

Wedding Feature

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Summer weddings are always popular, but given the need to social distance during the pandemic, there's no better time to get married in most parts of the country than the summer. Our Summer Wedding guide has tips on how to pull off a socially distanced affair, as well as coverage of trends in the wedding industry, from food to decor and more.

Publication Dates: Friday, Apr. 29, Sept. 3 and Nov. 12

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Planning a Zoom Wedding

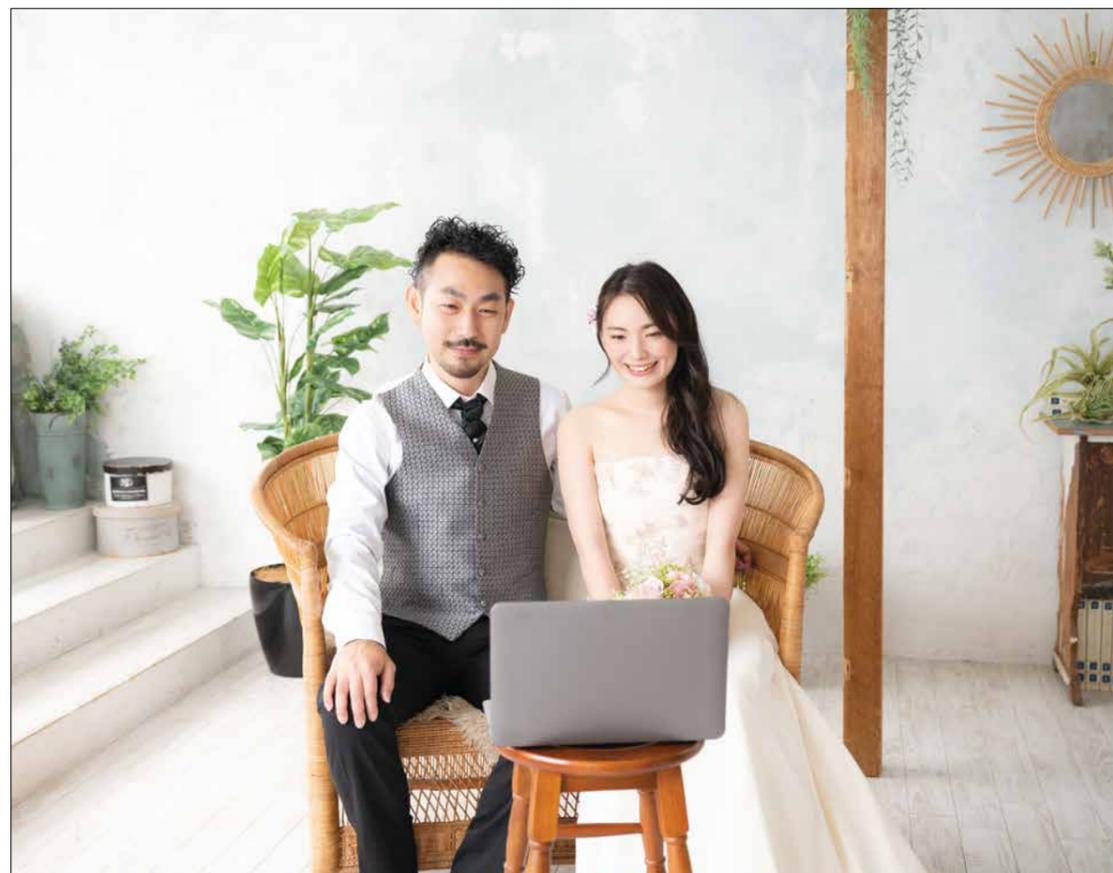
With the coronavirus pandemic now more than a year old, many cities and states still have restrictions on travel and gatherings.

If you've been holding off on your nuptials waiting on conditions to improve, technology may have an answer for your wedding blues.

HOSTING AN ONLINE WEDDING

That's right, the same technology that brings you working from home can now bring you weddings from home. As a guest, your options are pretty much endless and you can attend from the comfort of your own couch. No flights to book, no babysitters, just joining in the fun. And the happy couple aren't limited by venue restrictions, they can invite as many people as they want, include guests who would prefer not to travel under ordinary circumstances.

