# WEDDING DATES

# UK WEDDING INDUSTRY REPORT

# **2023** EDITION



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## SIGNIFICANT CHANGE MARKERS

We have added specific designators for significant statistical changes, generally over 2%.



Upward change

Downward change



# The 2023 Industry Report

## **STATISTICS & INSIGHTS FROM WEDDINGDATES**

I am delighted to bring you the results of our eighth WeddingDates survey and the **2023 UK Wedding** Industry Report.

The ongoing cost of living crisis amplifies the changes in wedding trends we've seen over the past few years. In this report we surface many of those changes and offer insight into their impact.

For the first time, we've asked couples questions about price hike tolerance and budget elasticity to bring business intelligence about a changing market to both venues and suppliers. We've also included the questions that have helped us surface key trends in the market year after year for our valuable annual analysis.

I hope this report aids your business in taking advantage of the opportunities presented, and that you enjoy a thriving 2023.

Geod

Ciara Crossan Founder & CEO, WeddingDates

# 2023 SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

WeddingDates surveyed 1,362 engaged individuals from across the United Kingdom to generate a statistically valid depiction of the 2023 UK wedding market.

YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE 9%	SOUTH EAST ENGLAND 15%	SOUTH WEST ENGLAND 11%	WEST MIDLANDS 9%	NORTH WEST ENGLAND 15%	NORTH EAST ENGLAND 6%
SCOTLAND	EAST MIDLANDS	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND	LONDON	EAST OF ENGLAND
11%	6%	5%	4%	4%	6%

96% of this year's respondents identified themselves as brides, and 2% identified as grooms. Nearly 2% of our survey takers chose not to identify as binary.

ŤŤ		İİ	İİ
96.04%	2.13%	1.62%	0.22%

Couples continue to wed later. The 25 - 34 age group still makes up the bulk of our engaged couples, while the 35 - 44 cohort sees an increase of 11%.

	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45+	
2022	2%	72%	24%	3%	
2023	2%	59% 💙	35% 🔺	4%	

# SILVER BELLS, WEDDING BELLS

Christmas is always a huge annual driver in proposals, but the pandemic saw a large drop in engagements as couples held off for more certainty around events. Last year we saw a record number of couples engaged under six months, but this year we again see a drop in recent engagements and an increase in couples engaged more than two years.

	<1MOS	1 - 6 MOS	6 - 12 MOS	12 - 24 MOS	2+ YEARS
2022	26%	34%	12%	15%	13%
2023	23%	29% 🔻	16% 📐	15%	16%

## HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN ENGAGED?

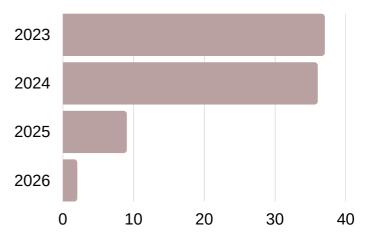
At the height of the pandemic, we saw our highest ever number for couples engaged more than two years, coming in at 18%. This year's 16% is rising towards that number. This hesitation is likely due to the cost of living crisis and a lack of economic confidence.



#### RETURN TO THE NORM

## A DIMINISHING BACKLOG

Last year, 18% of respondents told us their plans had been impacted by COVID, but this year we've seen a dramatic drop in the effects of the pandemic, with only 10% saying it's had an effect.



This year, a 37% are planning to wed in the current year and 36% next year. This is a small decrease of around 3% from 2022 figures. These number indicate that the pandemic backlog is resolving but with a 3% rise in couples with no date set yet, may also indicate economic hesitancy.

