

Summer Weddings



Dress Shop Like a Pro

It's likely the most memorable garment you'll ever wear. Yet there's no handy manual on how to pick a wedding dress.

Here are a few typical mistakes to avoid:

DON'T RUSH TO DECIDE

There are many factors to consider when shopping for your summer wedding dress, including shape, cut, fabric and size. The process can feel overwhelming, but it's important not to rush through things. Avoid settling on a specific style or color too quickly. Look beyond your initial online searches and the first fitting. Turn to Instagram and Pinterest to explore new gown ideas. Visit designers, blogs, dress stores and bridal salons to see how these garments look on real people. Keep in mind that the perfect dress may not be one of the first ones you try on. Stay aware and patient.

DON'T BUY TOO EARLY

It can be tempting to make a purchase right after getting engaged — especially when you consider the time that it takes to complete a gown, which can range from 4 to 10 months. But it's important not to order your wedding dress too early. This is a significant investment, to the tune of hundreds (or even thousands) of dollars. So, wait until you are fully prepared,



both personally and financially. Buying too early may also result in missing out on a dress that better suits your budget and style. Instead, keep an eye out for sales, as the savings can be used for other aspects of your special day.

DON'T OVERTHINK IT

As the wedding day approaches, every bride wants to have the support of friends and family around her. While moms offer valuable insights and gal pals provide emotional support, it is crucial to nar-

row down the group to a few trusted confidants — especially when it comes to choosing a dress. Avoid extensive group discussions and do your best not to hear only what you want to hear. Make sure to check the guest limit at bridal

salons in advance, since many only allow a handful of guests, including the bride. With this smaller circle, your mother or a trusted bridesmaid can help ensure a relaxed experience while providing thoughtful advice.

A New Era for Registries

With so many people living together, less is now more.

In years past, it was customary for couples to have multiple registries before getting married — but times have changed. Nowadays, more couples are choosing to live together and have their own households before tying the knot. As a result, the problem they face is not a lack of items but rather too many.

Newlyweds may also reside in smaller spaces compared to couples in the past, and they simply do not require many traditional registry items — in particular extensive sets of fine china or silverware.

Environmentally conscious couples may also choose to forgo a registry altogether to reduce waste and keep items out of landfills. Regardless of their individual motivations, more couples are deciding that traditional registries aren't always necessary.

CHARITY DONATIONS

One trendy option is to request that your guests donate to a charitable organization.

You can give them the freedom to select a charity that they personally endorse, or you can suggest a few options that hold significance for you. Try not to limit yourself to just one charity, however, since your guests might have their own favorite nonprofit. Allowing friends and family to choose where the donation goes can give them a



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feeling of empowerment.

HONEYMOON FUND

Some engaged couples are deciding to establish a honeymoon fund where guests can contribute money. Numerous websites are available to assist in setting it all up. You may also choose to finance the honeymoon yourselves and

request guests to gift you with experiences during your trip, such as a wildlife excursion or a dinner at a restaurant.

NO REGISTRY

To avoid receiving any gifts, ask parents and members of the bridal party to inform everyone that gifts are not necessary. It is important to

include this message in all wedding stationery and communications. Be advised, however, that some guests may bring gifts, anyway. So go ahead and order thank you cards to express your gratitude.

COLD HARD CASH

Other couples may opt for

monetary gifts instead — and that's become perfectly acceptable. Provide a brief about what you're saving for, whether it's a new house or to start a family, so that guests can feel like they're a part of your journey. As with honeymoon registries, there are now online platforms available to guide you in creating a cash registry.

Before Your Beach Wedding

There's no experience like standing barefoot in front of the ocean while professing your eternal love to that extraordinary person.

Beach weddings offer a romantic and laid-back vibe, but they also require meticulous planning. Make sure that your special day goes smoothly by following these helpful tips.

HIRING A PROFESSIONAL

A professional wedding planner can handle the more stressful aspects of a beach wedding, such as obtaining permits for specific areas or licenses for activities like bonfires. It's sometimes preferable to have someone other than a family member handle unexpected situations, like dealing with passersby or individuals who are encroaching on your event space, to make the day run more smoothly.

