

Planning the Beverage and Bar Service for Our Wedding Reception

Tips Page

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An important aspect of your wedding reception is toasting. Yes, family and guests will raise their glasses and toast you, your love, your aspirations and your future. This is why most brides and grooms provide their reception guests with lots of champagne, wine, beer and liquors and/or non-alcoholic substitutes such as punch and bubbling juices.

Before hiring any Bar Service consider:

- Your budget
- Where your wedding reception will be held
- Who will serve
- If you want an open bar or a beverage service that is provided at the reception guest tables by a waiter or by a server with a rolling bar.
- A bar service outfit that holds a valid liquor license, issued by the state where your reception site is located.
- The type of wedding reception you are planning,
- The style of wedding reception you are planning,
- The theme of wedding reception you are planning,
- The time of day your reception will take place,
- The guests who will attend your wedding reception,
- The types of foods that will be served at your wedding reception,
- Do you want the bar to serve alcoholic beverages throughout the reception, or only at specific times?
- Asking the manager for reduced prices, for minors and guests who do not drink alcoholic beverages

If your wedding reception is hosted in a hotel or banquet hall, liquor is usually included in your package. In most cases, the charge quoted is a per-person times the number of guests. Some established independent caterers who provide a bar service calculate the fee charged the same way. Others may charge per unit, that is per drink, per bottle, per case, etc. Caterers who do not have a liquor license often purchase the alcohol from a vendor and quote you a price per bottle. Be sure to have all the pricing details. Don't join the group of consumers who get the unpleasant surprise of added on charges they did not suspect and did not calculate into their budget. Remember, there is no stupid question. Ask if the prices quoted take into consideration the number of minors who do not drink alcoholic beverages and if they include other fees such as tax, gratuities, **Corkage Fee** and labor. If not, ask that they be added to the total cost before you accept a bid. If the reception facility you contracted for your reception permits it, you may save handsomely if you supply the alcohol. You may be subjected to a "corkage fee," that is a flat fee charged by the caterer per bottle opened. Purchase the drinks in establishments that will accept and reimburse you for returned un-opened bottles. Club stores such as Costco and Sam's Club offer savings over the prices charged by liquor stores, and accept returns. **Provide canned rather than bottled or pop dispensers for soft drinks**, because they are easier to handle and pour and while partially used bottles create waste, unopened cans can be used later.

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BAR OPTIONS

An Open Bar:

At an open bar, your guests can have whatever drinks, and as many as they want, relatively speaking. You pay a flat rate per person for a certain period of time. This is the most expensive option and can cause guests to drink more than you would like them to, unless there is an announced limit. In many states, the hosts may be held legally responsible for their drunken guests. So, if you plan on having an open bar at your reception, assign several people the task of watching carefully to ensure that none of your guests gets drunk.

Read the paragraph **SAFETY CONCERNS**.

A Limited Bar

The name a limited bar says it all. Instead of having unlimited types of drinks, only a selected few are offered. You may choose to offer only beer and wine, only wine and mixed drinks only champagne and wine etc.

A Cash Bar

You guessed right. Guests pay for their own alcoholic drinks. **Do Not** do it! It is almost as rude as asking your guests for money. If you are on a super tight budget yet want to share a celebratory drink with your guests, offer only toasting champagne or toasting champagne and a bottle of wine at each table. Or have A Temporary Open Bar. Additionally, if you do plan a "cash bar" at your wedding reception, and it is not held in a liquor licensed facility, check ALL the local rules requirements and laws to make sure that you are in compliance.

A Temporary Open Bar

A temporary open bar is open only during a limited period of time. For example, you may have only a cocktail hour, have an open bar only before dinner or only before and for a single after dinner drink, etc.

Consumption Bar:

A consumption bar will keep a running tab of all drinks served and total the cost per drink. You will not be charged a flat fee per guest but for each drink consumed. If your guests like to drink, your bill will add up quickly and your cost could be very high.

Beverage Stations

Each of various stations features a specific beverage theme. For example: One station serves wine, another serves beer, another serves hard liquor and mixed drinks, and yet another serves water and soft drinks.

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TERMS USED BY CATERERS AND BAR SERVICE COMPANIES

Champagne Reception:

A champagne reception serves only champagne. No other alcoholic beverages are served. Typically, each bottle can serve four glasses. When calculating how much champagne to order, figure that every guest will be provided with 2 glasses for cocktails, and one glass for a toast.

Corkage Fee:

Some caterers and bar services charge a fee for every bottle they open or uncork, especially, but not only if you provide the wines and liquor. However it is more common for venues to provide the wine and liquor for your reception.