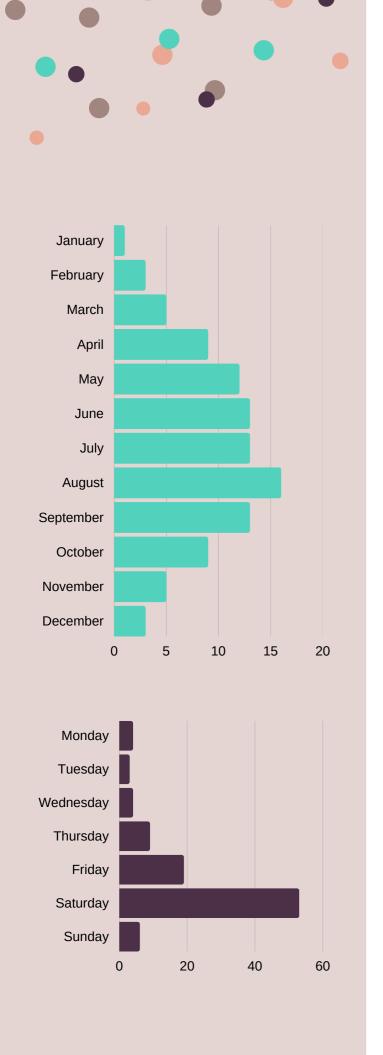
# RISE OF THE CIVIL CEREMONY

This year's survey sees a remarkable milestone in the falling popularity of church weddings. When we first began collecting data, 28% of couples were marrying in a church or other religious house of worship. Last year that number was 22%, with the 2023 number hitting an all-time low of just 15%:

	CHURCH / RELIGIOUS	CIVIL AT RECEPTION VENUE	REGISTRY OFFICE	CIVIL AT OTHER VENUE
2022	22%	63%	8%	7%
2023	15% 🔽	66% 📐	10%	9%

We are also seeing the largest increase in the popularity of civil weddings in the reception venue, with **two thirds of all couples choosing to wed in the same location as their reception celebration.** An additional 9% are choosing other locations like historic sites, beaches and weddings at home for their ceremony.

A key statistic in line with these changes is that 11% of survey respondents told us they were having Humanist ceremonies, and 70% were being married by a registrar outside of a registry office. These are all-time highs for these figures.



# STEADFAST SATURDAY

Summer weddings continue to be the most popular, with **June and July tied at 13% right behind August at 16%.** In 2022 when demand outstripped supply, September was the most popular month, but it has now dropped to 13% to tie with June and July.

The UK continues to have steady demand in the shoulder seasons, with 25% of weddings booked for March, April and May and an even greater 27% booked for September, October and November.

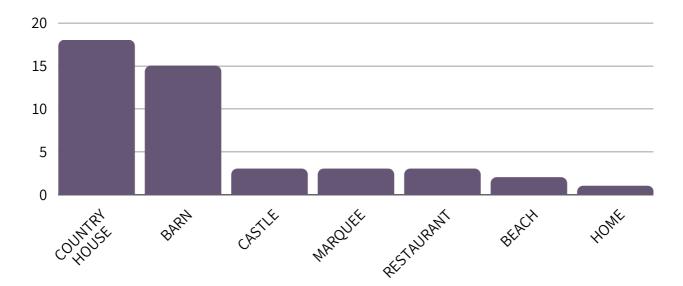
Poor unloved December, January and February remain the least popular months but offer plenty of **opportunities for engagement parties**, wedding open days and proposal packages.

Saturday continues to be the most popular day by far, although Friday is the choice with 19% of our couples, down from a pandemic high of 21%. Thursdays continue to be more popular than Sundays for the third year in a row.

## FINDING THE ONE

As of January 2023, only 52% of engaged couples have booked a venue, a 15% drop over the past two years. In part, this reflects the rising number of those only just recently engaged, but may also reflect price hesitancy and the last of the pandemic backlog.

Among those who have booked a venue, hotels continue to be the leading choice. This year our survey shows a 9% increase in hotel popularity. **34% of UK couples are now choosing a hotel venue.** Other choices include town halls, pubs, sports clubs, and other atypical venues.