You'll need to recruit someone (or even a company; several have sprouted up) to hold the camera, narrate and record the ceremony for posterity. You may also need some decor, depending on the route you want to go, but remember you won't need the whole space. Just a backdrop or two. And don't forget the sound. Opt for a microphone or even AirPods to make sure your online guests don't miss a word.



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HOSTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

If Zoom or other such platforms aren't your thing, you can always livestream your ceremony on Facebook Live, YouTube, TikTok or other social streams. These platforms give you an opportunity to interact

with guests in real time and may even be easier for some guests to use and understand than Zoom or GoTo Meeting.

Whatever platform you choose, remember to also select a backup (or two or three). You should also run a test of the ceremony several

times, checking things like your hardware and your internet connections. You might want to upgrade your service for a month to make sure you have plenty of bandwidth.

Also check things like lighting, camera angles and audio in a variety of conditions. If you

combine your online wedding with other services like ordering outfits, flowers and even cakes and champagne online, you could have a nearly contactless wedding ceremony. Some states even allow for online applications for marriage licenses.

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Outdoor Venues

Summer is a great season for holding your ceremony outdoors.

Not only is the weather great, but there may be fewer restrictions and regulations, since being outdoors has been deemed more safe than being inside during the pandemic.

THE PROS

Summer breezes, lots of greenery, tents and twinkly lights set a fresh and airy mood for the ceremony and the reception. "Tented weddings are the new ballroom," wedding planner and designer Jove Meyer told The Knot. "Couples are leaning into nature and fresh air in ways they did not in the past."

Entire weekends can be planned outdoors, including welcome ceremonies and receptions, as weddings contract into smaller, safer parties that, with those tinier crowds, can be more luxe and still make the budget. Think s'mores and campfires under the stars instead of star-spangled giant receptions under chandeliers.

Outdoor weddings can also be less formal occasions, including relaxed dress codes that make both guests and the happy couple more comfortable. Today's ceremonies are heavy on the fun and sentimentality and light on the formality, and every detail should reflect that.



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THE CONS

Mother Nature can be a welcome guest at your wedding with a spectacular backdrop or a jewel-toned sunset to end the day. Or she can crash the whole thing with a roaring thunderstorm or excessive heat. All your wedding plans need a back-up, especially those that are out-

side. The good news is that today's smaller ceremonies can be a lot more agile and adapt to changing conditions easily.

Your wedding planner can help set up a variety of options for your and your guests. This will help you rest easier as you approach your wedding day, no matter what

happens with the weather.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Depending on your venue, you'll need to consider things like parking, facilities for your guests and plenty of room for staffing.

Wedding planners are pros at figuring out what each

venue needs in terms of extras from other vendors.

Just like indoor ceremonies, you'll also need to consider mask-wearing, social distancing and other precautions.

Even though your outdoors, follow all local restrictions and regulations for gatherings and events to stay safe.

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Gifts Trends for 2021

Wedding gifts are a fairly classic set of items. Couples usually register for things to help them set up housekeeping together, such as bedding and linens, kitchen accessories and more.

With couples delaying getting married and living on their own or together before saying I do, however, registries have gotten more creative in the past few years. They now include cash gift funds for things like honeymoons, first houses or experiences.

CLASSIC WEDDING GIFTS

Of course, things for the home are always appreciated. High-end kitchenware makes a great group or office gift that makes a strong statement of love and support. Think KitchenAid mixers or LeCreuset cookware, or even expensive small appliances like vacuums.

Dishes, china, towels and glassware are also traditional gifts that can hold a lot of meaning. Have pieces monogrammed or etched with the happy couples' initials and the date of their wedding for a sentimental touch.

CASH GIFTS

Cash is always a welcome gift to a couple just starting out. But more and more, couples are registering for cash funds that devote the money to things like a honeymoon, a first home together or gifted experiences, such as a weekend getaway, a private tour or a local historic site or park. and more.

When choosing these types of gifts, give the amount you would've spent on a classic gift and make sure to include a note to the couple. Some online registries allow you to just pay online or you can always opt for the traditional check or cash in a lovely card.

SUBSCRIPTION BOXES

Give the couple a gift they can enjoy all year with a subscription box tailored to their interests. Once reserved for beers and beauty, subscription boxes now run the gamut and are available at a wide variety of interests

and price points. Pick a box that speaks to the couples' common interests and one that will allow them to celebrate their love for months to come.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

Brides magazine says to spend anywhere between \$75-\$250 as a wedding gift, but that it depends on how close you are to the couple and your budget. A gift doesn't have to be expensive to be thoughtful. Less expensive options include a framed wedding invitation or a photo book for the happy couple.

