

The Wedding Planner

The wedding dates have been decided and you don't have a clue where to begin is quite a common feeling. Therefore organising well in advance and planning is so essential to make your event not only special but successful as well. Wedding planners in the market are there to assist you every step of the way with choice of wedding providers who can take the stress away and get the work done for you.

**1-3
YEARS
AHEAD**

START SAVING

Planning to finance your own wedding? A parent planning a child's wedding? Either way, start planning at least one to three years in advance. Invest some money to get a decent return or start saving and keep it aside for the wedding from the pay packet you bring home each month. Begin buying jewellery one piece at a time. You can always trade in designs later.

START LOOKING

If it's to be a semi-arranged marriage or otherwise, set aside at least a year to find a match. Not only can you do it calmly, it gives all options. It allows the couple and families to meet many times before deciding that the alliance is suitable to each other.

**6-8
MONTHS
AHEAD**

SET A DATE

Fix a date that gives enough time for preparations. Schedule within public holidays or weekends. Factor in exams, jobs, religious concerns and weather. Organise time for temple visits, native village trips and so on.

MAKE GUEST LIST

The number of guests will largely decide your wedding budget, venue, catering and more. Get an indicative list from both families well ahead, and follow up later with a detailed list of addresses and e-mail IDs.

SET VENUE

Decide first on city, so that travel tickets can be booked in advance and save money. Find a venue that suits the weather, crowd size and nature of ceremonies. Ask for referrals and visit personally to check facilities, car parking etc. Book at least six months if not more in advance.

ENGAGEMENT PARTY

Do you want a formal engagement? About six months before the wedding is a good time. You could keep it small with a party at home, or hire a banquet hall. Either way, plan well ahead and book venue, send out invites, buy rings, and get the outfits ready.

FITNESS AND BEAUTY REGIME

Start beauty regimes like skin and hair programmes in good time so on the day you are radiant looking.

**4-6
MONTHS
AHEAD**

BUDGET

It's time to draw up a budget. Decide how much you want to spend in total. Draw up a list of what and when you want to withdraw investments or savings. Prioritise expenditure, so that it helps you decide which service provider to select. Do you want to splash on the entertainment or the food or five star venues? Use the Budget sheets to get a grip on where your money is going. It will help you plan expenditure.

WEDDING DRESS

Decide your wedding outfits. Pick a tailor, shop or designer and place the orders, including for accessories.

INVITES

Design or select cards. Sometimes it works to have multiple cards; one 'religious' set; one sent out by families, and one sent out by the couple. Decide on the printer, ask for samples, and always read proofs. Don't ignore envelopes and try to include a location map. Print extra copies as back-up. Mail invites to out-station guests now or at least two months in advance.

ACCOMODATION FOR GUESTS STAYING OVER

Book rooms for your guests or arrange for stays with friends and relatives. Ask if anybody has a vacant flat that you can temporarily use. Serviced apartments are a good idea. Hire or borrow extra mattresses, linen, crockery etc. You might need to hire maids, cooks and drivers for the wedding week, so start looking now.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Most important: it's time to start making a list of all service providers for the wedding. This includes: Caterers,

Confectioners, Florists, Trousseau Packers, Decorators and Lighting, Ushers, Parking Valets, Photographers, Hair and Make-up Artists, Saree Drapists, Mehendi Artist, Priest and Registrars, Car Rentals, and DJs and Entertainment artists. Ask for recommendations, look at providers in the magazines, go online to check credentials, visit personally, and ask for samples and quotes. Always inspect services and equipment beforehand. For eg, check out cutlery, crockery, and linen the caterer provides; or websites and albums of photographers. Start separate files for each service and add visiting cards, quotes etc to this, so that nothing gets lost. Discuss themes thoroughly, if the theme is orange flowers and décor, approve the selections, and ensure availability on the date in adequate numbers. Place orders and book service providers with written receipts and bills so that you can get refunds in case of defaults. Pay advance amounts and settle fully only after the ceremony. Assign one person to one responsibility, which they can see through completely till the wedding day and after. This way, you control quality till the very end. For example, assign one person for the photographer-to book dates, ensure he's in place during each ceremony, and follow up on album delivery and payment.

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**MONTHS
AHEAD**

GIFTING

List and buy all gifts needed for family, in-laws' family, return gifts, and for all those who helped with wedding arrangements. Wherever possible, buy in bulk to save costs; for eg, you can get great deals at wholesale saree shops.

MEDICAL CHECK-UP

Take a thorough physical examination. Make sure you are healthy and take supplements if needed. Consult a gynaecologist for safe contraception and to control the menstrual cycle for the wedding.

LEGAL CONSULTATION

Talk to a lawyer if both of you want a pre-nuptial contract. If the parents of the bride are giving her gifts and property, it's a good idea to register these in her name for future security. Such issues are particularly important if it's an arranged marriage with someone who lives abroad, or for marriages arranged too quickly between unknown families.

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**MONTHS
AHEAD**

NEW ROOM/HOUSE

The newly-weds will move into a new home or a new room in family home. Get the place ready and stock essentials well in time.

SPRING CLEANING

Give your house a lick of paint and clean-up so that you're ready for the thousand teas you will be serving soon.

HONEYMOON

Discuss and find a destination, decide how you will finance it, and book flight and hotels. Get your honeymoon wardrobe ready. Apply for passports and visas.

JEWELLERY

Finish all jewellery purchases like mangalsutra by now. Buy from reputed dealers and insist on receipts and purity certificates. Try on wedding rings for size and alter if needed.

WEDDING APPAREL

The couple should have by now tried on their outfits, given them in for alterations, and purchased all accessories like bags, shoes, cuff links or tie-pins.

WEDDING FUNCTIONS

Sign up for dance lessons if you plan to have a choreographed Sangeet session. Decide on the song and dress code. Decide which friend will arrange the Bridal Shower. Invite the people you want for the Sangeet, Mehendi or Bridal Shower, and organise transport and catering for these days.

**Last
MONTH**

Time for the last-minute checks on caterers, florists, decorations, and so on! Ensure it's all going to plan. Re-confirm all bookings and give final guest lists and numbers to the caterers. Call the DJ/musicians and reconfirm dates, music and programmes. The guests will soon start pouring in, so hire extra hands. Make sure the house is never left unguarded, because a wedding house is ripe temptation for burglars. Indulge in a spa and massage session-whether bride, groom or parents. It's a much-needed break from the pressure and for general sanity. Be prepared for the bachelor/hen party, and give yourself plenty of time to recover from all excesses. You don't want baggy eyes on D-Day.

**Last
WEEK**

List all guest arrival times and ensure transportation to take them to their accommodation. Make sure they are comfortable, and that food and entertainment like sightseeing trips are organised for them. Decide how you want to deal with leftover food. Arrange with organisations beforehand if you want it picked up and used rather than thrown away. Reconfirm bookings with the wedding registrar.

**ON THE
Day**

Get the dressing room at the venue cleaned and prepared. Stock it with iron and sewing kit for emergency repair jobs, as well as with water, fruit juices, snacks and tissues. Keep a first-aid kit handy. The cars that bring families and friends to the venue should be in place, with all car numbers and driver contacts handy. Put ushers at the entrance to show guests in and organise valet parking. Set up a gift table and assign someone to handle all gifts. Make sure the bidaii or farewell car is decorated and ready for the couple to leave the venue for their bridal suite. Make sure all the gifts and personal belongings are transported back to the homes.