## **BOOKINGS FOR NON-HOTEL VENUES**

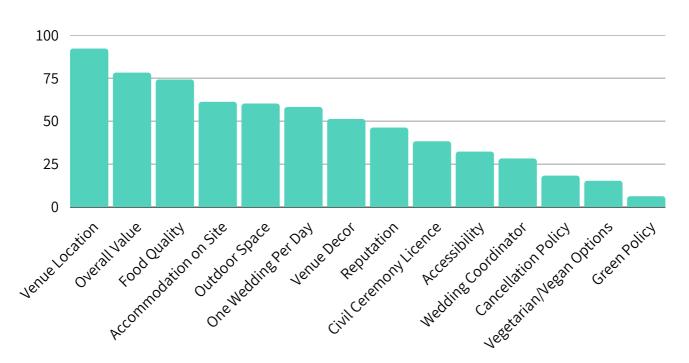
61% of those who had booked indicated they chose an exclusive use venue, demonstrating the massive demand for this feature.

In good news for UK venues of all types, 95% of couples are planning to wed at home rather than abroad.

# THE LOW-DOWN ON DINNER

For the eighth year running, location has remained the #1 factor when choosing a venue. However, couples' other priorities have seen a significant shift in 2023. **Overall value has risen 8%, surpassing food quality in the rankings and now coming in at second place.** This year 42% also said cost was more important than quality, an increase of 5% from last year.

## IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN CHOOSING A VENUE





# GRACIOUS ENTERTAINING

## TOP 10 VENUE WANTS 2023



Over the past few years, cocktail hours, selfserve food tables and extended, multi-day celebrations have all increased in demand. And while these items are still firmly fixed in the planning landscape, we are seeing a discernable trend this year towards lower-cost extras in preference to more expensive options.

This year, 67% of couples are planning to welcome guests with canapés on arrival, down from 71% in 2022. Demand for Day 2 BBQs and cocktail or prosecco stations are both down 5% as well.

However, one item that is up this year is the always-appreciated but inexpensive to stock candy cart, a traditional favourite that had fallen slightly out of favour in recent years.

Most popular among couples hiring in extras are photo booths, flower walls and giant letters, with light up dance floors just behind the candy cart in demand.

## SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS

Last year saw a significant swing from the bottom spend to the top, and this year we are seeing spending swing from the top back to the bottom again. While spend over £100 remains unchanged, the key £65 - £100 bracket has dropped by 7%, and those spending under £50 per head has risen to almost one third of couples.

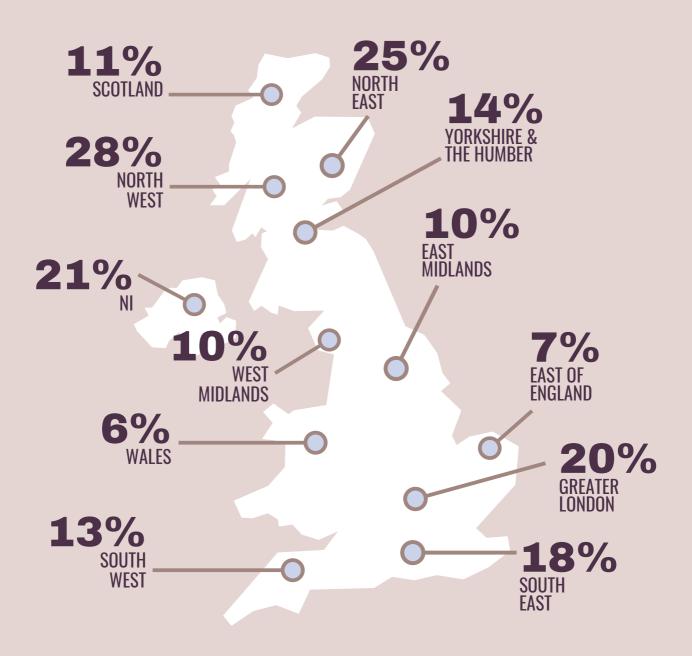
## WHAT IS YOUR PER HEAD COST FOR YOUR VENUE?

	< £50	£50 - 65	£65 - 80	£80 - 100	£100+
2021	36%	25%	18%	14%	7%
2022	23%	21%	18%	21%	17%
2023	31%	21%	15%	17%	16%

52% of couples are now spending under £65 per head, a significant shift from last year, and a tangible effect of cost of living concerns.

