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### Beating the \$27,000 wedding

The average ceremony costs \$26,984 -- and that's not counting the honeymoon. Check out creative tips from couples who wed for much less.

By Donna Freedman May 29, 2012 2:28PM

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Kendal Perez, who got married six years ago, would like to point out that some wedding "traditions" are negotiable. She nixed a bridal shower, let her attendants choose their own dresses, decided against wedding favors, did her own makeup and drove to and from the ceremony in her own car rather than hire a limo.

The shopping-deal expert, who blogs at Hassle-Free Savings, is just as married as the folks who pay the \$26,984 that the average wedding now costs (according to The Knot, which runs two wedding websites).

"No guest approached me with complaints about missing out on monogrammed matchbooks or pouches of customized M&Ms," she says. "No complaints from guests hoping to shell out even more cash (on shower gifts) to attend my big day."

You get to choose what your wedding does and doesn't have. Get creative about meeting your wedding needs, though. Make every available dollar work hard, and you'll be able to afford some wedding "wants," too.

Here's how some other couples did it.

#### Something old, something new

Go paperless. Digital invitations are increasingly popular. Some are free, according to Stephania Andrade, a San Diego reader who's helping her sister with a summer wedding. Look for sites such as SmileBox.com and PaperlessPost.com; choose one with an RSVP feature so you can keep track of attendees.

Cheaper paper. Don't like e-vites? By all means use paper invitations, but skip the paisley or multicolored models. "Simplicity screams 'elegance,'" notes April Masini, who writes Ask April, an online advice column.

Feeling lucky? Once you've set the date, enter every wedding-themed contest and sweepstakes you can find. Julie Vlahon recommends this strongly, having won several thousand dollars' worth of bridal supplies that way. Use this Facebook app to search, specifying keywords like "wedding," "bridal" or "honeymoon." Note: Start a new e-mail address for this because you will at least get e-mails from the sponsors and may even have your contact info sold; if a phone number is required, read the rules carefully to make sure you aren't also signing up for ringtones, texts or any other cell-related spam. (Post continues after video.)

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#### WHAT IS FRUGAL COOL?

Donna Freedman's Frugal Cool blog is for readers who want to live cheaply -- whether due to necessity or a lifestyle choice. It explores living sustainably and making life more meaningful at the same time.

#### ABOUT DONNA FREEDMAN



Donna Freedman, a freelancer in Seattle, writes the Frugal Cool blog for MSN Money. She won regional and national prizes during an 18-year newspaper career and earned a college degree in midlife without taking out student loans. She also writes about the frugal life for her own site, Surviving and Thriving.

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Whitman shows how you can save money on your big day by repurposing the bridesmaids' flowers, serving a signature cocktail, and substituting pie for cake.



**Something borrowed.** Before you buy jewelry for the wedding, see if you could use pieces owned by family members. "It is more meaningful, and your mother and/or grandmother will be so touched that you asked," says planner Marisa Manna of So Eventful in San Francisco.

Getting there

**Travel costs.** When Sara McKinniss' brother got married, the bride's mother donated frequent-flier miles to pay for a hotel and plane tickets to Hawaii. "It saved (the couple) thousands of dollars," McKinniss says.

- **Bing:** [The origin of "something old, something new"](#)

**Playing your cards right.** My daughter's engagement lasted two years. During that time she and I each got airline credit cards and earned enough miles for her honeymoon. Opening and later closing a card need not affect your credit scores, incidentally.

**Wedding wheels.** Consider skipping the luxury transportation, suggests wedding photographer [Catherine Fiehn](#). "Rent a convertible or an exotic sports car," says Fiehn, who's based in Darien, Conn.

**Keep it small.** Speaking of transportation: Cristin Frank's minimalist approach to attendants -- a maid of honor and a best man -- meant the entire bridal party fit into a borrowed convertible. Photos were easy, too. "We could actually get close-ups of the four of us, instead of a group (shot) that looked like an eighth-grade graduation picture," says the Williamsville, N.Y., resident.

Watch for deals

**Make an offer.** Ask wedding planners and suppliers about canceled nuptials. Someone who's already paid for linens or lighting will want to get rid of these items. Texas reader Marjorie Asturias says she's "not superstitious" and had no qualms about getting the silver cake slicer that way. No qualms about the price either: \$10. Don't think of it as profiting

from another couple's misfortune; think of it as helping them get some of their money back.

**Bid on it.** Watch for charity or benefit auctions, which often feature goods or services suitable for weddings. You might find your florist or hairdresser that way. Michelle Baylin paid \$800 for a fancy wedding venue that would have cost up to \$4,000.

