



Spirit Unlimited Professional DJ Entertainment Wedding Planning Newsletter #16

Catering & Bar Timeline

Keeping track of time is important when planning a wedding...Use the following catering timeline to maximize your schedule...

10 months before: Begin thinking about your wedding reception menu.

9 months before: Interview caterers.

8 months before: Select and book caterer.

7 months before: Decide wedding reception menu.

3 months before: Finalize your guest list.

1 week before: Give caterer final guest count, including number of vendor meals.

2-3 days before: Give caterer items like place cards, table cards, menu cards, and/or disposable cameras.

Wedding Day: Assign a family member or wedding party member to pay the remaining balance to the caterer at the end of the reception.

Day after: Assign a family member or wedding party member to return any rentals if necessary.

Glossary

We've provided a catering glossary to help familiarize you with some of the words you may hear...

Hors d'oeuvres: Appetizers or “finger food” served usually with cocktails. It is often the first course of either lunch or dinner service.

Cake-cutting fee: The per-plate cost that the caterer and/or venue may charge for a wedding cake prepared by an independent baker.

Russian Service: Formal wait staff service of a multiple course meal. It is also known as “White-gloved” service.

White-gloved Service: Formal wait staff service of a multiple course meal where the food is served by waiters and waitresses wearing white gloves. It is also known as “Russian” service.

Catering Styles

Understanding and identifying the various styles associated with weddings is important...Here is a look at Catering styles...

There are different styles of wedding catering menus: **Traditional**, **Thematic**, and **Ethnic**.

Traditional: Menu items tend to be meats and potatoes, chicken and pastas, or fish and rice. Vegetables are usually of a bean variety.

Thematic: Menu items are chosen to reflect a certain themes. Seafood is a popular theme food for weddings on the beach.

Ethnic: Menu items are selected to reflect the ethnicity of the marriage. Each nationality has certain unique foods that make wonderful wedding reception meals.

What to Look For

It is sometimes difficult to know what makes a quality wedding vendor...we've provided a guide to help you identify the key things to look for...

Inspecting the work of a wedding caterer is important. When you look at their portfolio, a good rule of thumb is to see if the food in their pictures looks fresh, colorful, and diverse.

Here is other criterion to judge:

Presentation: The layout of the food should not only be functional, it should be creative.

Color: The foods represented should create a colorful combination.

Diverse Menu: The caterer should offer different styles of food ranging from red meats to chicken to kosher and vegetarian.

Freshness: The food should not look or taste tired, spoiled, or bland.

Taste: The sample food should taste fresh and flavorful.

New Trends

Wedding trends change and evolve with each New Year...we've provided a run-down of the newest, hottest trends in wedding catering...

Organically-grown fruits and vegetables are a stylish and healthy new option with certain catering companies. The cost tends to be higher but the quality and freshness are much better.

Ethnically themed meals are becoming very popular for wedding receptions. This option will likely increase your overall price but can be a memorable complement to your special day.

Free-range meats and poultry are very desirable for entrees. They tend to be higher priced than their farm or ranch cousins.

Color themes can carry over into the types of foods served by your caterer. This is especially effective when you choose buffet-style service with individual food stations.

Catering Packages & Options

Understanding the typical wedding catering packages and options is important...Here is a look at what is usually available for weddings...

Package

Typically, there are certain packages for wedding catering.

Brunch is generally the earliest meal served. This is usually self-served in a buffet fashion with food stations.

For afternoon or evening receptions, hors d'oeuvres can be a stand-alone service with cocktails or serve as the appetizer portion of a larger meal service.

Lunches and, especially, dinners are the common meals for wedding receptions. These meals can be buffet-style with self-service or "plated" with service by a wait staff.

The estimated head count is a big influence in pricing and menu selection since most caterers will charge by the plate.

Options

Hors d'oeuvres and dinner are the standard for weddings but consider brunch, lunch, tea, cocktails, or dessert-only receptions.

Pasta and chicken menus tend to be less expensive than steak, lamb, pork, or seafood.

Ethnic food and vegetarian options are becoming increasingly popular.

Seated meals can be served in the following styles: Family-style, American, French, or Russian.

Buffet meals can be formal (e.g. staff-served), casual (e.g. self-served), or food stations (e.g. salads, crepe table, etc.).

Standard seated meals are served in three courses. It is not uncommon for reception meals to have five to seven courses.

A good wedding catering company can provide not only food but also bartending and wedding cake services.