# HIGH AND LOW SPENDS

In the face of cost of living concerns and decline in per-head spending, we also looked at higher end spends nationwide. In the cohort spending over £100 per head, the North West leads at 28%, followed closely by the North East at 25%, whereas couples in the East of England are the least likely to spend in the £100+ bracket, coming in at just 7%.



PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE SPENDING £100 OR MORE PER REGION

## COST CONSCIOUS COUPLES

This year's survey revealed significant concerns around money. **30% of couples tell us the cost of living crisis has impacted their budget.** In a rise of 12% from last year, **50% of couples are now spending less than £10K on their big day**. Simultaneously, the number spending £15 - 20K has dropped by 5%.

	< £5K	£5 - 10K	£10 - 15K	£15 - 20K	£20 - 25K	£25 - 30K	£30K+
2021	19%	30%	24%	13%	6%	5%	1%
2022	11%	27%	23%	18%	10%	7%	4%
2023	17%	33%	22%	13%	7%	5%	3%

#### WHAT IS YOUR ENTIRE WEDDING BUDGET EXCLUDING THE HONEYMOON?



We are still in the early stages of planning but can see how some extras may be cut out because of the rise in the cost of living.

## PRICE RISE RESISTANCE

This year for the first time, we asked our survey takers questions about price change sensitivity. It is no surprise that 41% told us they would not be able to tolerate a rise in their contract prices at all. However, **over 50% said they would tolerate an increase of 5 - 10%.** 

## HOW MUCH COULD YOUR VENUE RAISE PRICES BEFORE YOU WOULD CHANGE YOUR PLANS?

41%	31%	19%	3%	6%
0% INCREASE	5% INCREASE	10% INCREASE	15% INCREASE	20% INCREASE

If faced with such a rise, just 13% said they would increase their budget, while 15% say they would change venues.

#### IF YOUR VENUE INCREASED PRICES BY 5 -10%, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

33%	31%	9%	15%	13%
CUT OTHER	SEEK LEGAL	DECREASE	CHANGE	INCREASE
COSTS	ADVICE	GUEST LIST	VENUE	BUDGET



## WHEN COSTS GO UP

A small number (7%) of our survey respondents reported that their venues **had** increased their prices even after contracts had been signed. Despite just 13% saying they would increase their budget if faced with a theoretical price rise, **nearly half of those who faced an actual price rise opted to simply increase their budget to address rising costs**.

#### HOW DID YOUR VENUE PRICE INCREASE IMPACT YOUR PLANS?

48%	31%	17%	3%
WE INCREASED	WE CUT	WE DECREASED THE	WE CHANGED
OUR BUDGET	OTHER COSTS	GUEST LIST	VENUES

It is notable that **among these couples, 3% actually changed venue**, well below the 15% of those who have **not** been faced with this issue said they would change if their venue increased price. It is likely that while most couples are theoretically deeply opposed to price increases, when confronted with price hikes they are also forced to consider the enormous effort of finding an alternative venue, rebooking suppliers, and informing guests of the change of plans.



## **COUPLE QUOTES: CHANGING COSTS**

My venue was very transparent about year-on-year increases, which is over the rate of inflation and why we decided to get married this year. I have budgeted for the price quoted and would not be able to afford any increases. If you book at a certain price, that price should be locked in.

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I would be fine with food costs increasing, but venue hire should stay at the contracted price. If the price increase was large, we would consider cancelling and booking a registry office to have a more low key day.