ALL ABOUT TIMING

Sunset ceremonies appear to be enchanting, but the harsh rays can cause discomfort. Besides, who wants to be caught squinting in pictures? Instead, think about the well-being of all your guests — especially the youngest and oldest attendees. Sunshine may even pose a hazard on the uneven surface of a beach.



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DRESS FOR SUCCESS

As the bride, you have the right to choose any gown that brings you joy and happiness. But beach weddings raise certain considerations. Consider the practical implications of walking in a flowing ball gown on a sandy, bumpy surface. You'll also be surrounded by a significant amount of fabric if

you seek the voluminous, traditional look, and conditions promise to be hot.

Consider dresses made of lighter fabrics that will more gracefully sway with the ocean breeze. As for the groom and his groomsmen, consider forgoing blazers and dinner jackets in favor of looser shirts. If maintaining a touch of for-

mality is important to you, suspenders can be worn to add a hint of elegance.

OTHER CONCERNS

If all goes well, you'll have a gorgeous setting. Weather can be very unpredictable, however, so create a Plan B. Beach weddings can also be pretty loud, with their proximity to

both wind and waves. It's best to prepare for a certain lack of privacy. You're likely going to have a few strangers looking on.

Provide baby powder to help guests get rid of sand particles on their feet. You may also be required to immediately clean up the area, depending on your permits.

A Revolution in Rings

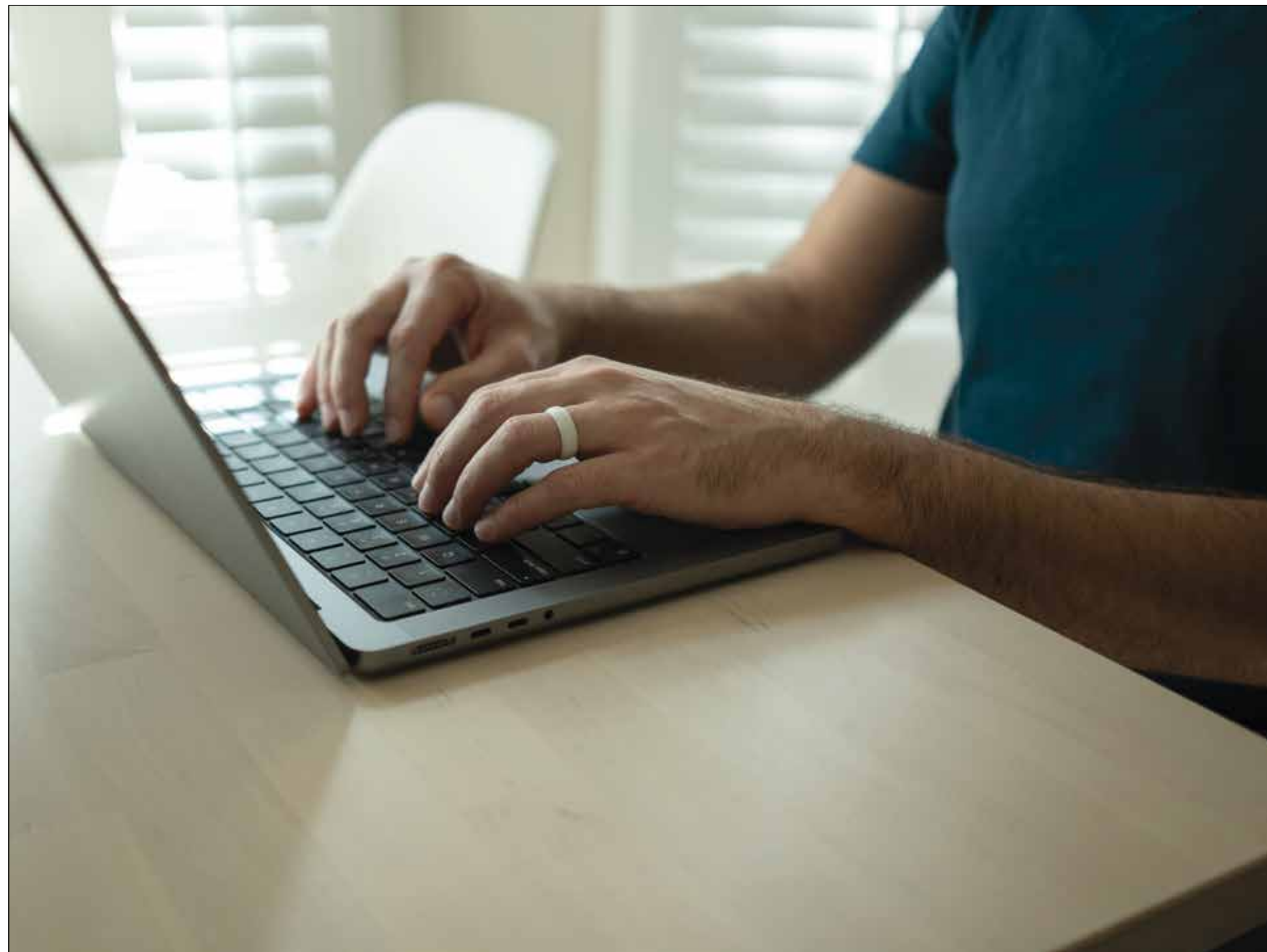
Wedding rings have been exchanged for millennia, but that doesn't mean they haven't evolved.