A wine and beer-only bar tends to be less expensive than a liquor bar.

Keys to Success

Here are some expert tips to make sure your wedding catering experience is the best it possibly can be...

- ✓ Use a catering service that specializes in weddings and has the proper state license and insurance.
- ✓ Confirm whether your caterer will be handling the cocktail bar service and/or cake design and baking.

- ✓ Make certain to address reasonable gratuities for a typical wedding catering service. You can ask your caterer what they usually receive and then make your decision upon final payment to your caterer.
- ✓ Don't keep your guests waiting at the reception site for your arrival. This not only effects the mood of your hungry friends and family, it can cause the caterer to not be able to serve the meals when they are their freshest.
- ✓ Some caterers will let you provide extra liquor. Be sure to address if they will be charging you a "corkage fee" to open and serve your liquor.
- ✓ Have extra white wine on-hand because guests tend to drink more white wine than red wine.

Catering Questions

When you meet with your prospective wedding caterer, you'll want to ask all the right questions...we've provided a list of what you should make sure to ask when you first speak with them about your wedding. Their attitude, in addition to their responses, will give you a good idea of whether or not you'll want to include them in your wedding plans...

1. How long have you been catering weddings? We recommend at least three years of experience, with 25% or more of their business being wedding receptions.

2. How many weddings do you normally do in one day during the same season as my wedding?

3. Have you catered a reception at the venue we've chosen?

4. Do you have any extra fees or considerations due to the venue we have chosen?

5. What is your guest to waiter ratio?

6. What is the staffs' attire, including on-location chefs?

7. For my budget range and number of guests, what type of menu items do you recommend?

8. Which type of service (buffet or sit-down) would be the best?

9. Are linens included or are they an additional fee?

10. Do you have a selection of linens in colors other than white?

11. Are glasses, plates, and silverware included?

13. How much time will be needed to set up?

14. What type of bar service do you recommend?

15. Is liquor included?

16. How much do you charge per drink?

17. Is there a corkage fee per bottle if we provide our own liquor?

18. Are gratuities included or separate?

19. Do you have a minimum required guest count?

20. When do you need a final guest count?

21. Is there an additional charge for pouring coffee?

22. Is cleanup included?

23. Will you return any rental items?

24. How do you handle overtime?

Things to Avoid

Knowing the pitfalls and traps ahead of time can help save you money, time, and your sanity...Here's a list of things to avoid when planning your wedding catering...

- ✓ Avoid running late on your photographs after the ceremony since this will cause a delay at your reception. This could affect your caterer's ability to serve a hot, fresh meal at your predetermined time.
- ✓ If your reception is outdoors in the heat, pay special attention to serving items that may not stay fresh over the course of your food service.
- ✓ Try to not use a catering service that is handling more than two other weddings on your particular day. Their busy schedule may affect your food cooking, delivery, and service.
- ✓ Pay attention to the color of the meat versus what kind of wine to serve with dinner. If you're serving beef, offer a red wine. If you're serving chicken or fish, offer a white wine.

- ✓ Lay out a floor plan and avoid putting any major food service right next to a dance floor.
- ✓ This could lead to unneeded congestion in your reception site.

References

Checking the reputation, credentials, and service record of a prospective wedding caterer is important before you hire them...

There are several resources available to check the references of a particular wedding caterer:

- ✓ Family and friends who have recently been married
- ✓ Better Business Bureau (B.B.B.)
- ✓ Local Resorts/Country Clubs
- ✓ Other local wedding vendors

Contract/Payment

Knowing what to include in a contract with a wedding caterer is important...we've created a list of important points to consider...

Contract

- Name and contact information for you and the caterer.
- Date, location, including exact address and name of room, exact starting time, and length of your wedding reception.
- Date of final head count for the caterer.
- Waiter-to-guest ratio.
- Number of bartenders, if applicable.
- Type of service (cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, buffet, tea, dessert, seated meal, etc.).
- Specific menu and acceptable substitutions.
- What types and amounts of liquor, if applicable.
- Description of rental items (e.g. tablecloths, napkins, dishes, tables, etc.).
- Name of location catering supervisor.
- Proof of state license and liability insurance.
- Approximate number of guests.
- Costs per person for adults, children, and other vendors.
- Detailed accounting of extra fees including: Sales tax, extra waiter fees, gratuities, delivery, bar or corkage fee, rentals, gratuities, and kitchen fee.
- Total estimated cost.
- Overtime rates.
- Deposit amount due.
- Balance and balance due date.
- Cancellation and refund policy.
- Name of acceptable substitute in case of emergency.
- Caterer's signature
- Your signatures.

