

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue denim shirt and a brown apron, is smiling and looking down at a bouquet of flowers on a wooden table. In the background, there are shelves filled with various colorful flower arrangements.

# Ultimate Guide To Finding Wedding

# Vendors



By Inspire Me Photography

# The Ultimate Guide to Finding & Booking Wedding Vendors

*Congratulations on your engagement! Now that you've secured your date with Inspire Me Photography (excellent choice!), it's time to assemble the rest of your dream wedding team. This comprehensive guide will walk you through the process of finding, vetting, and booking the perfect vendors for your special day.*

## Getting Started: Setting the Foundation

### Establish Your Wedding Vision

- ☐ Define your wedding style (modern, rustic, classic, bohemian, etc.)
- ☐ Create a mood board on Pinterest or physical inspiration board
- ☐ Decide on your color palette and overall aesthetic
- ☐ Discuss must-have elements versus nice-to-have features
- ☐ Consider any cultural or family traditions to incorporate

### Budget Planning

- ☐ Determine your total wedding budget
- ☐ Allocate budget percentages to each vendor category:
  - Venue: 30-50% of total budget
  - Catering: 20-30%
  - Entertainment (DJ/Band): 8-10%
  - Flowers: 8-10%
  - Attire: 8-10%
  - Decor & Rentals: 5-10%
  - Cake/Desserts: 2-5%
  - Transportation: 2-5%
  - Stationery: 2-5%
  - Hair & Makeup: 2-5%
  - Officiant: 1-2%
- ☐ Create a spreadsheet to track estimates, deposits, and payment schedules
- ☐ Build in a 5-10% contingency for unexpected expenses

### Timeline Planning

- ☐ 12+ months before: Book venue, major vendors (catering, entertainment)
- ☐ 9-12 months before: Book florist, cake baker, rental companies

- ☐ 6-9 months before: Book hair/makeup, transportation 4-6
- ☐ months before: Book officiant, finalize smaller vendors
- ☐ Create a month-by-month checklist for booking deadlines

## **Finding Your Perfect Venue**

### **Types of Venues to Consider**

- ☐ Hotel or resort
- ☐ Banquet hall or event center
- ☐ Barn or farm
- ☐ Historic building or mansion
- ☐ Garden or park
- ☐ Vineyard or winery
- ☐ Beach or waterfront property
- ☐ Restaurant
- ☐ Industrial or loft space
- ☐ Backyard or private property
- ☐ Community center or religious facility

### **Initial Venue Research**

- ☐ Create a list of potential venues within your budget range
- ☐ Check venue websites and social media for photos and information
- ☐ Read reviews on wedding platforms (WeddingWire, The Knot, etc.)
- ☐ Ask recently married friends for recommendations
- ☐ Check with your photographer for venue recommendations

### **Questions to Ask Potential Venues**

- ☐ What dates are available in your preferred month?
- ☐ What is the capacity for seated dinner/cocktail reception?
- ☐ What is included in the rental fee? (Tables, chairs, linens, etc.)
- ☐ Are there required vendors or preferred vendor lists?
- ☐ What are the catering options or restrictions?
- ☐ Are there noise restrictions or curfews?
- ☐ What is the rain plan for outdoor spaces?
- ☐ Is there a separate ceremony space or fee?
- ☐ What is the payment schedule and cancellation policy?
- ☐ Are there adequate restroom facilities?
- ☐ What is the parking situation?

- ☐ Are there getting-ready spaces on site?
- ☐ Are there any decoration restrictions?

## Site Visit Checklist

- ☐ Visit at the same time of day as your planned event
- ☐ Check cell reception throughout venue
- ☐ Note electrical outlet locations
- ☐ Test acoustics in main spaces
- ☐ Consider traffic flow between spaces
- ☐ Check lighting conditions (especially important for photography)
- ☐ Observe climate control systems
- ☐ Note proximity of restrooms to main event spaces
- ☐ Evaluate accessibility for elderly or disabled guests
- ☐ Take measurements and photos for planning
- ☐ Identify potential photo locations
- ☐
- ☐

## Selecting Catering Services

### Catering Styles to Consider

- ☐ In-house venue catering
- ☐ External full-service caterer
- ☐ Restaurant catering
- ☐ Food truck
- ☐ Family-style service
- ☐ Buffet service
- ☐ Plated dinner service
- ☐ Food stations
- ☐ Cocktail style with heavy appetizers

### Finding Potential Caterers

- ☐ Check venue's preferred vendor list
- ☐ Ask for recommendations from your venue coordinator
- ☐ Read online reviews on multiple platforms
- ☐ Attend wedding shows or tastings
- ☐ Look at social media for food presentation and style
- ☐ Ask friends and family for recommendations

## Catering Interview Questions



- ☐ Are you available on our date?
- ☐ Do you have experience working at our venue?
- ☐ What is your price range per person?
- ☐ What is included in your package? (Staff, rentals, etc.)
- ☐ Do you offer tastings before booking?
- ☐ Can you accommodate dietary restrictions?
- ☐ What is your service style and staff-to-guest ratio?
- ☐ Do you provide bar service or work with bartenders?
- ☐ What is your cancellation/postponement policy?
- ☐ Can you share sample menus from recent events?
- ☐ How do you handle last-minute guest count changes?
- ☐ What is your food safety certification and insurance?