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Honeymooning in a Pandemic

Honeymooning — especially right now — aren't about where you go. it's about who you're with.

With coronavirus travel restrictions limiting honeymoon destinations that normally blow up Instagram, it's time to get creative about where to go after the wedding's over.

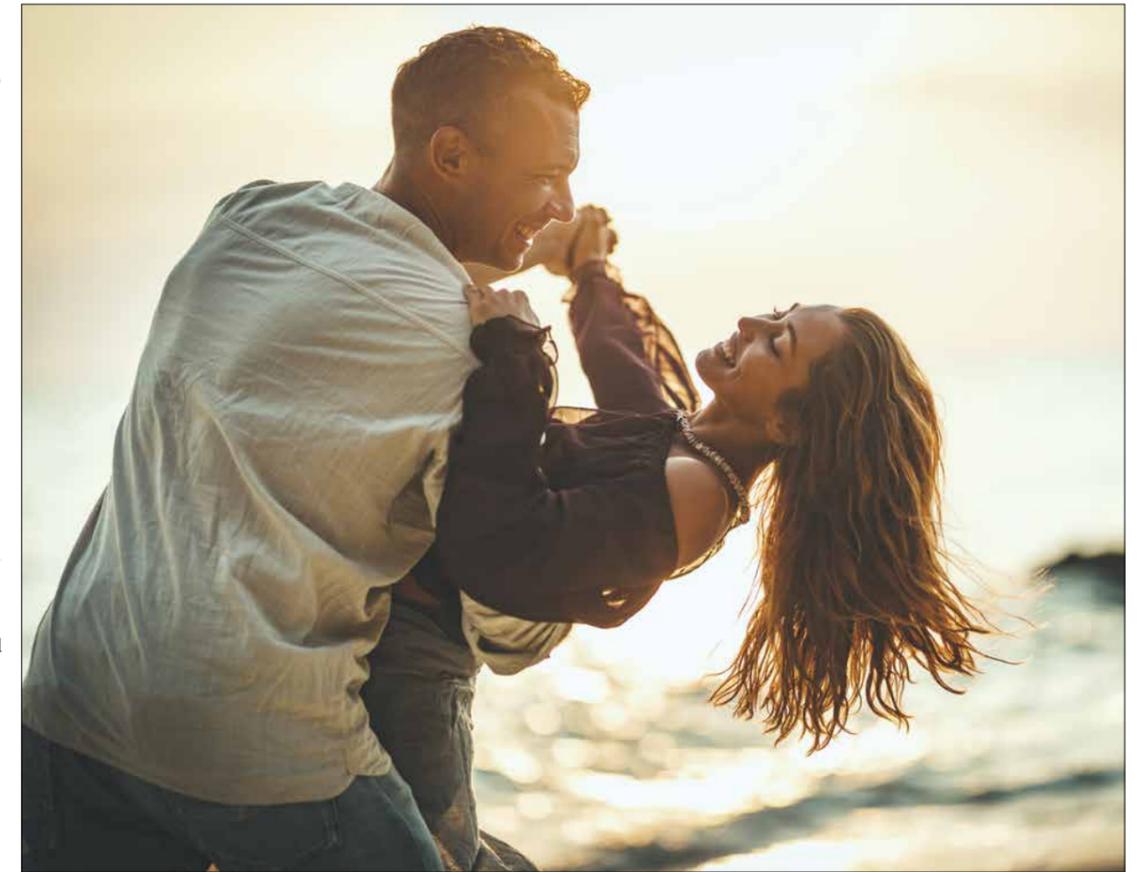
USE AN EXPERT

This is where the expertise of a travel agent really comes into play. The big online sites may be cheap, but the computer doesn't have the know-how of an expert on the ground for planning you a fun and safe honeymoon. Your wedding planner or other wedding experts can help put you on the trail of a great local travel agent. And, as always when you're looking for services, ask friends and family for recommendations.

WHAT TO PAY

Some travel agents charge fees upfront, some charge fees for booking certain services and others don't charge a fee at all and are paid instead by the hotels and other places where they send you. All travel agents, however, should discuss compensation upfront, with no catches and hidden fees.

