

Top Banana Photography

LAS VEGAS WEDDING TIPS

The following tips and suggestions are for both locals and out-of-towners. Over the last few years, I have photographed countless Las Vegas weddings and have acquired information that will hopefully help you plan your ideal wedding. Some of the following ideas are photography-based (marked by *), but most are general and beneficial to everyone. Remember, you're basically planning a big—or not so big—party. Planning should be *fun*—don't even *consider* stressing out.

Okay, let's begin!

If you and your fiancé are like most couples, you'll probably figure out the **DATE** and the **VENUE** first.

DATE When it comes to weather, April, May, September, and October are generally beautiful in Las Vegas. March and November can be pleasant as well, but they are still “wildcard” months—some days are perfect as paradise, others are brisk and windy. Speaking of wind, Las Vegas has a lot of it. In fact, it is blowing hard as I type this right now. Wind isn't going to make or break your big day, though, so don't worry. I just want to give you a heads up on what Las Vegas is capable of—and for those of you who are allergy-prone, don't forget the Claritin. Although wind can be a bit annoying, it's not half as bad as rain. Since it rarely rains in Las Vegas, the chance of having a bright sun and clear skies on your wedding day is *very* good—hooray! June, July and August are scorching hot, but you probably knew that already. If you are planning a summer wedding, plan it accordingly. For example, don't schedule a one-hour ceremony on the un-shaded golf course at noon—trust me, it's no fun for anyone. (And if your family is anything like mine, they'll never let you live it down).

Late November through February is considered the “off season” for weddings. If you plan on getting married during these months, keep in mind that you *may* qualify for a discounted rate from the vendors you hire (i.e. reception hall, photographer, DJ, etc). In addition, getting married on a weekday (Monday through Thursday) *may* qualify you for another discount. Since most weddings are generally on the weekend, most vendors are willing to offer a discount during these days since the demand is much lower. My business offers 20% off any weekday wedding and I know other wedding vendors who do the same. Just ask and see. You may be surprised at the deal that is in store for you!

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VENUE There are four types of venues to choose from: Wedding Chapel Church Country Club/Reception Hall Private Residence

WEDDING CHAPEL There are various reasons why couples choose to get married in a Las Vegas wedding chapel: it's cheap, it's quick, it's "Vegas" and Elvis might make an appearance. There may be additional reasons, but those are the main ones. Depending on the wedding you want to plan, this may be the perfect option for you. In and out! Those are the three best words to describe a typical Las Vegas wedding chapel. The ceremony is 10 minutes maximum, the following wedding is 5 minutes after yours, and there is no time to dillydally. After vows are exchanged, the staff photographer takes you and your new spouse to a few set locations, snaps some photos, and moves on to the next couple. Linger is not encouraged and some chapels will repeatedly remind you that your package was 20 minutes—not 23 minutes—so please make room for the next wedding since there is limited parking and no one wants to meter park. If you want quick, inexpensive, and informal, getting married in a wedding chapel is the way to go.

* If photos are important to you, hire an outside photographer. Wedding chapels generally include photography in their wedding packages, but the photos tend to be so-so quality, cheesy poses, and overpriced. The staff photographers at wedding chapels only photograph on property and have set poses. If you want a photo tour on the Strip or more photographs at other locations, hire a photographer to pick up where the staff photographer leaves off. This way, you'll get a much wider range of backdrops and poses. To sum it up, pay for the wedding package with the least amount of photos and use the extra money to hire an outside professional for a couple hours. This is assuming photos are important to you; if they aren't, make life easier by ordering the package you want and just ask Uncle Bob to snap a few extra for Facebook.

CHURCH A church is clearly the most traditional venue. Most churches do not have the urgent time constraints of wedding chapels, but they will be more expensive to rent. One benefit to getting married in a church is that you will probably already know the officiant and church event planner. Because of this, you can communicate your needs with them directly and ahead of time.

* Some churches have photographers they work with and it is a good idea to consider them since they have experience with the property and know "the rules" (yes, churches have rules when it comes to photography—keep reading).

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Churches, unlike some reception halls, do not force you to hire one of their preferred photographers and there is no additional fee for bringing in an outside photographer. Depending on the church, flash photography may not be allowed. In addition, some churches have certain areas that photographers and videographers cannot enter. Neither of these restrictions should be a problem if your photographer has the necessary equipment to work under these conditions. Just make sure to find out the specific rules from the event planner and communicate them to your photographer and videographer. It's nice when everyone is on the same page!

COUNTRY CLUB/RECEPTION HALL These two venues are in the same category since my experiences with them have been identical. The main reason people choose to get married at a country club or reception hall is because it is all-inclusive. This means that you can do everything in one place—get dressed, exchange vows, dance the night away, etc. This is especially advantageous if you and/or your guests are from out of town and directions aren't your strong suit. Having everything in one place assures you that Aunt Doris from Daytona won't end up at the Hoover Dam Visitor Center when she is supposed to be in the front row at your ceremony.

PRIVATE RESIDENCE I have photographed several weddings at private residences and I think it is a wonderful idea. Renting out a nice house, especially in this economy, is not as expensive as you may think. It also gives you maximum control of your wedding day. You can hire any vendor you want, rearrange the details to your liking, set up days before, and establish the exact times you want. You want a sunset ceremony? Done. You want to crash 50 feet from the spot where you got married? No problem. You don't always have the luxury of so many options at reception halls and wedding chapels. Do keep in mind that you *will* have neighbors and *some* of them will take advantage of the opportunity to get all riled up and call the police two seconds into "The Cha Cha Slide" (this happened at a wedding I shot last year). One remedy to this situation is to forewarn the nearby residents that you're getting married and they'll probably forgive you if your reception is rowdy and they lose sleep.

These tips will hopefully get you started on the right path and give you an idea of what to expect when you get married in fabulous Las Vegas. Everything written above is based on my experiences and/or opinions from the last five years photographing Las Vegas weddings.

Good Luck and Enjoy the Journey!

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