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Wedding Advice: How to Plan a Budget-Friendly Rehearsal Dinner

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When planning a wedding there are many questions my brides and grooms ask me. Two of the most popular questions are, "Do we have to have a rehearsal dinner?" and "If so, can we have one without breaking the bank?" The answer to these questions are **yes** and **yes!**

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1. **Set Your Budget**

When you plan any party the most important thing to do first is to set a realistic budget. This is the foundation of any event whether it is a wedding, birthday or anniversary. Clothing shopping is a great analogy for setting your wedding budget. You wouldn't shop for your wardrobe willy-nilly. You probably think to yourself, "I have '\$X' to spend and I can't (or don't want to) spend a penny more on clothing". You then look at your financial resources and set your limits based on your needs and wants. You should plan your wedding budget the same way.

2. **Don't go Overboard**

The second most important thing to remember when planning your rehearsal dinner is that this isn't the actual wedding! So, why make the rehearsal dinner more extravagant than it should be? It doesn't have to be an over the top, fancy event. One of my clients chose to do a brunch the morning before her wedding with her immediate family and the bridal party. The point is to create a relaxing atmosphere that will be the anchor for what's to come.

3. **Keep Your Guest List Short**

Remember how I said this isn't the wedding? Back in the day (when your parents got married) if you were having a wedding with most guests coming in from out of town, you would have invited all of the out-of-towners to your rehearsal dinner (i.e. the bridal party, aunts, uncles, and cousins etc.). Today, this is not necessary, so don't feel obligated!

Chances are your guests are looking forward to doing some sight seeing and exploring on their own. If you're having feelings of guilt, put together an inexpensive guide to some of your favorite restaurants, theaters and museums, and ask the hotel to distribute your packages to your guests at check in. This will be your way of ensuring that your out of town guests have something to do, which will cut down on your rehearsal dinner head count and help to lower the cost.

4. **Take a Non-traditional Approach**

Another way to avoid an expensive rehearsal dinner is to do away with the 'dinner'. Why not come up with a different way to entertain your guests? I recently had a client who was planning a NYC wedding and all the guests were from out of town (including the grooms – yes, it was a gay wedding). They were on a budget and instead of entertaining the out of town guests at a sit-down dinner they decided to reserve a section of a hotel lobby lounge for 2 hours. My client paid for everyone's drinks and afterwards they were all free to do their own thing for dinner.

There are many ways to keep the cost of a rehearsal dinner low. You don't have to feel obligated to invite everyone to an extravagant affair. Just remember the rehearsal dinner should be a time when two families come together, get to know each other, and celebrate before the bride and groom begin their journey together.

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