Contemporary rings have taken on a more futuristic look when compared to the conventional gold and silver bands. The hottest new trend is silicone rings, and they're particularly suited to individuals leading active lifestyles:

WHY THEY'RE HOT

Silicone bands are very light, and they stretch, bend and break away. That's very beneficial if you work in a field that's hazardous to your fingers. They're also preferred by those who play sports, work out or maybe just have fingers that tend to swell. Unlike traditional metal bands, silicone rings also come in an impressive array of colors and finishes. You can even purchase iridescent versions. They can be specially engraved, and come in different widths, patterns and textures.

Some are meant to be stackable, and they come with different edges for your comfort. Several companies also offer limited edition designs by artists who work to create a once-in-a-lifetime purchase. This may also be a good option if you have an expensive or heirloom wedding set that you don't want to wear at all times. You can have the



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permanent, traditional set, and then a silicone ring for everyday wear.

WHAT DO THEY COST?

Silicone bands offer a more affordable alternative to bands crafted from precious metals, with prices starting at around \$20. Any additional customization options like

engraving or intricate finishes will naturally come with extra charges. For those who tend to misplace jewelry, these bands can provide a cost-effective solution.

WHERE TO BUY?

They're often found at local sporting goods and outdoors stores. As the trend has taken

hold, some jewelers have also started carrying silicone bands as an option for their customers. That's led to an array of exciting new options.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Allergic reactions can occur with any type of ring, including this one. Find out if you have an allergy to silicone

before you buy. It's also important to ensure that the ring fits properly, as a tight-fitting ring can cause discomfort. Because of the ring's unique construction, it is important to exercise caution when handling chemicals. Closely follow cleaning instructions provided by the manufacturer.

Managing Out-of-Towners

Your wedding guests are likely more scattered than ever.

Wedding guests used to live nearby. Nowadays, however, couples should anticipate that many of their guests (if not all) will be traveling from out of town. Given the effort and expense involved, couples often feel compelled to provide special assistance for friends and family. Here's how to smooth the way for your wedding's out-of-town guests:

ACCOMMODATIONS AND TRAVEL

You are not obligated to arrange a hotel block or coordinate travel plans for your guests. But they'll likely welcome local recommendations. Compile a list of hotels or alternative lodging options close to your wedding location, as well as your top restaurant picks, cafes and coffee shops. Share any insights you have about the local airport to assist with travel logistics, including long security lines or limited parking. Offer choices that cater to various budgets. For instance, you might mention other nearby airports for guests to consider, if they can fly more cheaply.

TRANSPORTATION

Inform your guests in advance if it would be more convenient for them to rent a car. It might be helpful to assist relatives and guests in



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coordinating carpools or to offer tips on making arrangements for transportation to and from the airport and other event locations. This is particularly important if you have guests who do not drive. Hotels might be willing to offer a shuttle or bus service for your gathering, especially if you have already booked a

block of rooms.

