

Say 'I do' ...

To a Wedding Planner

Let's face it; planning a wedding can be a daunting task. It requires a lot of time, patience and energy, and can be a full time job. For some this can be a nightmare and as the big day approaches it can seem like the list of items to deal with is never ending. Most couples are excited to dive right in but may quickly learn that it is more than they were prepared to handle. So, to alleviate the stress, many couples are now considering booking a wedding planner. This is becoming quite a common option for South Asian weddings; today there are many planners who have planned Indian weddings and understand the traditions and ceremonies.

Gresham Mathew booked a planner for his summer wedding. Although he and his bride-to-be planned as much of the details as they could and had their families help keep them organized, it still made a big difference to have that extra helping hand take care of things on the day of. "It helps to have someone organize things; it takes a load of stress off when there is a professional who can think about the small details that we may have forgotten." A Wedding planner can do everything from making sure the parents of the bride and groom are around for the important moments to ensuring all of the guests have a seat.

For the Mathew's wedding, their planner coordinated the entire ceremony and also set up the banquet hall. "Setting up the reception hall was the biggest help for us, since there was not much time in between the two functions" says Mathew. "The planner also organized the rehearsal for us and it's always good to hear suggestions from someone who has had previous experience with planning weddings." Still, many couples still feel that despite all the work, they would rather not get anyone else involved when it comes to the details of their day and may not need a planner.

"We did it ourselves. It was hard work but I guess it was all part of the experience," says Gary Mithra. He got married this summer. And the main reason for not booking a planner? "They are expensive." Cost is a reason why many couples may not book a planner, according to wedding consultant Raana Chaudhry of Sapna-South Asian Wedding Planning Services. "With all of the costs associated with a wedding, many couples are hesitant to book a planner as they don't see it as a required expense" says Chaudhry. Despite the load of work that a planner can take off the couple's shoulders for the big day, booking one still just boils down to budget. But what many don't realize is that if budget is a concern; then that may be a key reason to obtaining the services of a planner. A wedding planner can actually help couples stick to their budget. Since they are in the business of weddings they may be able to negotiate better prices with the various vendors whose services are required.

So, how much does a wedding planner actually cost? "Every couple's needs are unique and the level of work involved always differs" says Chaudhry. "An Indian wedding day is generally 16hrs with lots of detail so there is a lot of preliminary work that goes into putting the day together. A day wedding package could start at approximately \$1000 with more involved planning services priced according to the couple's requirements. It's hard for a couple to put a value on their time but Sapna Weddings brings industry knowledge and experience to the planning process resulting in a stress free wedding day which ultimately saves couples both time and money."

Another reason many couples hesitate to book a planner is losing control. They may be concerned that bringing a planner on board will take away their vision of how their wedding should be. Gresham Mathew says even his own bride-to-be was hesitant to get a planner involved. "Brides want to be in control of everything. They want to do everything their own way. It's a power struggle." But he says in the end the planner was there to work with him to ensure their vision of their dream day would become a reality. A good wedding planner will work with the couple to achieve their vision, not to take

control of the event. "Having a planner takes a lot of the stress out of the process and saves couples plenty of time from doing research, working with vendors and worrying about the details on their Wedding Day" say Chaudhry. "Knowing that someone is there to manage the logistics and vendors, while ensuring all of the 'behind the scenes' work is completed, allows the couple the freedom to enjoy themselves."

Exquisite Occasions wedding and event planner, Suzette Patten says that some couples think that their family or friends can help them take care of the little things on the wedding day. But she says they may never have planned a wedding before, whereas a planner knows what to expect and how to get things done in time. "The wedding planner won't want to take pictures with family members or talk to long lost relatives. The task of the wedding planner is to make your day turn out the way you and your fiancé envisioned it, and that is the only goal they have in mind." This gives your family and friends a chance to enjoy the wedding and truly celebrate it without worrying about what happened to the guest book or scrambling to make sure the centre pieces are just right. The planner can take the stresses away or at least reduce it and they are always prepared to deal with last minute changes like finding a replacement tuxedo for the best man the morning of the wedding when it arrives blue and not black.

And Patten says that some couples don't book an outside planner because some halls and hotels already have an on-site planner. But she says often an on-site planner is usually only responsible for things that happen in the building and with the staff there and nothing else. They may not necessarily be able to assist with things like scheduling timing with your transportation or assisting in rounding up important members of the family for certain ceremonial responsibilities. It's important to ask the hall or hotel's on-site planner what specific things they will be able to do for you and if they cannot take care of all of the things you require assistance with it's probably a better idea to book an actual wedding planner.

In the case of Indian weddings, there can be a number of pre-wedding festivities, such as the Sangeet and Mehndhi, which also require a lot of planning and organization. Couples may also want to consider having their planner assist with these events. "They are like mini receptions in a way and do require quite a bit of planning" says Chaudhry. "The pre-wedding events can add a lot of stress to the planning process". This can be especially true since they are so close to the big day; it can be a lot to handle at once. Depending on the specific needs of the couple This list is endless! Sapna Weddings can be as involved as the couple needs them to be. Starting from recommending venues, finding reputable vendors, developing creative solutions, negotiating contracts, managing the bridal party, creating detailed schedules of the day's events, managing budgets and running the Wedding day to name a few.

If planning the wedding seems overwhelming, it's a good idea to speak to a planner to see what services they can offer. They can assist in all aspects of the preparation starting from recommending venues, finding reputable vendors, developing creative solutions, negotiating contracts, managing the bridal party, creating detailed schedules of the day's events, managing budgets and running the Wedding day to name a few. Most importantly a wedding planner can go that extra mile to ensure that everything runs smoothly and your day turns out just the way you imagined.

QUESTIONS TO ASK A PLANNER:

- Do they call all the vendors on your preferred vendors list to see if they are available for the wedding and schedule appointments? And can they offer suggestions of other vendors who are in your budget?
- Will they create a budget for everything related to the wedding day?
- Will they schedule and attend all the vendor meetings with the couple?
- Will they review all contracts that need to be signed?
- Ask to see examples of past work.
- Ask for references.
- How would they handle a crisis on the day of the wedding?

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A WEDDING PLANNER:

1. Prepare a detailed itinerary for the day as well as one for all the vendors contributing to the wedding.
2. Have an emergency kit prepared for the bride and bridesmaids
3. Set up the hall and centre pieces.
4. Serve as the 'go-to' person at the wedding and reception for any questions from vendors or guest inquiries.
5. Ensure that everything is moving along according to your schedule.
6. Act quickly to resolve any issues or discrepancies throughout the day.

