

Wedding costs take the cake

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By [Alice Hudson](#)

You have picked your dream venue, agonised over choosing the photographer and plumped for the perfect cake.

Now comes the real shock: your already big wedding bill is likely to be much larger than necessary.

Suzanne Carson, director of Christchurch-based Events and Wedding Professionals said it was common for suppliers to boost their prices for weddings.

Overseas couples getting hitched here – often without relatives, guests and a full reception – were commonly charged "horrific" bills of up to \$1000 for wedding photos. "That's just to take a few shots, put them on a disc and send them on their way."

Auckland wedding planner Amy Davidson said clients often asked her whether rumours of wedding mark-ups were true.

"You will look at a cake online and it will be one price, then once you mention it's for a wedding the price can suddenly go up."

The *Herald on Sunday* made two calls to five venues, photographers, cake makers and hairstylists selected at random from around the North Island.

We asked first for quotes for a wedding for about 80 people, then for a birthday party and family reunion for the same number of guests. The difference in several areas was marked.

A summer Saturday wedding at Waiheke Island's popular Mudbrick Vineyard costs at least \$15,000. The price of a big birthday bash – three courses for 80 guests – was \$6120, excluding beverages.

Owner Robyn Jones said wedding parties used the whole venue. The vineyard employed wedding co-ordinators to help with every aspect of the day, set menus started at \$77 a head and there was no mark-up on wedding food.

At the bistro at Black Barn Vineyards in Hawke's Bay, venue hire for a birthday dinner for 80 people was \$350. But a wedding cost \$2000, which included a "fully set dining room" and use of the courtyard garden.

A Black Barn spokeswoman said the wedding hire charge included administration and co-ordination fees and was "completely different" to a birthday party.

Most photographers offered bridal packages involving at least four hours' shooting.

We asked Auckland's Aaron Lang if a two-hour option was available. He told us we could get 800–1000 shots, including 150 high-resolution versions of our favourite wedding snaps on a disc for \$1200. When we asked him to attend a family reunion for the same length of time, the quote was \$450 plus GST for 400–600 shots, again with a high-res selection.

Steve May, of one2onephotography, quoted a similar deal for a family reunion but his cheapest wedding package, including at least four hours at the event, started at \$1950.

The photographers said several factors pushed up prices. Weddings required far more creativity and time, particularly for post-production work.

"We can be climbing trees – last week we were out on Coastguard boats," said Lang.

The price of cakes also soared once "wedding" was mentioned.



Happy couples planning their wedding day may be taking a closer look at their quotes as the financial crisis grips the country. Photo / BOP Times

At Albany's Chocolate Earth a two-tiered plain, round chocolate cake with white icing, cake board and ribbon would cost the happy couple \$390.

A similar cake, encased in chocolate, for a birthday party was \$275.

At Mt Eden's City Cakes, adding a second tier to a chocolate ganache cake added an estimated \$220 to the price. Manager Susanna Pattison confirmed the quotes but denied prices were "hiked" for weddings and said they were clearly stated on the website.

She said wedding cakes were tiered, and involved more detail and work. A birthday cake with the same detail would cost the same.

Tracey Lee of Chocolate Earth said many cakemakers charged more for weddings, but there was a "vast difference" in the style of the two cakes.

"People are willing to pay \$70 an hour for a plumber but when it comes to cakes they say to me 'What is it made of? Gold?' They don't realise that you may have spent 15 hours working on a cake."

At Barnaby's Hair Salon in Auckland's Newmarket, a bridal do was quoted as costing "from \$100". The same styling for a birthday was "from \$85". For bridesmaids with long hair worn out in curls, the estimated cost was \$85 each. The same style for someone going to a party was \$60-\$85.

At Wellington's Bliss Salon and Spa, a bridal hairdo was \$155 with bridesmaids \$85 each. A "complicated style" for a birthday girl was \$85-\$95, and curls for her friends \$65 each.

Barnaby manager Olga Lomakine and a Bliss employee both said bridal parties needed extra time and care.

But Carson warned suppliers they may not be able to get away with wedding premiums for much longer. "With the current economic climate people aren't going to stand for it. People are going to be watching every dollar."

Consumer New Zealand chief executive Sue Chetwin was not surprised by the results of our survey.

"Maybe couples planning a wedding should try to avoid mentioning the [wedding] word," she said.

But Christchurch wedding planner Emma Newman doubted suppliers in her area would dare charge more for weddings.

"It's a small place, and they couldn't get away with it."

If anything, clients who went through a wedding planner could receive a slight discount.

Newman advised prospective brides to be upfront to ensure they got the best prices.

"If you think there may be an issue, be honest about it. Ask whether you can be reassured you are getting the same deal as someone who was having a conference, or a birthday."

Wedding planner Amy Davidson said couples should try omitting the "W" word when asking for quotes.

The 28-year-old, of Auckland's Wonderful Weddings, said some venues she had booked for clients hiked prices "because they could". One exclusive lodge slapped a \$5000 surcharge on the bill for one January wedding.

Davidson, who is getting married in two weeks, said she had been doing her own research and had noticed differences in the price of cakes in particular.

Cake makers using expensive fondant icing had a good excuse for higher prices, but hairdressers couldn't necessarily justify the extra cost.

"Ball styles can be very complicated and wedding styles can be simple, so they can't say it always takes longer."

"You have to shop around."

- ADDITIONAL REPORTING: Rhiannon Horrell

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