ENTERTAINMENT

It's not necessary to plan every moment of the journey, but pre-ceremony gatherings and suggestions for fun activities will keep your guests in high spirits. Consider hosting a welcoming celebration before the more intimate

rehearsal dinner, or perhaps a cocktail hour or even a pizza party to express your gratitude.

HELPFUL SCHEDULE

Provide out-of-town guests with a complete wedding schedule, and make it available both in print and online for easy access while everyone

is on the move. Consider packaging the schedule in a creative gift basket that showcases local restaurants and shops. (Hotel staff may be able to help place the baskets in guestrooms.) Help everyone make the most of their free time by making other suggestions for activities that suit various age groups and budgets.

Making a Great Toast

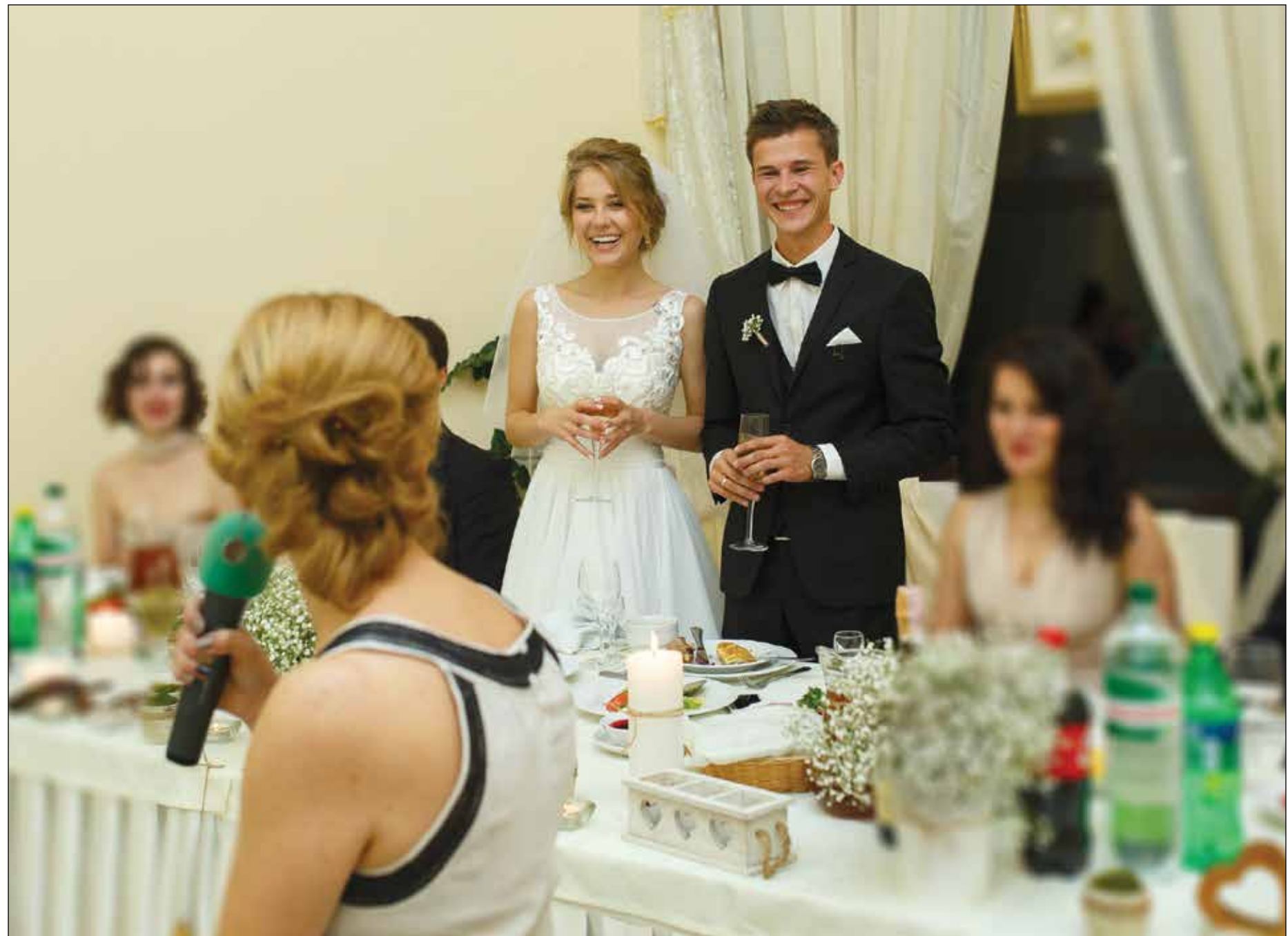
Toasting at a wedding gives you a chance to leave a lasting impression — or to stumble embarrassingly. Here are the essential elements for delivering the very best toast.