Mixed Drinks:

Mixed drinks are made from combinations of liquor, juices, sodas, condiments and waters that are mixed, shaken or stirred. They are often further served garnished. The cost of each mixed drink is usually higher than that of most wines or champagnes.

Poured Drinks:

Poured Drinks are drinks poured directly from the bottle to the glass. When the glass contains ice the liquor is served on the rocks. A poured drink is quite often garnished with a twist of lemon or lime zest.

Premium Brands:

Famous or top-quality brands of liquors, wine or beer that usually display vintage labels, whether imported or domestic they are your most expensive options.

Table Service:

Is pretty much self explanatory. This Beverage service is where a waiter or a server with a rolling bar serves the guests at their tables.

Wine & Champagne Bar:

A bar that features champagne, wines and often a choice of sparkling waters, juices and sodas for minors and for guests who prefer non-alcoholic drinks.

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Saving On Beverages

The following is geared for wedding where the bride and groom who either provide the beverages, hire a beverage and bar service or have the caterer provide the beverages and bar. Wines and liquors are quite expensive. If you have an open bar, where guests have access to unlimited drinks throughout the entire reception, it may set you back by as much as 10 to 20% of your total budget. Additionally, select basic beverages that can be versatile. That is, they can be served straight but can also be made into mixed drinks. This will minimize waste and leftovers. You may also decide to serve only champagne, wine and beer. Be sure to have some non-alcoholic drinks such as bubbly juices for guests who do not drink alcoholic beverages. Use 12 ounce glasses for mixed drinks, beer and soft drinks. Serve wine in 6 ounce glasses. Your wedding guests will have a reasonable portion which will decrease the number of times they will return for a refill, thus you will utilize the beverage service personnel more efficiently. Unless your reception is very formal, **use canned soft drinks instead of 2 liter bottles or pop dispensers.** They are easier to handle and pour, allow for multiple varieties and will minimize waste, as the leftover product can be used later.

Staffing Your Bar

Hire experienced bartenders who are familiar with portion control as they can save you money and provide quality service and safety for you and your guests. Bar stations are becoming quite popular because they distribute traffic flow. You may have one station dedicated to wine, another to liquor, another to soft drinks and yet another to hot drinks. Only the wine and liquor require a licensed professional bartender. Hire bar tenders to accommodate the type and style of your wedding reception and the number of guests attending. Bartenders usually work more efficiently in teams. Always engage at least two bartenders or a bartender and an assistant and you will save in overall equipment, labor and product costs. The bartender to guest ratio should range between 1 per 50 and 2 per 100. This will usually provide an efficient service. Bar stations are becoming quite popular. You may have one station dedicated to wine, another to liquor, another to soft drinks and yet another to hot drinks. Having a clearly visible display of the available beverage selections will save time. When you compare the pricing of various bar providers and beverage catering companies, do not compare cost estimates. Compare the cost per unit. Ask to be quoted pricing based on cost per drink, per bottle, per case, and per keg. Additionally request that all other costs and fees including tax and labor are clearly outlined. Find out if gratuity is calculated in or is an add-on. If the quotes you get are based on a flat cost per guest, make sure that allowance is given to minors in attendance as they would drink only juice, water or soft drinks. Be sure that your total is adjusted according to the number of minors attending your wedding.

A Note about White, Blush And Red Wines

Chablis, Blush and Burgundy are less expensive than Chardonnay, White Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot.

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Bar Hours

In order for your liquor bill not to get out of sight and at the same time minimize the chance that some guests may get drunk and spoil your celebration, you may choose to have a limited time bar. The bar is opened only during specific times such as the cocktail hour and right after dinner. However, you should have champagne for toasting and wine served with the meal. It is important that the bar will stop serving alcoholic drinks at least an hour before your guests hit the road. Non-alcoholic beverages, especially coffee, should be served until the very end of your wedding reception.

Fees and Expenses You Must Be Aware Of

Be sure that the following and other fees are disclosed to you before you sign any contract. It is not uncommon for venues and catering facilities not to mention them unless asked specifically. Be aware! Do not let anyone surprise you with hidden costs.

Wedding Bartenders and Bar set-up and Clean-up fee

Some reception sites and caterers charge an extra fee for bartending and for **setting up** the bar. Additionally bartenders expect to be paid a **gratuity** fee. The average gratuity is 15% to 18% of your beverage and/or bar bill.

Corkage Fee

Many reception sites and caterers that allow you to supply the beverages, charge a corkage fee which is the fee for each bottle un-corked or opened by a member of their staff.

Fee to Pour Coffee

In addition to the corkage and cake-cutting fees, some facilities also charge extra to pour coffee for your guests.

