

BAR HARBOR CATERING COMPANY

Venue 101

Finding the perfect venue for your wedding or event can be a challenging task. The cost is undoubtedly one of the biggest deciding factors when choosing where to celebrate, and it's not always apparent in the initial price tag. So, before you sign the dotted line, let us help by providing some important questions you should be asking yourself and your venue when making your decision.

How long is the rental?

Some rentals are only available the day of the event, while others may be yours for the whole weekend. What's the difference? Day only rentals can be difficult to manage, especially when using a rental company, or if you need to do a lot of decorating and set-up. While a lower rate for a 24 hour period may seem like a great deal, keep in mind that you will need to set up and break down your entire event directly before and after your festivities, which makes for a long (and oftentimes stressful) day. We encourage our couples to get all of the dirty work done the day prior to the wedding, allowing them to enjoy (and not stress!) on their wedding day. Having a bit of time on Sunday morning allows for the final clean up to take place in the light of day and for you to pick up gifts and decor in a more leisurely time frame.

Who's going to clean-up?

Congratulations, you're married and the reception was a resounding success! Now that your guests have gone home though, who's going to clean-up? Knowing beforehand who is responsible for the final clean up of the event space and what the venue's specific interpretation of "clean" means is another important question to ask. Some venues require that you leave the venue exactly as you found it, completely swept, mopped, and toilets scrubbed; others are happy for you to remove your decor and not much else. It's good to know these things beforehand so you don't get stuck without a security deposit or clean-up fee while basking in the glow of your post-reception glow.

If the cleaning responsibilities fall on you as the renter, you need to know who will complete these tasks and what the timeframe for doing so is. Often, you can pay an additional fee to have the venue's in-house cleaner handle these tasks for a better rate than hiring someone on your own, or having to do it yourself. Don't assume that your caterer or other vendors will complete these tasks -- be sure to ask if it's part of their contracts and if not, what the cost might be for them to do so.

Another part of cleanup that is often overlooked is the removal of trash and bottles. Does your venue have a dumpster or bottle return area? Events create lots of trash, so don't forget to ask if your caterer handles the removal of these items (we do!), or how trash is generally handled at your particular venue. Having to haul trash and bottles on your own at the end of the night could mean additional costs of having to dump it yourself, and usually is a messy endeavor.

Does your venue have working bathrooms?

Here in Downeast Maine, you can never assume that there is going to be a bathroom on site and sometimes, even when it is, the system may be a bit old to handle the number of guests you'll be having. Make sure to ask your venue what their policy is regarding restroom usage. Is the plumbing up to date? Is there a "cap" as to how many guests the system can handle? Are portable toilets required by the venue?

This is another example of a hidden cost you may not know about unless you ask, and you should make sure to factor the additional costs into your overall budget. Porta potties in our area can run from a few hundred dollars for a basic set to a few thousand for a restroom trailer with running water, working toilets, AC/heat, and all the luxuries of a hotel restroom. While no one wants to spend money on toilets for a wedding, it's a necessity that should never be ignored, and your guests will thank you for it.

Does your venue have a kitchen?

If you are planning on serving food, you'll need to make sure that there is somewhere to cook, serve, wash, and store food. If your venue has a kitchen, that's great, just don't assume that the use of it is covered by your rental fees. Make sure to ask if it's included, and if not, what the rate is to use it is. It's also important to find out what equipment they have in their kitchen; not every venue has commercial-grade facilities, and it will be very difficult to prepare food for 200 people if all you have is a sink and toaster oven.

If you are hiring a caterer, make sure to ask them what equipment they will need based on your menu, guest count, service style, and so on. Not all catering companies have all their own portable kitchen equipment to bring to events. A simple household stove and sink will usually not suffice for more than 25 people and many events will require additional cooking equipment, which the client will need to provide.

If the venue does not have a kitchen at all, you'll need to ask if there is a space to create one. If you need to build a kitchen at your venue, (yes, this happens more than you'd think), be sure to account for the costs of renting a kitchen tent and filling it with the necessary cookware and prep space. Good rental companies will be well versed in this, so don't be shy asking for a breakdown of the cost for an average kitchen tent.

Can you or can't you?