Backup Plans

Have a secondary reception location or back up plan in case of inclement weather. Be sure to discuss this with your caterer.

It is important to have contingency plans in place for backup food styles, backup caterer, and a backup location.

Backup Food Style: In case of last minute market price and availability fluctuations, it is smart to have a second choice that is easily obtained by your caterer.

Backup Caterer: Keep your second choice caterer's information just in case there is an emergency with your first choice.

Backup Location: Have a secondary location standing by in case of weather or disaster. Be sure to remember the caterer's needs when you pick your alternative location.

Be sure to address the contingency plan in your written contract.

Checklists

Catering Styles

- Determine Meal Style
- Passed Hors d' Oeuvres
- Hors d' Oeuvres Table
- Pick Buffet Service Style
- Determine Flavors
- Choose Courses
- Identify Requirements
- Pick Entrée(s)
- Cake Only
- Additional Desserts
- Determine Alcohol Service
- Catering Budget
- Traditional Menu
- Thematic Menu
- Ethnic Menu

What to Look For

- Creative Presentation
- Colorful Combinations
- Diverse Menu Choices
- Fresh Looking Food
- Fresh Tasting Food
- Determine Menu
- Choose Food Service style
- Seated Menu
- Buffet Menu
- Number of Courses

- Beverage Service style
- Use Wedding Caterer
- Check State License and Insurance
- Confirm Cocktail Service
- Address Gratuities
- Stay on Schedule
- Extra Liquor
- Determine Corkage Fee

Keys to Success

- Research Reception Menu
- Interview Caterers
- Select and Book Caterer

Caterer Items

- Finalize Reception Menu
- Finalize Guest List
- Give Final Head Count to Caterer
- Give Table Items to Caterer
- Pay Caterer
- Return Rental Items

Number of Guests _____

- Reception Style
- Meal
- Cocktail Service
- Seated Meal Food Service
- Buffet Meal Food Service
- Flavors
- Requirements
- Notes: _____
- Sit-down
- Buffet
- Cocktails/Hors d'oeuvres
- Punch and Cake
- Brunch
- Lunch
- Tea
- Cocktails
- Dinner
- Dessert Only
- Passed hors d'oeuvres
- Hors d'oeuvres tables
- Family-style
- American
- French
- Russian (white-gloved)
- Formal (staff-served)

- Casual (self-serve)
- Food Stations (sushi bar, crepe table, etc.)
- Continental
- Regional
- Seasonal
- Ethnic
- Thematic
- Kosher
- Vegetarian
- Other
- Entrees
- Dessert
- Alcohol

Catering Budget: _____

Notes:

Food Types

- Beef
- Chicken
- Pork
- Lamb
- Seafood
- Pasta
- Vegetarian
- Cake only
- Additional desserts

Catering Bar Amounts

Determining how much alcohol to serve your party is also a challenging task...Here's a worksheet based on 100 guests...if your party's bigger than that, make sure to factor in the extra beverages needed...

Style

- Open Full Bar
- Limited Full Bar
- Beer + Wine Only
- Wine with Dinner
- Champagne Toast
- Specialty Cocktail

Open Bar Amounts: (per 100 guests)

Category Amount	Your Amount
Champagne 18 bottles	_____
Red Wine 10 bottles	_____

White Wine 18 bottles _____
Beer 2-3 cases _____
Bourbon 1-2 liters _____
Gin 2 liters _____
Scotch 3 liters _____
Rum 2 liters _____
Vodka 6 liters _____
Tequila 1 liter _____
Dry Vermouth 2 bottles _____
Sweet Vermouth 2 bottles _____
Tonic 1 case _____
Club Soda 1 case _____
Cranberry Juice 2 gallons _____
Orange Juice 1 gallon _____
Grapefruit Juice 1 gallon _____
Other _____

Wine for Dinner Amounts: (per 100 guests) Your Amount

Red Wine 50 bottles _____
White Wine 50 bottles _____

Champagne Toast Amount: (per 100 guests)

Champagne 18 bottles _____

This guide is provided by Spirit Unlimited Professional DJ Entertainment to assist new couples as they navigate their way through the year leading up to their wedding day. Included are only suggestions and ultimate decisions need to be made by the couple. Spirit Unlimited Professional DJ Entertainment is not responsible for negative outcomes as a result of following guidelines.