### **Catering Tasting Tips**

- ☐ Bring your partner and 1-2 key decision-makers
- ☐ Take photos of each dish
- ☐ Taste both hot and cold items
- ☐ Ask about seasonal menu adjustments
- ☐ Discuss presentation style and customization options
- ☐ Take notes on flavor, portion size, and presentation
- ☐ Ask about setup and breakdown procedures

## **Finding Your Perfect Entertainment (DJ or Band)**

### **Types of Wedding Entertainment**

- ☐ DJ
- ☐ Live band
- ☐ String quartet/ensemble
- ☐ Solo musician (pianist, guitarist, harpist)
- ☐ Cultural performers
- ☐ Combination of live music and DJ
- ☐ Additional entertainment (photo booth, performers, etc.)

### **Researching Entertainment Options**

- ☐ Read reviews on wedding platforms
- ☐ Watch videos of performances
- ☐ Attend showcases or see them perform live if possible
- ☐ Ask venue coordinators for recommendations

- ☐ Check social media for client feedback
- ☐ Ask for sample playlists or set lists

## Questions for DJs

- ☐ Are you available on our wedding date? What packages do
- ☐ you offer and what is included? How many hours are
- ☐ included in your standard package?
- ☐ Do you provide ceremony sound equipment?
- ☐ What is your approach to MCing? How do you handle song
- ☐ requests? Can we provide must-play and do-not-play lists?
- ☐ Do you have experience at our venue?
- ☐ What is your backup equipment plan?
- ☐ Do you provide lighting options? What happens if you're
- ☐ sick on our wedding day? What is your attire for wedding
- ☐ performances? Can we meet our specific DJ before
- ☐ booking?
- ☐

## Questions for Bands

- ☐ Are you available on our wedding date? How
- ☐ many band members will perform? What
- ☐ instruments/vocalists are included? What is your
- ☐ song list/repertoire? Can you learn specific songs
- ☐ for our first dance? Do you provide sound
- ☐ equipment and lighting?
- ☐ How much space do you require for setup?
- ☐ What are your break requirements?
- ☐ Do you provide music during breaks?
- ☐ What is your band's typical attire? Do you need
- ☐ meals provided? Can you act as MC for the
- ☐ reception? What happens if a band member is
- ☐ sick?

## Finding a Florist

### Initial Floral Planning

- ☐ Determine which floral elements you need:
  - Bridal bouquet

- Bridesmaid bouquets
  - Boutonnieres
  - Corsages
  - Ceremony arrangements
  - Aisle decorations
  - Reception centerpieces
  - Cake flowers
  - Additional decor elements
- ☐ Create inspiration photos of styles you like
  - ☐ Research seasonal flowers for your wedding date
  - ☐ Establish floral budget

## **Finding Potential Florists**

- ☐ Check venue's preferred vendor list
- ☐ Browse Instagram and Pinterest for local florists
- ☐ Look at real weddings at your venue to see florists' work
- ☐ Ask friends for recommendations
- ☐ Check wedding vendor directories
- ☐ Review local flower shops that offer wedding services

## **Questions for Florists**

- ☐ Are you available on our wedding date?
- ☐ Have you worked at our venue before?
- ☐ Can you work within our budget of \$X?
- ☐ Can you recreate the style in our inspiration photos?
- ☐ What flowers will be in season for our date?
- ☐ Do you offer a sample centerpiece before the wedding?
- ☐ What is your delivery and setup process?
- ☐ Do you handle breakdown/cleanup after the event?
- ☐ What happens if certain flowers are unavailable?
- ☐ What deposit is required and when is final payment due?
- ☐ Can you repurpose ceremony flowers for the reception?
- ☐ Do you rent vases/containers or do we purchase them?