Every venue comes with its own set of rules. Check to see that the venue does not restrict the use of things like open flame if you envision a BBQ or lots of real candles as part of your decor. Do they have a restriction on food trucks? Be sure to check to see if your venue has restrictions on which food(s) cannot be served, as privately owned inns and homes, for instance, may only allow kosher or vegan food to be prepared in their kitchens. Knowing all of the restrictions and rules ahead of time can save you trouble and sometimes additional costs, fees, or fines later on.

What is the alcohol policy at your venue?

Some venues require you to use their in-house bar packages or staffing. Others allow you to BYOB. Some require that you hire only state-licensed bar services. Be sure to read the fine print of any alcohol requirements at your particular venue and ask to see pricing require you to use in-house services before booking. Don't forget to ask about policies regarding permits required by the town or local ordinances, and for insurance requirements at the venue (see more below).

Do you need event insurance?

Does your venue require that you take out an event insurance policy? Single day event policies can run a few hundred dollars online, or you can ask your insurance agent if it's included as part of an existing homeowner's policy. Ask your caterer if they have the necessary insurance required, (most reputable companies will -- we certainly do!). Some venues require that both the caterer and the client have policies, so be sure to check these requirements and costs before booking both your venue and caterer.

What time does the party stop?

Does the venue have a 'hard-stop' time when music needs to end and guests need to be gone? While liquor laws prevent the service of alcohol past 1 am in the state of Maine, some venues may require you to end your party as early as 9 pm to comply with local noise ordinances or neighbor considerations. This could be a deal breaker if you enjoy late night dance parties. It's important to ask your venue beforehand so that you don't find out that you can't legally have the party you

want to after you've signed the contract. And it's always best to know ahead of time if there are any fees for hourly overages or violations of their policy.

Where for art thy venue?

While the serene waterfront location you've envisioned in a remote beach town may seem like a dream come true, you need to remember that remote locations require a lot of logistical planning and juggling. Have you considered the transportation plans and costs of getting yourself and your guests to and from the venue? Is lodging available nearby at various price points? Is there a taxi or shuttle service available to get your guests home safely after a night of prosecco toasts and signature cocktails? If you're hosting a party with alcohol service, you need to consider how your guests will get home and it's your responsibility to communicate those plans, both before and after the event. Safety is an important consideration, and as a good host, you should think of how you can help your guests enjoy themselves without worry.

If you plan on choosing a hard to reach location, such as an island that requires ferry service, be sure to check with all of your vendors before finalizing plans to see what additional fees, if any, would be incurred by having to transport staffing and supplies. On average, for nearby island weddings that require water taxis or ferry service, expect to pay 25-50% more for most vendor services than you would for a mainland-based wedding.

Additional fees and logistics should be expected when transporting guests anywhere and hiring a professional planner or coordinator (unless you are one) to handle these details is highly recommended.

Does your venue provide tables or chairs?

With rental tables starting upwards of \$10 each and chairs at \$3 or more, it doesn't take long to count the savings of using tables and chairs that are included in your venue rental. As a bonus, some venues will set-up the in-house tables and chairs as part of your venue rental, saving you from either having to do so yourself, or having to pay someone else to do it. Just be sure to read the fine print, ask questions, and don't assume these services are already included. Ask to see the tables and chairs before signing to be sure that they align with your vision and standards.

Are the floors, walls, & heat included?

Don't discount the benefits of a venue that has lighting, floors, AC, or heat if you are debating between an inside or tented venue. Things like heat, dance floors, and lighting are all added costs when you opt for an outdoor tented wedding and can add up quickly if you haven't budgeted for them. Considering an indoor venue that already has these items can potentially save thousands in overall costs, not to

mention spare you from having to create alternate rain plans.

To that same effect, electricity is one of the most often overlooked details during event planning. If your venue provides power, is it up to date? Does it require outside generators or power distribution panels to handle the large loads required by the DJ, refrigeration, or lighting equipment? If so, you'll need to discuss who is responsible for the hiring, installation, and payment of these items. Be sure to ask your DJ, caterer, lighting professionals, and any other vendors what they will require for power and if they match with the supply at the event. Ask if they provide generators for their equipment, and if not, check with your rental or lighting company to see if they are able to supply one for you.