**Hunt for discounts.** Sites such as [Dealnews](#) and [MyBargainBuddy.com](#) may have just the right bridesmaid gift or trousseau item. Online coupon sites like [RetailMeNot](#), [Savings.com](#) and [FatWallet.com](#) can get you discounts on everything from wedding dresses to table linens.

**Look everywhere.** Mei-Ling Uliasz found decorations for her Halloween-themed wedding at thrift stores and yard sales. Many items were in "free" boxes "since many folks were wanting to get rid of them," she says. Don't rule out Craigslist; my daughter sold a lot of her wedding-related items that way. You might even luck out with [The Freecycle Network](#).

**More frugal tactics**

**Budget booster.** Most of the food and beverages for my daughter's wedding were covered by [free gift cards](#) from MyPoints. (Hint: Wal-Mart gift cards are accepted at Sam's Club.) Sign up for sites like MyPoints and [Swagbucks](#) as soon as you set the date. Ask family and friends to sign up, too.

**Frugal feeds.** If you're having a simple ceremony, a cake-and-punch reception might be the perfect capper. Or consider a potluck; Lauren Rathvon of Sarasota, Fla., asked each guest to bring a small dish, "something that was their specialty or one of their favorites." This not only resulted in a splendid variety, it also ensured that those on special diets (vegan, kosher, gluten-free) knew there'd be at least one dish they could eat.

**Make it snappy.** If you plan to marry within six months, a site called [BrideRush](#) specializes in discounted, date-specific deals on venues, photography, videography, DJs and other wedding needs. There's a "request" feature if you don't see the deal you want, and the site has a blog focusing on last-minute weddings.

**Flash wedding.** I just heard about a young man who invited friends to a surprise birthday party for his girlfriend. When everyone was there he announced the real surprise: They were getting married right there, right then. No bridal shower, no bachelor party, no worry about what to wear -- just the two young people, their families and their best friends. It worked.

**Readers:** Did you think outside the box for your wedding? Have any ideas to share?

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**NEWEST** OLDEST BEST WORST CONTROVERSIAL

LaceyLane13

Jun 7, 2012 2:22PM



Instead of an actual wedding dress, I wore an ivory bridesmaid dress. Most bridesmaid dresses come in some shade of off-white, and can be made full length for an extra fee. If you're short, there will be enough fabric to leave a teeny tiny train in the back after hemming. (This won't work if you really want a train, but my dress cost \$216.)

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DJ Craig (sushiinthemorning)

May 31, 2012 2:05PM



I had one bride who, in place of an expensive wedding cake, bought several Cheesecake Factory cakes and decorated them with flowers. Way less expensive than a traditional cake and soooo good!

1 1 | Replies (0)

TanjaJ

May 30, 2012 12:35PM



There are sooo many ways to save on a wedding, without having a "cheapskate" wedding. My husband and I got married in 2010, and spent \$12,000 on a very nice wedding. Thanks to a longer engagement (20 months) I had ample time to go to bridal shows where I signed up for various raffles and scored \$200 off a florist and \$150 off a dj. We opted not to rent a car, but had a trolley instead that took us and our guests back to the hotel and was cheaper than renting a limo or anything like that (\$100 for 2 nights of transportation). I got 15% of my wedding dress by buying off the rack and had a family member seamstress do the alterations. We did our own invitations and got a cake from Publix that everyone complemented us on. We also got a free officiant and wedding planner thanks to our volunteer work for a wedding charity event we participated in. We saved almost \$2,000 by having an "out of season" wedding. In Georgia, that would be August thanks to the heat and humidity. Other

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Ro in SD CA

May 29, 2012 9:36PM



My husband and I eloped when we were stationed overseas with the Navy. The hall we rented was not available so we had the reception at a local sports club (paid for in part by the canceled venue).. The bachelors each brought a bottle to stock the bar, I think we bought 2 bottles of champaign and soft drinks for the guests at the reception. I think we spent \$70 on flowers for the bride, groom, best man and maid of honor.

I catered my own reception and created the party trays an hour before the wedding. Wedding gifts were: 1 wedding cake, photography services of 2 guests, and assorted cookware/ bakeware items, Our landlord paid for our honeymoon at the local swanky hotel. We were residents of Bermuda so that meant the Grotto Bay Hotel which was also the site of our first date.

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jestjack

May 29, 2012 7:28PM



To be clear, I am no "fan" of The Knot... It is my understanding that these fine folks have a goal ...to seperate you from as much of your money by as many ways as possible. My DD was constantly quoting that ..." the Knot says this is what is SUPPOSED to be spent "...on whatever. After a while it really kind of takes away from the whole purpose of the event IMHO...

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