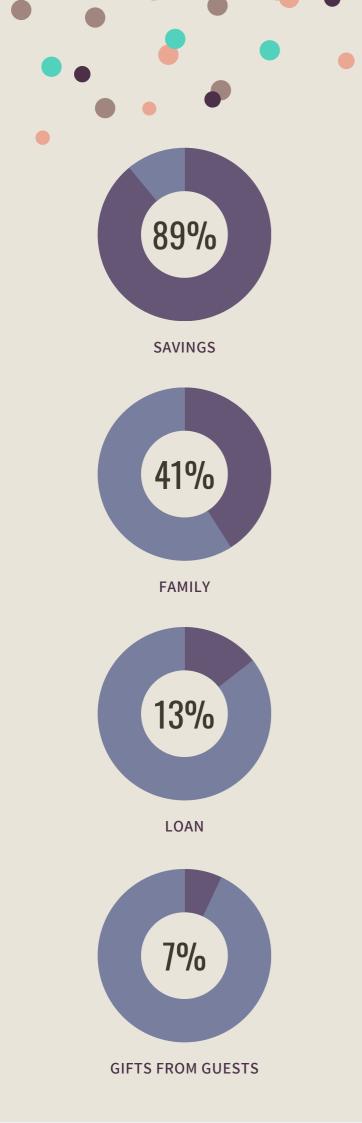
## **GUEST NUMBERS**

The bulk of the wedding budget is spent catering to guests, specifically, food, beverages and venue. But how far is this budget stretching? The 2023 survey shows that **the average wedding couple is expecting to host 77 guests at their reception.** 

#### HOW MANY GUESTS ARE YOU EXPECTING AT YOUR WEDDING?

UNDER 50	51 - 100	101 - 150	150 - 200	201 - 250
34%	51%	12%	3%	1%

When we look more closely at the survey responses, the largest bands are 76 - 100 guests at 28%, followed by 26 - 50 guests at 24%. This means that more precisely, **52% of weddings are hosting between 26 and 100 guests.** This year 66% of couples told us they were planning to have evening guests, with 49% inviting 26 - 50 additional people.



# FUNDING THE BIG DAY

This year, we asked couples how much of their budget excluding the honeymoon they were spending on their venue. Numbers varied enormously, with 7% spending more than 75% of their funds on their venue vs 12% on the low end spending 25% or less.

However, the largest cohort was 45% of survey takers spending 26 - 50%, followed by 36% allocating 51 - 75% of their budget to the venue. Among our brides and grooms, the average venue spend was 50% of the couples' total budget. For those venues passing along increased costs, this number may be an indicator of couples' price hike tolerance.

For the first time since 2020, we asked our survey takers how they were paying for their big day. Survey couples reported by a huge margin that their weddings were being funded by their own savings. However, the number reporting they are taking loans to meet the cost is at an all time high at 13%, having nearly tripled from the previous high of 5% in 2018.

## SERIOUS ENQUIRIES ONLY

This year the pandemic availability crunch is easing up and couples are being much more targeted in their enquiries, making each one a more valuable lead than ever. The number of brides and grooms making enquiries at five venues or less has risen a massive 23% this year.

ENQUIRIES	1 - 5	5 - 10	10 - 20	20+
2022	42%	37%	16%	6%
2023	65% 📐	26%	7%	3%

Although only 7% of couples expect a response to an enquiry the same day they send it, a big 41% expect a response within 48 hours. About the same number are willing to wait a few days, though only a very patient few are willing to wait a week!

#### WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TIME FROM A VENUE TO AN ENQUIRY?

	SAME DAY	NEXT DAY	3 - 5 DAYS	1 WEEK
2023	7%	34%	52%	7%

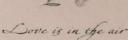
## FUNNEL OF LOVE

This year's survey shows us that in their quest to find the perfect venue, wedding couples are becoming ever more digital. **55% of couples used online wedding sites to make enquiries to prospective venues**, an increase of 13% from the previous year. And a huge **54% of brides and grooms now tell us they would prefer to make an appointment via online booking form to tour a venue.** This number has gone up more than 40% since the beginning of the WeddingDates survey.

