

Til debt do us part

The average LI wedding costs **\$61,113** — nearly twice the national average. Here's where that money goes.

BY LAURA BLASEY

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I take thee to be my wedded spouse — for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until debt do us part.

Does that last line sound unfamiliar? Welcome to the world of Long Island wedding planning.

Long Island ranks third nationally for highest average wedding costs, behind Manhattan and North/Central New Jersey, according to The Knot's 2017 Real Weddings Study, which includes surveys of 13,000 couples who got married in 2017.

The total cost of a Long Island wedding, excluding a honeymoon, was \$61,113 on average, nearly twice the national average of \$33,391, according to the study.

"Being in New York, most people will spend more money on their wedding than a [house] down payment on Long Island," said Christina DiPasquale, manager at Village Bridal and Boutique in Babylon. "We do everything bigger and better in New York."

Compared with the rest of the country, Long Island couples were most likely to have black tie weddings and were among the top spenders for wedding dresses, according to The Knot.

As couples and vendors prepared for September, the most popular wedding month, Newsday spoke with local wedding experts to explain the costs of a dream wedding on Long Island.

All prices are averages, according to The Knot survey.

THE VENUE **\$27,685**

The single greatest expense for any bride typically is the



venue. Couples nationally told The Knot they spent about half their budget on reception venues last year. At an average price tag of \$27,685, Long Island couples spend more on their reception venue than some spend on their entire wedding.

The competition for wedding dates here is fierce. Wedding planner Sonal J. Shah is based in Manhattan and specializes in South Asian and multicultural weddings. She said many New York City brides come to her dreaming of a Long Island venue with a waterfront view.

Venues might have multiple weddings in a day, especially on Saturdays in the summer. Fall is also a popular time to get married, with 30 percent of weddings nationally taking place in September and October, according to The Knot.

Many popular local wedding venues offer lists of experienced vendors, on-site catering and all-inclusive packages, planners said.

Cultural traditions can also play a significant role in the cost. For example, Shah said South Asian weddings usually have more guests than average and multiple days of events, adding to the venue budget.

Some couples save money by choosing a less-inclusive venue or even having a backyard wedding. But Kristina Spiropoulos, owner of Northern Lights Events

in Huntington, said those cost money, too, for tents, catering and more.

Having a ceremony at a separate location will add an average \$1,672 to the total, and transportation to the reception costs around \$1,400, according to The Knot.

THE DRESS **\$2,347**

From beading to alterations, bridal gowns require an enormous amount of labor, said DiPasquale, manager at Village Bridal in Babylon. But the price of that labor isn't always obvious.

Brides "come in and they have an idea, but they don't think beyond the dress," DiPasquale said.

The average Long Island bride in The Knot survey spends \$2,347 — topped only by Manhattan — compared with the national average of \$1,509 for a bridal gown.

Modern brides are gravitating more toward less expensive styles, such as flowy bohemian dresses, DiPasquale said.

Still, the final cost of a gown is in the alterations budget, DiPasquale said. Few dresses are completely ready to go, and many brides add sleeves, straps, a belt or, of course, a veil.

"There's four to eight layers on a wedding gown and each



one has to be hemmed, for example," DiPasquale said. "When we have to take in something that's beaded, you have to open up a side seam and the whole thing has to be re-beaded, so that's hours of work."

THE RING **\$9,500**

For most couples, it all starts with the ring.

Long Island couples surveyed by The Knot said they spent an average of \$9,500 on the engagement ring in 2017, nearly twice the national average.

Couples spend on average 3.5 months searching for the right ring, looking at more than two dozen rings in the process, according to a separate 2017 Knot survey of 14,000 couples across the country.

Of those surveyed, 45 percent went with a custom ring. As for the rock on that ring, about half chose a round cut diamond around 1.2 carats.

Those trends mirror what Jeff Reizner, owner of From Italy With Love Jewelers in Westbury, has seen among his customers.

The average 1.5 carat diamond he sells runs around \$10,000 without a setting.

"The most important thing is the diamond, so if people have a budget, we recommend putting your money into the diamond

and less into the setting," Reizner said.

