit this year.

Set reasonable spending limits for gifts and outfits

Getting to the wedding is only part of the cost. You also want to bring a gift and look presentable. After more than two years of pandemic living, formal clothes hanging in your closet might not fit the way they used to.

"If you can duplicate outfits as opposed to doing multiple different outfits for every wedding, I always recommend that," Appel says. Clothing rental services like Rent the Runway or Nuuly help you cut costs and still feel special.

And don't let expectations to spend

outrageously on gifts hold you back.

"Just because we know the person well doesn't necessarily mean that you need to spend a significant amount of money on a gift," Appel says. He suggests a gift with personal meaning behind it, something "that maybe reflects back on an experience or a shared memory." A group gift is another way to give a higher-priced item without busting your budget.

Stretch the budget strategically

You're likely to do everything you can to share a close friend's or family member's special day — even if it stretches your budget.

Appel doesn't advocate going into debt for a wedding. But, he says, "I also don't want people to miss out on those memorable experiences." He suggests trying to reduce spending or temporarily increase income to cover extra costs.

If those strategies aren't enough, you might consider putting your wedding guest expenses on a credit card.

However, make sure you have a plan to pay off that debt — the debt avalanche or snowball methods are popular. And use credit cards strategically. Moving charges to a card with a low or 0% APR for balance transfers gives extra time to pay without running up a lot of interest.

If you have time, save before going

If you know there are weddings in your future, start planning now.

Build guest expenses into your budget with a sinking fund — a savings account dedicated to a planned expense. Consistently saving smaller chunks over time is more manageable.

Also, cutting costs across your budget not only helps you afford wedding attendance but also respond to rising inflation in general. Think about buying store brands, renegotiating bills, canceling subscriptions and trimming discretionary spending.