Alexandra Stockton of Alexandra Stockton Luxury Travel told Brides magazine



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that she doesn't charge a fee, but that some travel agents' fees allow them access to benefits and upgrades to give you the best experience.

"Plus, (they have) insight and relationships to help you get the best deal and save money, so that small fee is

going to be worth it," she said.

WHAT YOU GET

Not only do professional travel agents know the best places to go, they also allow you to take advantage of upgrades and special services you wouldn't normally have

access to. Agents also know all the ropes of travel, even during a pandemic, and can help you navigate the process before, during and after your trip. Run into trouble at your destination? Your agent can help.

Agents will also, of course,

plan a custom itinerary that will make your trip one of a lifetime, taking honeymoon planning off a busy couples' plates. This will give you time to focus on the wedding and make sure your honeymoon is all about relaxation and romance. Just as it should be.

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Reception Menus

Pandemic restrictions have put a damper on both weddings and receptions. There are safety restrictions, and many areas that have limited restaurant and event capacity.

This means that couples can opt to spend more per guest, meaning plated and personalized reception dinners that will delight your guests.

COURSE MEALS

Smaller guests lists mean that you can opt for a more intimate, luxe reception featuring plated, multi-course dinners. Seat your guests in well-spaced pods, where people sit with people they already associate with. Leave plenty of room for both guests and staff to social distance. Encourage sanitization and mask-wearing except for when eating and drinking. Consider offering intimate touches like handwritten place cards and personalized notes to make the experience special for those you choose to share in your special moment.

TINY PLATES

If you're not serving a full meal and don't want passed hors d'oeuvres to create a safety risk, opt instead for individualized plates of appe-



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tizers on a theme. Think miniature charcuterie boards or small plates featuring four individual finger foods. Have plenty of pick-up points so that guests don't congregate in any one area and can instead grab a plate and move to their table at their convenience.

MINI WEDDING CAKES

Another pinch point at wed-

dings is the line-up after the couple cuts the cake. Instead of serving slices of cake that have to be served, some couples are opting for miniature wedding cakes that are individually plated and either served at the reception or packaged for guests to take home and enjoy later. This doesn't have to just be a cupcake, either. Bakers are turn-

ing out tiny, fully decorated layered wedding cakes that perfectly match your theme, palette and budget. Of course, you can always think outside of the box and do another kind of individual sweet treat, such as cookies, brownies or even marshmallow treats.

PREPACKAGED FOODS

Some couples are offering

for boxes of prepackaged foods that come individually wrapped so that people can enjoy them at their own pace and knowing the food is safe to eat.

Bonus: These boxes can easily be shipped to guests attending via online platforms such as Zoom and social media so everyone can share in the fun.

Seating Made Easy

Historically, seating charts are the things headaches and nightmares are made of.

This group can't sit with this group, Shelia can't sit by Lindsay, and that's Jim's ex-wife. Nightmares and headaches. One good thing about the pandemic — tables are smaller, making seating easier. And social distancing means tables need to be far apart. Here's a few more hints for making seating as easy as possible.

POD SEATING

Ask people who is already in their bubble and seat those people together. Opt for tables of four or six, max, and leave plenty of room for two-top sweetheart tables to accommodate the rest. Another solution to this problem is lots of small tables, but enforce seating limits and don't let people move tables together. Then, allow people to seat themselves according to their own pods. This works best with picked-up boxes of food or appetizers instead of plated meals.

LIVING ROOM SEATING

Seating people on couches or in armchairs is a hot trend right now. Smaller groups lend themselves well to this luxe, cozy approach to wedding seating. Make sure your venue can



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accommodate this unique wedding style, which encourages conversation. You also could consider half-and-half seating, where guests who opt to dine can sit at tables and guests who've moved on to cocktails and conversation can take advantage of these cozy spaces.

CHILDREN'S TABLES

If kids are invited to the ceremony, have a space set aside for them, perhaps with their own menu of finger foods, along with activities to keep little hands busy. Think coloring books, building brick sets, activity books and more. This should be a less formal setting

where noise is OK and where parents can easily see (and discipline) their children.

NO SINGLES TABLES

Especially with pandemic protocols in place, skipping the singles tables is a good idea. Even in ordinary times, it's an awkward grouping that

ends up embarrassing your guests more often than not. Use your best judgment and treat people how you would want to be treated. Instead, opt for more sweetheart tables or conversation spots for single guests to gather with friends and family at their own pace.

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