Reizner said many of his younger customers forgo other wedding jewelry, like necklaces or earrings, but don't skip the wedding bands. Those run about \$2,000 total, he said.

But if you're going to spend the money, why not on the jewelry?

"When people get married, they can spend up to \$100,000 on the venue, the entertainment, for a couple hours and what do they leave with?" he said. "It's memories, photos and jewelry, that's it."

PHOTO AND VIDEO **\$6,996**

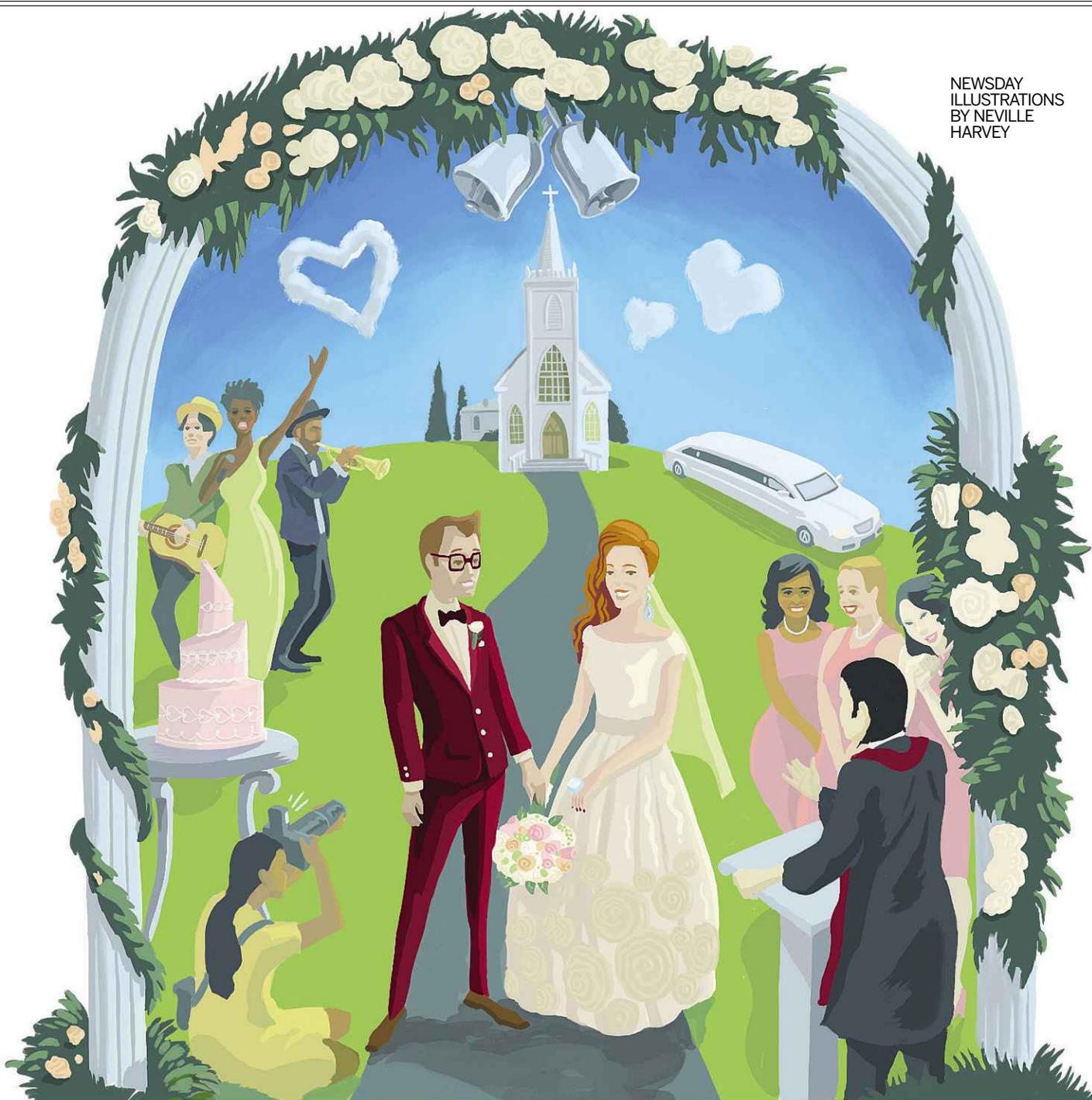
Just as with nearly every other category, Long Islanders paid more for photos and video of their weddings than other areas of the country.