LONG TRADITION

Throughout history, individuals have been raising their glasses in celebration. This long-standing tradition can make it challenging to make a memorable impression when tasked with giving a speech as best man or maid of honor. Some people become anxious and stumble over their words, while others may unintentionally say something inappropriate. Remember, you were chosen for this role because of the influence you've had on their lives. Take comfort in knowing that you are surrounded by supportive friends.

STAY CLASSY

This toast will be delivered in front of the most significant individuals in this couple's lives, among them elderly family members, lifelong friends and colleagues. The purpose is to provide words of support as they embark on their journey into married life. Make sure your toast lands properly by refraining from



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inappropriate remarks or jokes, as well as any form of bad language. If alcohol is being served at the reception, it is crucial to be mindful of your intake. Over-imbibing can lower inhibitions, potentially leading to unintended slip-ups in speech.

KEEP IT SHORT

Inquire about the time allo-

cated for toasts. You don't want to embarrass yourself or the newlyweds when delivering this brief speech. The couple may still have a busy schedule ahead of them, including traditional events like the father/daughter dance. If left to your own discretion, aim for a duration of three to five minutes. Going beyond this timeframe may

result in losing everyone's attention. At the same time, a shorter speech might convey a lack of effort or preparation.

KEEP IT SWEET

Humor has the power to break the ice and create a joyful atmosphere during special events. Still, it is important to be selective about the topics you choose to discuss in a

toast. The most memorable speeches are those that strike a balance between humor and heartfelt personal stories, evoking both laughter and tears.

Steer clear of embarrassing tales, especially those related to past relationships. This forward-looking occasion is simply not suitable for revisiting those memories.

Packing for Your Honeymoon

Your wedding should be a memorable occasion that you will cherish forever. At the same time, however, you'll also likely feel a partial sense of relief once the stress of organizing such a significant event is over.

Now, you can start anticipating some much-needed relaxation on your honeymoon. Whether you have planned a tranquil beach retreat, a brief city escape or an exciting mountain expedition, you'll need to have certain necessary items. Here's how to pack like a pro:

MAKE A LIST

Start by making a list. It's the best way to avoid forgetting any essential items. And don't wait until after your wedding when the timeline is usually more compressed. You'll end up rushing through it all, increasing the chances that you'll forget something. Take a moment to revisit and revise the list, as needed, keeping in mind both your plans and potential weather conditions.

Select versatile items that can be mixed and matched. The best outfits can potentially serve multiple purposes during a longer trip.



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TRY TO PACK LIGHT

Traveling becomes significantly easier when you don't have to worry about checking any luggage. Would you prefer to waste time waiting for luggage at the carousel or be whisked off to a refreshing beachside cocktail or cozy snacks at an intimate restaurant?

Simplify your packing pro-

cess by including versatile clothing items for your trip. Stores also offer plenty of space-saving essentials, including packing cubes and pack-flat toiletry kits.

CHECKING A BAG

Despite the inconvenience, sometimes you simply have to check a bag — in particular on extended trips or honey-

moons where you'll be making multiple stops in different climates. If checking a bag is necessary, it becomes even more important to carefully plan your carry-on — because your luggage may be delayed.

Carry-on items should ideally include an extra outfit, a swimsuit, comfortable shoes and another spare outfit that's suitable for dinner.

These items will help you manage the first couple of days, as needed, while waiting for your checked luggage.

You will also have given yourself more time to purchase necessary items at the arrival point if your delay lasts longer than expected. You don't want a mixup at the airlines to derail your big plans.