## HOW DO YOU PREFER TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO TOUR A VENUE?

54%	30%	12%	4%
ONLINE BOOKING	BOOK VIA	BOOK BY	SOCIAL
FORM	EMAIL	PHONE	MEDIA DM

Correctly building and nurturing this part of your sales funnel is the key to capturing and converting leads. **50% of couples tour just two or three venues, and a key 21% make just one tour appointment.** 



## PERSONALISED TOUCHPOINTS

While couples may send enquiries to multiple venues, survey statistics tell us that **71% of couples will view three venues or fewer** before making their choice. Despite how crucial converting enquiries to showround bookings is, **less than a quarter of our survey respondents report made to feel special at this key touchpoint in the sales process.** 

## HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE PROCESS OF ENQUIRING WITH WEDDING VENUES?

14%	48%	24%	14%
I FELT LIKE JUST	NOTHING REALLY	I FELT REALLY	HAVE NOT
ANOTHER NUMBER	STOOD OUT	SPECIAL	STARTED YET

And while the expectation is that a brochure will initially arrive by email rather than post, **a huge 71% of survey respondents said they would be blown away by the personal touch of a handwritten note**, pushing that venue to the top of the list.



## **COUPLE QUOTES: THE VENUE TOUR**

The majority were very impersonal, apart from my venue which is why they were top of our list. Same with suppliers, just a copy and paste!

66

It differed from venue to venue. Some venues were so accommodating, others seemed rushed, like we were just another number and they just wanted our money.

66

Some venues made us feel like a number. However the venue we went for made us feel special and important.



A bit of hit and miss, depends on the time of year and what else is going on at the venues.

# the WEDDING Method

In the era of digital relationships, venues have to work harder to book showrounds. Standing out in a crowded, highlycompetitive market requires a more personal approach.

Couples used to visit 9 venues; now they visit three venues or fewer.

> The Wedding Method is our award-winning marketing system that delivers high-quality enquiries, more viewing appointments, and personalised, time-saving automation of the sales cycle.

47% of couples now want to book the first showround online, double the number last year.

We've built **The Wedding Method** on years of data from WeddingDates reports just like this one, tailoring the sales funnel to exactly what converts engaged clients.

This includes online booking for showrounds, creation of hand-written notes and personalised website links for every couple. Talk to us about how **The Wedding Method** can deliver outstanding ROI for your venue.



We knew we needed something more personal, something that would engage with couples."

RICHARD METCALFE, OWNER ROGERTHORPE MANOR HOTEL



"The process is slick, seamless and gives the team more time to focus on the showrounds."

MARTIN WICKS, OWNER HAZLEWOOD CASTLE

## GOING, GOING GREEN

Climate crisis continues to be at the forefront of the news, so it comes as no surprise that nearly 40% of surveyed couples told us they would feel positively about a venue with a green policy.

## HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT YOUR VENUE OR SUPPLIERS HAVE A GREEN POLICY?

39%	11%	35%	15%
I WOULD FEEL POSITIVELY ABOUT THE VENUE	IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO ME	I DON'T CARE EITHER WAY	IT'S NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT

While just 11% told us it's very important their venue has a green policy, a huge **58% of couples** report they are incorporating planet-saving elements into their celebrations.

46%	26%	21%	17%
SUSTAINABLE OR	UPCYCLED	ECO-FRIENDLY	EVITES INSTEAD OF
RECYCLED CONFETTI	DECOR PIECES	WEDDING FAVOURS	PAPER INVITATIONS



## **COUPLE QUOTES: GREEN TOUCHES**

My venue offers the table décor all sorted and reused. Was definitely a factor in choosing them.



We're hoping to avoid too much single use plastic like plastic cups or cheap slippers.

We're incorporating a lot of second-hand items, including my wedding dress!

Second-hand and preloved items, including vintage wedding dress and bridesmaid dresses.



# VIRTUAL OVERLOAD

2020 thrust the entire wedding industry into virtual offerings, from virtual tours and walkthroughs to Zoom speeches and even remote bands. And as recently as last year's survey, couples were continuing to embrace the digital, with 24% still interested in incorporating tech elements into their big day.