How Much To Serve

When you plan your bar, calculate for two to three drinks per person for the cocktail hour and one drink each per hour after that. Additionally have plenty of soft drinks, hot drinks and water on hand.

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Legalese

The consumption of alcoholic beverages by minors is illegal in most states.

Most homeowner's policies written since the late 1980's contain "**Host Liquor Liability**" coverage that covers free service of alcoholic beverages in the home of the policy holder. If your wedding is in a home that is covered, and you do not charge for drinks, the coverage will extend to wedding guests. If you plan to collect money from your wedding guests for alcoholic beverages, you will lose the coverage because serving the alcoholic beverages will be considered a commercial sale. Not only will you lose the insurance coverage, but you will be required to provide a liquor license. If you hire a bar service or a caterer who has a liquor license, or if your wedding reception is being held in a facility that provides a bar service, their liability insurance should cover your wedding reception. Therefore, it would behoove you to **obtain copies** of both the vendor's liquor license and certificate of insurance.

Public Facility

In most states, public facilities must be licensed in order to serve alcoholic beverages. Therefore, if you plan a self hosted wedding in a public place that is licensed, you must have a licensed monitor to observe that no laws are broken and that no alcohol is served to minors.

Safety Concerns

You do not want any of your guests to drive drunk. You are going to be too busy. So, depending on the size of your wedding, appoint one or two of your wedding attendants to be bar monitors and to keep an eye on guests who may have over indulged themselves. Ask the bartenders to alert the monitors of such guests as well. If your monitor suspect that any guests had consumed too much alcohol, have him/her arrange for someone sober to give them a ride or order a taxi service to do so.

Oops!

Consider the carpet before serving red wines in your home. However, if some is accidentally spilled, white wine is quite good at removing red wine stains.

Bride's Name: _____ **Groom's Name:** _____ **Wedding Date:** _____

Alcoholic Drinks

Item	18 Drinks / Fifth	20 Drinks / Quart
Champagne		
Sparkling wine		
White Wine such as White Zinfandel		
Red wine such as Cabernet Sauvignon		
Beer Domestic, Import or Micro Selection		
Non alcoholic beer		
Bourbon		
Brandy		
Gin		
Dark rum		
Light rum		
Scotch		
Dry sherry		
Sweet sherry		
Tequila		
Triple sec		
Dry vermouth		
Sweet vermouth		
Bourbon		
Brandy		
Gin		
Bailey's Irish Cream		
Grand Marnier		
Amaretto		
Sambucca		
Frangelico		
Cognac		
Brandy		

The following will help you plan the beverage purchasing needs per 100 guests:

- Bourbon 3 Fifths
- Gin 3 Fifths
- Rum 2 Fifths
- Scotch 4 Quarts
- Vodka 5 Quarts
- White Wine 2 Cases
- Red Wine 1 Case
- Champagne 3 Cases
- Soda 2 Cases each
- Juice 5 Gallons each

Bride's Name: _____ Groom's Name: _____ Wedding Date: _____

Mixes, Non-Alcoholic Beverages, Garnishes Equipment and Essentials

MIXES & NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS	GARNISHES	EQUIPMENT	ESSENTIALS
Tonic Soda	Lemons	Portable Bar or	Ice
Tonic Water	Limes	Skirted and covered Table with	Glassware
Club Soda	Oranges	a small table for a back bar area	Napkins
Lemon Sour	Maricino Cherries	Ice Coolers	Bottle Openers
Orange Juice	Pickled Pearl Onions	Coolers for Chilled Products	Carafes
Lemon juice	Olives		Pour Spouts
Lime juice	Tabasco		Stir Sticks
Grapefruit Juice	Worcestshire		Mixer
Cranberry Juice			Cocktail Stirrers
Tomato Juice			Straws
Pineapple juice			Decorative picks
Grape juice			Bar Towels
Sparkling Grape Juice			
Apple Juice			
Sparkling Apple Juice			
Grenadine			
Bloody Mary Mix			
Margarita Mix			
Club soda or Seltzer			
Ginger ale			
Seven Up			
Cola			
Diet Cola			
Lemon lime soda			
Root beer			
Diet soda			
Water			
Milk			
Half and Half			
Heavy Cream			
Coffee			
3 lbs for a 50 cup urn			
Decaf			
3 lbs			
Tea			
50 bags per 50 cups			
Punch			
4 gals Per 50 cups			

Bride's Name: _____ Groom's Name: _____ Wedding Date: _____

Bar Worksheet – For Our Wedding

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Liquor store information:

Name of store: _____

Manager: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Web Site: _____ Interview Date: _____

Person responsible to place order:

