

Questions to Ask When Evaluating a Location for Your Event

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Here Comes The Guide is a fantastic resource to help you find the location to host your wedding, rehearsal dinner or company party. Even with all the info we provide, though, you'll need to address your specific needs with each venue you visit to come up with a winner.

The following list of questions and tips will help you navigate through your location search. Print them out and use them as a guide while you're talking with a site contact or reviewing a site information packet. Feel free to add questions that relate to your particular event (e.g. "Can my dog be the ring bearer in my ceremony?") Make sure to get everything in writing in your final contract! **Don't forget to have a notebook or your planning binder handy so that you can record answers to all these questions.**

1. What dates are available in the month I'm considering?
2. How many people can this location accommodate?
3. What is the rental fee and what is included in that price? Is there a discount for booking an off-season date or on Sunday through Friday?
4. How much is the deposit, when is it due, and is it refundable? What's the payment plan for the entire bill?
5. Can I hold my ceremony here, too? Is there an additional charge? Is the ceremony site close to the reception site? Is there a bride's changing area? How much time is allocated for the rehearsal?
6. What's the cancellation policy? *NOTE: Some places will refund most of your deposit if you cancel far enough in advance (often 60 days), since there's still a chance they can rent the space. After a certain date, though, you may not be able to get a refund—at least not a full one.*
7. What's your weather contingency plan for outdoor spaces?
8. How long will I have use of the event space(s) I reserve? Is there an overtime fee if I stay longer? Is there a minimum or maximum rental time?
9. Can I move things around and decorate to suit my purposes, or do I have to leave everything as is? Are there decoration guidelines/restrictions? Can I use real candles? *TIP: Keep the existing décor in mind when planning your own decorations so that they won't clash. If your event is in December, ask what the venue's holiday décor will be.*
10. How much time will I have for décor setup? Does the venue provide assistance getting gifts or décor back to a designated car, hotel room, etc. after the event has concluded?
11. Do you provide a coat check service (especially important for winter weddings)? If not, is there an area that can be used and staffed for that purpose?
12. Is there an outdoor space where my guests can mingle, and can it be heated and/or protected from the elements if necessary? Is there a separate indoor "socializing" space?
13. Do you have an in-house caterer or a list of "preferred" caterers, or do I need to provide my own? Even if there is an in-house caterer, do I have the option of using an outside caterer instead?
14. If I hire my own caterer, are kitchen facilities available for them? *NOTE: Caterers charge extra if they have to haul in refrigerators and stoves.*
15. Are tables, chairs, plates, silverware and glassware provided, or will I have to rent them myself or get them through my caterer?
16. What is the food and beverage cost on a per/person basis? What is the service charge?
17. Can we do a food tasting prior to finalizing our menu selection? If so, is there an additional charge?
18. Can I bring in a cake from an outside cake maker or must I use a cake made on the premises? Is there a cake-cutting fee? If I use a cake made on site is the fee waived?

19. Can I bring my own wine, beer or champagne, and is there a corkage fee if I do? Can I bring in other alcohol?
20. Are you licensed to provide alcohol service? If so, is alcohol priced per person? By consumption? Are there additional charges for bar staff? Is there a bar minimum that must be met before the conclusion of the event? What is the average bar tab for the number of people attending my event? *NOTE: Some facilities (private estates and wineries in particular) aren't licensed to serve hard alcohol. You may need to get permission from the location to bring in an outside beverage catering company.*
21. Are there restrictions on what kind of music I can play, or a time by which the music must end? Can the venue accommodate a DJ or live band? *TIP: Check where the outlets are located in your event space, because that will help you figure out where the band can set up, and where other vendors can hook up their equipment. You don't want the head table to block the only outlet in the room.*
22. Is there parking on site? If so, is it complimentary? Do you offer valet parking, and what is the charge? If there is no parking on site, where will my guests park? Are cabs easily accessible from the venue? *TIP: You should have the venue keep track of the number of cars parked for your event and add the total valet gratuity to your final bill so that your guests won't have to tip.*
23. How many restrooms are there? *TIP: You should have at least 10 restrooms per 100 people.*
24. Do you offer on-site coordination? If so, what services are included and is there an additional charge for them? Will the coordinator supervise day-of? How much assistance can I get with the setup/décor?
25. What security services do you offer? Do I need to hire my own security guards, or does the site hire them or have them on staff? *TIP: In general, you should have 2 security guards for the first 100 guests and 1 more for every additional 100 guests.*
26. Does the venue have liability insurance? *NOTE: If someone gets injured during the party, you don't want to be held responsible—if the site doesn't have insurance, you'll need to get your own. For info on insurance click [here](#).*
27. Can I hire my own vendors (caterer, coordinator, DJ, etc.), or must I select from a preferred vendor list? If I can bring my own, do you have a list of recommended vendors?
28. What overnight accommodations do you provide? Do you offer a discount for booking multiple rooms? Do you provide a complimentary room or upgrade for the newlyweds? What are the nearest hotels to the venue? *TIP: Some venues have partnerships with local hotels that offer a discount if you book a block of rooms.*
29. Do you have signage or other aids to direct guests to my event?
30. Do you have a recycling policy?

More Tips:

- If you really love the site, ask the venue representative to put together a proposal with all the pricing and policies—including the tax and service charge—so you have an idea of the basic cost.
- Bring a camera with you to every location you visit, and organize the photos by location name when you get home. After seeing a series of places, it's easy to confuse them. Having a photographic record will help you remember what was special about each site.
- Pay attention to venue as a whole: Check out everything, including the restrooms, the foyer, the dressing rooms, the outdoor lighting and even the kitchen. You want to be sure your vision can be realized at this location. If possible, make arrangements with the site representative to visit the venue when it's set up for a wedding.
- **GET EVERYTHING IN WRITING.** Your date is not officially reserved until you sign a contract and, in many cases, give a deposit—even if a site contact says you don't need to worry about it. Once you've found THE PLACE, make sure you ask what is required to get your booking locked in and then follow through on satisfying those requirements. And don't assume that just because the site coordinator said you can have 4 votive candles per table, you'll get them. Before you sign a contract, read the fine print and make sure it includes everything you and the site contact agreed on. As new things are added or changed in your contract, have the updated version printed out and signed by you and the site representative. Also, document all your conversations in emails and keep your correspondence.