

Questions to Ask the Reception Venue



1. Do you have a facility director? If so, will he be there on my wedding day?

A facility director is like the man behind the curtain at the reception. Because he often works for the facility, he is your go-to person should anything go awry while you're enjoying your celebration. Be sure to get a list of his responsibilities and confirm his attendance at your wedding before you sign the contract. If the facility itself pays him, you should not have to pay extra for this service. (Note: A tip of \$100 to \$500 for the facility director is not expected, but for superior service, it is acceptable and appreciated.)

2. Do I have to be a member of the country club?

Since country-club memberships are usually very expensive, most clubs let outsiders hold events there if they are sponsored by a member. Before you even visit any club spaces, inquire about the membership requirements. With the exception of super-exclusive country clubs, there are usually ways around them.

3. Will a shuttle to and from the ceremony and reception be provided?

Making wedding-day transportation a no-brainer for your guests will ensure that things run on time. If the reception site does not make shuttles available, rent your own.

4. At what time will my guests have to leave the facility?

Understanding the timeline of the day will help you plan more efficiently. Ask the reception hall to write the time in the contract. Some sites charge up to \$500 an hour for overstaying.

5. Is there a service charge on top of the bill? If so, how much?

Generally speaking, there's always a service charge for the food and beverages. The average is usually 20 percent of the food and beverage bill. Ask your contact at the reception hall about

tipping on top of the service charge. Typically, if the bar is hosted, the bartenders won't accept tips. If it's a cash bar, ask about the standard tipping protocol.

6. Must I use vendors of your choosing?

Some venues will expect you to use their caterers and florists. Know that you can sometimes avoid this, but at a hefty cost. Normally, you have to pay a fee to the house caterer for not using it, in addition to paying your own caterer.

7. Are there any consequences for not fulfilling the food and beverage minimum?

If you've decided on a cash bar, those purchases may go toward that minimum.

8. Do you allow alcohol and open flames?

Many museums have restrictions about the types of alcohol that can be brought in. Red wine might be a no-no, as might mixers with serious staining potential. Also ask about having candles. Flames are not always a welcome element in places containing storied art.

9. Will there be a hosted bar, a cash bar, or a combination of the two?

This is a personal decision that you and your fiancé should make based on your budget, not one that should be dictated to you. The best answer you can hope for is that there will be a combination.

10. Who is responsible for setting up and tearing down the decor, and when will it be completed?

No matter where your wedding is, find out if you need to hire an extra person to take care of constructing and deconstructing the wedding set. Sites will normally cover this portion of the program for a fee. If your wedding is in a backyard, offer to pay the florist and the caterer extra to help out.

Questions to Ask the Reception Venue (continued)



11. Will you rope off an area for parking?

Most likely there will be a parking lot, but there may also be an extra charge for it. Additionally, some institutions require you to use a valet service, which can be a hefty expense, because you have to pay and tip the attendants (about \$40 to \$60 per attendant).

12. What's the backup plan?

Make sure the facility has a contingency plan when it comes to bad weather or other unforeseeable circumstances.

13. What's the corkage fee if I bring my own wine?

Supplying the wine—no matter where your wedding is—could save you money, depending on the corkage fee. Standard fees, which vary from city to city, might run from \$8 to \$20 a bottle. Even at the higher end, however, this still may prove to be more of a bargain than using the site's wine selection, which is generally sold at a triple markup.

14. How early can I get into the site to set up?

Reception halls generally allow you ample time for this. But with

museums, galleries, theaters, and stadiums, inquire early and often about how much time you have. Occasionally they won't permit a setup until the public hours of operation are over. For instance, if a gallery closes at 5 p.m. on a Saturday and your reception begins at 7 p.m., that will pose a severe time crunch.

15. Are there restrictions for the photographer?

If you've booked the reception at your favorite art museum, only to be told that flashing camera lights are prohibited near the painting where your fiancé first kissed you, you might want to rethink that location.

16. Are there any additional costs—cleaning fees, insurance-fee waivers, etc.?

Get it all in writing so there are no surprises.

17. How many weddings will be booked on my day?

Only if you're booking a massive event space should there be more than one event scheduled on your day. Make sure that you're getting the time you've been allotted and have paid for.