But this year, our survey shows that couples are now keen to leave COVID and its virtual remnants behind. **85% report they have no plans to include any virtual elements in their weddings.** 

	CEREMONY LIVE STREAM	ZOOM SPEECHES & WELL-WISHES	RECEPTION LIVESTREAM
2021	27%	15%	6%
2022	14%	8%	2%
2023	12%	4%	2%

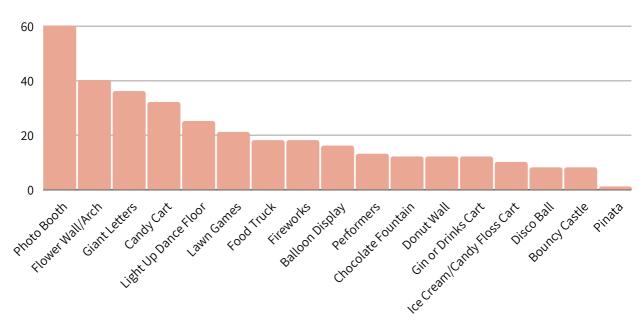
Similarly, the number of **couples who say they are not interested in virtual tours has nearly doubled**, rising from 39% to 72%, demonstrating a desire to experience venues in person.

## SOURCING SUPPLIERS

Friends and family remain the primary resource for couples finding wedding vendors. But this year, we see Google searches surpassing venue recommendations as the second most popular way to find suppliers, highlighting another area where venues can work to deliver personal help.

FRIENDS &	GOOGLE	VENUE	WEDDING	WEDDING	SOCIAL &	BRIDAL
FAMILY	SEARCH	RECOMMEND	WEBSITES	FAIRS	INFLUENCERS	MAGAZINES
30%	21%	17%	14%	10%	6%	1%

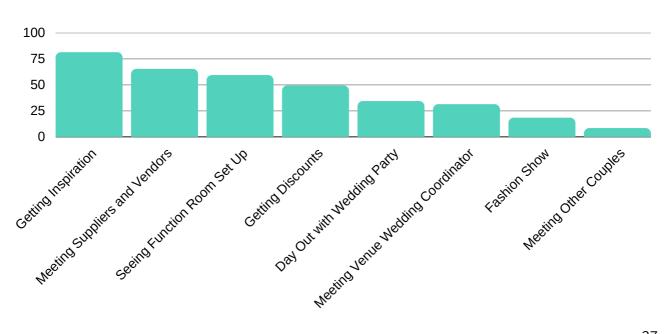
Venue extras continue to rise in popularity, with **79% of our couples planning to hire in extras** not provided by their venue.



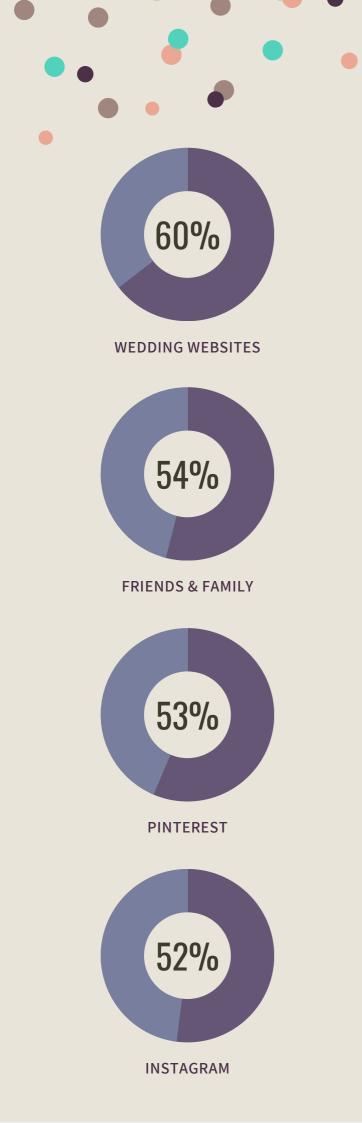


## WEDDING FAIRS

This year, the wedding fair is back with a bang. During COVID, only 42% of our survey respondents reported they'd been able to attend a wedding fair or expo. **This year, a whopping** 80% revealed they'd been to or are planning to go to a wedding fair.



WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT WEDDING FAIRS?



# SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Whether working solo, with a parent or with a pro, when we asked our survey takers to tell us where they find their wedding inspiration, four clear sources emerged as the winners.

Wedding websites are now the #1 source of inspiration with 60% of our couples, as couples look for trusted sources of information. The influence of Pinterest and Instagram have dropped 10 points to rank with friends and family for impact.

After the top four sources of inspiration, statistics drop off sharply, with bridal magazines coming in this year at 24%. **TikTok has doubled this year to come in at 19% and is one to watch.** Celebrities and influencers remain in last place as sources of inspiration at only 7%.

# THEMES & TRENDS

#### **BOOGIE NIGHTS**

Some traditions never go out of style. Photo booths remain the most popular item couples will hire in, but light up dance floors are the 2023 biggest mover.



#### AFTER THOUGHTS

Afters are firm favourite at UK weddings, and this year 66% of couples told us they were planning to have evening guests, most inviting 51 people.

#### VIP ACCESS

Couples are increasingly keen on privacy and a VIP experience for their big day. 58% are choosing a venue that hosts just one wedding per day, and a striking 61% are selecting exclusive use venues that offer a more intimate experience for couples and their guests.

#### A VERY CIVIL VENUE

We are seeing an increasing trend towards ceremonies in the reception venue, with two thirds of ceremonies taking place in the venue. 11% of these couples are choosing a Humanist celebrant.

#### A FAIR TO REMEMBER

Wedding events are back on the matrimonial landscape, with 80% of our survey takers planning to attend a wedding fair, wedding expo, or a hotel or venue Open Day. Getting inspiration and meeting vendors are these visitors' priorities, meaning wedding events are once again prime sales drivers.



## **Take-Away Lessons** key strategies for venues & suppliers

## COST OF WEDDING CRISIS

More than anything, the 2023 survey demonstrates that brides and grooms are keenly focused on cost. This year, couples telling us cost is more important than quality are at an all time high of 42%. Similarly, this year 78% cited value as an important factor when choosing a venue, moving Overall Value up to second place in criteria. **Suppliers and venues need to focus on pricing and on adding value to packages with included extras.** 

## SHIFTING PRIORITIES

A shift from environment to economy is just one of the symptoms of couples' current spending priorities. Smaller weddings with fewer guests are increasingly the norm. With overall value surpassing food quality as the higher priority for 78% of couples, many are opting to decrease the guest list and their spend, with 31% spending under £50 per head. Simplified meals with fewer choices, buffets and more casual alternatives to the sit-down dinner are likely to appeal to these couples.

## **COORDINATED PLANNING**

The number of brides planning their weddings solo has now risen to 26%, and fewer than 4% are hiring stylists or planners to help. With 28% naming the wedding coordinator as an important factor when choosing a venue, there is undeveloped potential to promote the services of the wedding coordinator as a part of a venue's packages.

#### MAXIMISE THE SHOWROUND

This year's statistics make it clear that the venue tour is more important than ever. Couples are sending fewer enquiries and booking fewer viewings before choosing a venue than ever before. On average, each viewing will give a venue a 1 in 3 chance of making the sale, so personalisation, taking time, and being responsive to a couple's plans and ideas are crucial.

#### ACCENTUATE THE PERSONAL

Couples are enquiring at an increasingly select number of venues, most between 1 and 5, but less than 25% of respondents tell us that venues succeeded in making them feel special during the enquiry process. Making the online enquiry process simple, delivering brochures immediately, and personalising communications are all key moments for personal connection.

#### **ON THE SHOULDER**

Contrary to popular perception, couples wed more often in the Autumn than in the Spring. September and October represent 22% of weddings each year, with April and May coming in at 20%. This gives an opportunity for venues to create attractive seasonal packages.



# SKYROCKET YOUR CONVERSION RATES IN 2023

## MANAGE

## CONVERT

## TRACK

Keep on top of your to-do list with easy-to-use management software. Enhanced experience for your couples with personalised automated responses.

# Powerful reporting on the effectiveness of your marketing channels









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