

Ask the Wedding Expert

By Kristin Banta

We don't know if we want to do a sit-down dinner for our reception. Are there any other alternatives if we want a night wedding that includes dancing? —Rob & Steve, West Hollywood

Cocktail receptions are a great alternative to a formal sit-down dinner, and (if done right) can result in significant savings. To ensure that your guests do not leave your wedding hungry and grumpy, note "Cocktail Reception to Follow" on your invitations (so guests know to eat a good lunch or a snack prior) and be sure to serve a wide variety of hors d'oeuvres (including a couple of heartier options) and possibly incorporate a large station.

We're trying to put together our bridal party. My fiancé wants to include nine people, and I only have four people on my side. Does this mean

that I need to find five other people? —Chris & Christian, Los Angeles

Not at all! There are absolutely no rules when it comes to this. Your wedding party absolutely does not have to have an equal number of groomsmen on each side. In fact, do not be afraid to omit a wedding party altogether. Long gone are the days of massive wedding parties in matching outfits. If you want to involve your closest pals, there are other ways to incorporate them into the day, some of which may result in them having an even better time.

We decided to have our wedding in Palm Springs. Most of our guests will be staying for the entire weekend. Do we need to host a welcome reception the day before the wedding and a brunch the day after? —Rick & Paolo, Long Beach

Although it's a very lovely gesture to host a welcome reception and/or post-wedding brunch (as it gives your out-of-towners something to do, particularly something to eat and drink), it is by no means absolutely necessary. It is, however, another chance for you to spend time with your out-of-town guests. Additionally, a welcome reception is a great opportunity for your guests to get to know one another in a relaxed setting before the formality of the wedding day.

We don't really want to have kids at the wedding. How can we convey this to our guests without insulting anyone? —Steve & Omar, Palm Springs

This is a very common question. Unfortunately, invitation etiquette puts the kibosh on putting this information on your wedding invitations. Your wed-

ding website is a great place to communicate to guests that your wedding will be adults only. Additionally, ask your family and close friends to help pass this information along to your guests with children.

Is it enough for us to just register in one location or do we need to register in multiple locations? And can we put this information on our invitation? —Brandon & Patrick, Culver City

As long as you are sure to register for items at a wide range of price points, do not feel pressured to register at more than one location. If all of your favorite gadgets and gizmos can be found in one place, why send your guests elsewhere? Unfortunately, etiquette dictates that your registry information should never be on your invitation. Your wedding website is



If we plan to have our wedding on the beach, can we still request black-tie for the attire?

—Victor & Rob, Marina del Rey

I would absolutely advise against it. A beach wedding suggests a more casual environment. If you're going to force your guests to schlep through the sand, the kindest thing to do would be to save them from ruining their tuxes and Jimmy Choos, with a request for more relaxed attire. Providing flipflops is always a good idea regardless.

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Are you in the middle of planning the big day and find yourself with questions about planning, design, logistics, budget or etiquette? What do you want to know? How can we help!? Send in your questions and concerns to info@kristinbanta.com so we can get you on track.



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the best place to list your registry, and I'm sure Aunt Carole and Grandma Bea won't mind helping to spread the word on where you're registered either.

We are not really into flowers but have never been to a wedding that did not have them. What else can we do that would make the space pretty without importing a million roses from Holland? —Larry & Paul, Los Feliz

Anything and everything! I have done a number of weddings without a single flower in sight, utilizing everything from installation art to a variety of inspired residential décor! If you love candlelight, you could focus your budget (and your tablescape) on a mass of pillar candles and votives. If you and your fiancé are obsessed with milk glass, think about doing a sea of milk glasses down the center of the table.

When I'm designing an event, I ask couples to think of their über-home and use that concept as the starting point for designing their wedding. If flowers aren't

your thing and you don't imagine your über-home to be full of florals, do not feel as though your wedding has to be flower-tastic. Your décor (like everything else) should embody the things that you love.

Our friend has a big house with a huge lawn they said we could use to host our wedding at no cost. We are watching our budget very closely. Should we take them up on their offer? —Nick & Jerome, West Hollywood

No! Although your friend's lovely offer will save you on initial site fees, you will end up spending more on your actual wedding than if you hosted your wedding at a hotel or other event-ready location. Transforming your friend's lawn and home into an event-ready space will greatly challenge your budget, with a majority of it being spent on basic rentals like building a kitchen, valet, restrooms, tent, flooring, etc., long before you even get to the fun stuff like the music, décor and menu.



Kristin Banta currently serves as the weekly wedding expert for the Hallmark Channel's *Home & Family* and is the host of *Keep the Party Moving*, a new show being developed by the Style network. Known as a long-standing advocate within her community for marriage equality, she is passionate about helping her clients find their own voice for their wedding day. KristinBanta.com

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