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Order placed on: _____ at: _____ O'clock. Order was taken at store by: _____

Total Bill: \$_____ Deposit: \$_____ paid by: Check number: _____ By Credit card: _____

Person responsible to pick up order: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Order picked up on: _____ at: _____ O'clock and delivered to: _____

Items that need to be chilled: _____

Person responsible for the bar including set-up, serving drinks and cleanup: _____

Bar tender Cost: \$_____ per hour / per event. Corkage fee if any: \$_____ Estimated. Total: \$_____

Person responsible to store opened bottles: _____ Phone: _____

Person responsible to return unopened bottles to store: _____

Unopened bottles returned on: _____ at: _____ o'clock and accepted at store by: _____

Refund in the amount of: \$_____ issued by store on: _____ By check: ___ By Credit card refund: ___

Complete Bartender service includes all drinks for _____ Guests and _____ Minors

Package 1: includes _____ Cost: \$ _____

Package 2: includes _____ Cost: \$ _____

Other options: _____ Cost: \$ _____

Bar Worksheet – For Our Wedding

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Liquor store information:

Name of store: _____

Manager: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Web Site: _____ Interview Date: _____ Time: _____

Person responsible to place order: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Order placed on: _____ at: _____ O'clock. Order was taken at store by: _____

Total Bill: \$ _____ Deposit: \$ _____ paid by: Check number: _____ By Credit card: _____

Person responsible to pick up order: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Order picked up on: _____ at: _____ o'clock and delivered to: _____

Items that need to be chilled: _____

Person responsible for the bar including set-up, serving drinks and cleanup: _____

Bar tender Cost: \$ _____ per hour / per event. Corkage fee if any: \$ _____ Estimated. Total: \$ _____

Person responsible to store opened bottles: _____ Phone: _____

Person responsible to return unopened bottles to store: _____

Unopened bottles returned on: _____ at: _____ O'clock and accepted at store by: _____

Refund in the amount of: \$ _____ issued by store on: _____ By check: _____ By Credit card refund: _____

Notes and Comments:

Bride's Name: _____ **Groom's Name:** _____ **Wedding Date:** _____

Bar Contract Checklist Worksheet

Prior to the contract we received a detailed bill for our order and agree with it: Yes: _____ No: _____

We received the contract on: Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

From: Full Name: _____ Title or Position in Company: _____

Contract is signed by: _____ Title or Position in Company: _____

Bartending Contract includes the date: Yes: _____ No: _____ and appropriate signature(s): Yes: _____ No: _____

Bartending Contract specifies **total** payment due: Yes: _____ No: _____ we agree: Yes: _____ No: _____

Total amount of deposit and date made: Yes: _____ No: _____ what we get for the deposit: Yes: _____ No: _____

Method of payment accepted: Check Yes: _____ No: _____ Credit card: Yes: _____ No: _____ Which credit: card _____

Total amount of balance due Yes: _____ No: _____ By when: Yes: _____ No: _____

Total includes ALL incidentals such as taxes, gratuities, bar set-up and cleaning, etc. Yes: _____ No: _____

The contract specifies the following dates:

- ✓ Date of entering the contract Yes _____ No _____
- ✓ Date and time of set-up, delivery and service at the Rehearsal Dinner, if applicable: Yes _____ No _____
- ✓ Date and time of delivery and number of hours of service at the Wedding Reception: Yes _____ No _____
- ✓ Last date to add, or make changes: Yes _____ No _____
- ✓ Dates payments are due as follows: Deposit _____ Payment in full _____

The Contract includes:

- ✓ Bar service full company name, owner or manager's name, complete address: Yes _____ No _____
- ✓ Bar service's complete contact information including phone number(s), fax, Email: Yes _____ No _____
- ✓ Bar service's emergency contact information: person to contact and phone number(s) Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ Full details about every item including the quantity and entire bar stock we ordered Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ Full details about every good and service provided by the Bar service Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ Names of all bartenders assigned to our wedding, detailing their responsibilities Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ All possible back-up services if needed: Yes: _____ No: _____ We agree Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ A 3 days cancellation clause allowing us to cancel within 3 days with no penalties Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ Full cancellation and refund policy should we cancel after the 3 days grace period: Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ Full cancellation policy and procedures if the Caterer cancels Yes: _____ No: _____ We agree Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ Disclosure about the Bar service's guarantees: Yes: _____ No: _____
- ✓ Proof that they are insured and bonded: Yes: _____ No: _____ and have a liquor license Yes: _____ No: _____

We agree with, signed and dated the contract on: Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Bride's Name: _____ **Groom's Name:** _____ **Wedding Date:** _____

Notes and Comments