## **Additional Key Vendors**

### **Bakery/Cake Designer**

- ☐ Research styles: traditional tiered, cupcakes, dessert table
- ☐ Look at portfolio photos of previous work
- ☐ Schedule tastings with 2-3 bakers
- ☐ Discuss design options and customization
- ☐ Ask about delivery, setup, and cake stand rentals
- ☐ Confirm they can accommodate any dietary restrictions

## **Hair and Makeup Artists**

- ☐ Look at portfolios for styles similar to your vision
- ☐ Schedule trials with top choices
- ☐ Discuss timing and number of people needing services
- ☐ Ask about travel fees if they're coming to your venue
- ☐ Confirm they bring adequate lighting and supplies
- ☐ Discuss touch-up services and timing

## **Rental Companies**

- ☐ Determine needed rentals: chairs, tables, linens, dinnerware
- ☐ Get inventory list and pricing
- ☐ Ask about delivery, setup, and pickup fees
- ☐ Check cancellation policies and weather contingencies
- ☐ Ask about replacement costs for damaged items
- ☐ Request sample items or showroom visit

## **Transportation**

- ☐ Determine transportation needs (couple, wedding party, guests)
- ☐ Research options: limo, vintage car, shuttle service, etc.
- ☐ Check company reviews and safety records
- ☐ Discuss timing, routes, and multiple location logistics
- ☐ Confirm backup vehicle availability
- ☐ Ask about overtime charges

## **Officiant**

- ☐ Consider religious leaders, professional officiants, or friends
- ☐ Meet potential officiants in person
- ☐ Discuss ceremony style and customization options
- ☐ Ask about their process for creating the ceremony
- ☐ Confirm they're legally able to perform marriages in your state



- ☐ Ask about rehearsal attendance and fees

## **Evaluating & Booking Vendors**

### **Red Flags to Watch For**

- ☐ Poor communication or slow response time
- ☐ Unwillingness to provide references
- ☐ No written contract offered
- ☐ Vague pricing or many "extra" fees
- ☐ Negative reviews mentioning the same issues
- ☐ Unprofessional behavior during meetings
- ☐ Pressure tactics for booking
- ☐ No backup plan for emergencies
- ☐ Limited or outdated portfolio
- ☐ Unwillingness to accommodate reasonable requests

### **Contract Review Checklist**

- ☐ Correct date, time, and location
- ☐ Specific services included
- ☐ Exact pricing and payment schedule
- ☐ Setup and breakdown times
- ☐ Overtime rates
- ☐ Cancellation and postponement policies
- ☐ Required vendor meals and breaks
- ☐ Substitution policies for unavailable items
- ☐ Insurance coverage
- ☐ Emergency backup plans

### **Booking Best Practices**

- ☐ Get all agreements in writing
- ☐ Keep copies of all contracts in organized files
- ☐ Create a payment schedule and set reminders
- ☐ Consider wedding insurance for vendor protection
- ☐ Get receipt confirmation for all deposits
- ☐ Communicate your expectations clearly
- ☐ Create vendor contact sheet for day-of coordinator
- ☐ Follow up one month before wedding to confirm details

## Vendor Coordination Tips

### Timeline Development

- ☐ Create detailed day-of timeline with all vendor arrival times
- ☐ Share timeline with all vendors at least 2 weeks before
- ☐ Identify potential scheduling conflicts
- ☐ Build in buffer time between major events
- ☐ Confirm load-in times with venue

### Vendor Communication

- ☐ Designate one contact person for vendor questions
- ☐ Create shared document for vendor contact information
- ☐ Schedule check-in calls one month before wedding
- ☐ Create vendor meal list for caterer
- ☐ Provide parking/loading instructions
- ☐ Share final guest count with relevant vendors

### Day-of Management

- ☐ Assign a coordinator or trusted person to manage vendors
- ☐ Prepare vendor tip envelopes with clear labels
- ☐ Create vendor emergency contact list
- ☐ Have printed copies of all contracts available
- ☐ Prepare a venue map marking setup locations
- ☐ Plan vendor meal timing and location

## Vendor Review Templates

### Initial Contact Notes

Vendor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Initial Response Time: \_\_\_\_\_

First Impression Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Budget Compatibility: \_\_\_\_\_

Availability for Our Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Meeting/Interview Notes

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

**Key Points Discussed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions/Concerns:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Unique Offerings:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Professionalism Rating (1-10):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Impression:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Final Vendor Comparison

**Vendor Type:**

**Option 1**

**Option 2**

**Option 3**

Price

Package Inclusions

Experience Level

Communication

Availability

Contract Flexibility

Personality Fit

Overall Rating

□

□

## Final Thoughts

Finding the right vendors is one of the most important aspects of wedding planning. Take your time, trust your instincts, and prioritize vendors who understand your vision and communicate well. Remember that the lowest price isn't always the best value—experienced professionals often prevent costly mistakes and reduce your stress significantly.

With your photographer already secured (Inspire Me Photography—fantastic choice!), you're well on your way to assembling an amazing team of professionals who will bring your wedding dreams to life!

*Download this guide as a printable PDF at [inspire-me-photography.com/resources](https://inspire-me-photography.com/resources)*

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