The Knot's survey found the national average for photo services was \$2,630 and \$1,912 for video. But Long Islanders paid \$4,379 and \$2,617 on average, respectively.

It's rare for Wantagh wedding photographer and videographer Charles Eames to see couples skip a wedding video.

With so many options for couples and high overhead costs and plenty of competition for





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EVENT PLANNING **\$2,046**

Planners on Long Island said couples must keep the budget in mind for this category. Families first need to set a guest list and a reasonable per-person cost, then figure out where the money will come from to meet that total, Shah said.

“That can be a difficult conversation to have early on because that’s not the romantic, fun part of wedding planning,” Shah said. “Even the wealthiest bride has a budget.”

According to The Knot’s numbers, couples on average paid for 41 percent of the wedding costs, relying mainly on parents for the rest. A 2015 Knot survey found 76 percent of couples went over budget and more than a third used credit cards to pay for wedding costs.

Even having a wedding planner is a luxury, Shah said. Long Islanders spent on average of \$2,046 on event planning help, just above the national average, according to The Knot survey. Most planners offer packages that range from planning every aspect of the event to help on just the wedding day.

One planning tip that’s not worth it? Vendors and planners say couples should avoid trying to match the kinds of weddings they see on Pinterest, bridal TV shows and even “Keeping Up With the Kardashians.”

“The TV shows, Pinterest, it has a huge role in a bride’s perception. The reality hits when you price out all the details,” said Carline Beaubrun, creative director and founder of Events by Carline in Garden City.

Instead, Beaubrun asks her clients to focus on what makes them unique as a couple. Their interests might mean they choose a more expensive band versus a DJ. But it could also mean they spend less on creative, personal centerpieces instead of large floral ones.

“Brides and grooms fight less about the expenses when there’s a reasoning behind it,” she said. “It becomes a better experience.”

vendors, photographers have had to adapt.

Eames started offering video services with photo packages about three years ago and found high demand for it. A typical package can range from \$4,000 to \$7,000 and will include two photographers, a drone, an online gallery and a drive with the photos and video, he said. Couples can also add an album or prints.

“Video picks up where the photos leave off,” he said. “People cry watching them. I’ve had customers who lose loved ones and they get to go back and relive their dance with their grandfather.”

Ultimately, with so much competition, couples can pick a pho-

tographer that best meets their budget and style, Eames said.

THE CAKE **\$548**

If you have the budget, you can have your cake and eat it, too. By The Knot’s numbers, Long Islanders spend about \$548 on their wedding cakes, \$8 more than the national average.

Some Long Island venue wedding packages include food and cake, said Kristyne Kounas, co-owner of The Sweet Duchess custom cakes in East Meadow.

But if you want a custom cake, you’ll have to be prepared to pay more for it. Kounas’ customers typically want something beyond vanilla and chocolate and

can pay from \$800 to \$1,600 for a cake serving 150 guests.

Kounas designs, bakes and decorates the cakes herself after consulting with the couple. The Sweet Duchess offers unique flavors, like earl gray lavender with blueberry buttercream or orange



cake soaked in triple sec with chocolate ganache.

Kounas said they do not charge more per flavor, but some ingredients can get pricey. They recently removed pistachio from the menu because it was no longer affordable.

One big trend among recent couples is edible gold, Kounas said, a very expensive add-on. A four-tier cake with edible gold could run as much as \$20 per serving, depending on how much gold is added. That 150-person cake mentioned above would be \$5-10 per serving.

“You are paying for something that’s not your everyday wedding cake. That’s why people like coming to places like us,” Kounas said.

