

Become your own wedding planner

Top wedding co-ordinator and the National Wedding Show Inspiration Sessions guru **Kate Smallwood** reveals her insider tips

Planning my wedding was one of the most exciting times of my life. In fact, I enjoyed it so much I became a professional wedding planner – helping other brides-to-be to achieve their dreams while sticking to that all-important budget. Here are a few of my tricks of the trade.

Organise your finances

A wedding planner will ensure you stick to your budget – there's nothing romantic about starting married life in debt. Work out what you've got to spend, set up a wedding savings account and allocate a sum to each aspect of the day. Make a note of every penny you part with and, if you splash out in one area, cut back somewhere else.

Research your suppliers

A happy bride is surrounded by a great team, so you need to be sure that the people you choose understand your ideas. Ask for recommendations from friends who have tied the knot and draw up a shortlist. The right supplier will be able to come up with ideas that suit your style and budget, and will be someone you get on with. There's no point choosing a photographer or hair stylist who makes you feel uneasy.

Get the best deals

While a planner has the benefit of contacts to get the best deals on your behalf, there's nothing to stop you shopping around. In these credit-crunch times, it's always worth asking if there's room to negotiate.



Planning your wedding should be fun, but it's important to be organised

Get everything in writing

Once you've placed your bookings, be sure to get written confirmation from every supplier. Check the small print. A wedding planner will always make sure you know exactly what you're getting and what you're paying. If, for example, a 12.5% service charge will be added to your catering bill, you need to allow for that in your budget.

Find the latest trends

The most beautiful weddings don't necessarily cost the most money, but they do involve creativity and imagination. Before you start placing orders, make sure you're up with the latest ideas. For inspiration, visit the National Wedding Show, read *Wedding* magazine, and visit websites that are updated daily, such as www.weddingmagazine.co.uk.

Delegate

A bride who tries to do everything herself is just asking for stress, and you'll be amazed at the number of other people who will jump at the chance of giving you a hand.

Bridesmaids should be your number one port of call, closely followed by anyone who has a skill to offer.

For more about Kate's wedding planning service, visit www.katesmallwood.co.uk.

Be inspired at the National Wedding Show

You can meet Kate Smallwood in person at the National Wedding Shows this October, where she will be hosting the Inspiration Sessions and introducing you all to the leading names in the industry. The National Wedding Show offers nearly-weds all you need to help plan your dream wedding. With more than 300 exhibitors under one roof, you'll find everything from fabulous dresses to stylish photographers. And, if you're looking for ideas, don't miss the How to Look Good Show hosted by Caryn Franklin, the Catwalk Show and the newly-launched Designer Flower Zone.

London Earl's Court 2–4 October 2009, and Birmingham NEC 9–11 October 2009. To book tickets, call 0870 730 0064 or visit www.nationalweddingshow.co.uk.