

What to Ask Your Wedding Venue Before Booking

A Practical Checklist for Couples Getting Married in Ireland

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How to Use This Guide

Booking your wedding venue is exciting—but it's also one of the biggest decisions you'll make.

This checklist is designed to help you:

- Ask the right questions early
- Avoid assumptions that cause stress later
- Get clarity before deposits are paid
- Ensure your ceremony and reception flow smoothly
- Spot potential conflicts between your vision and venue logistics
- Build a written agreement that protects both you and the venue

You don't need to ask every question in one meeting. Use this guide as a reference tool and tick things off as you go. Some answers will come naturally; others require specific follow up. The goal is clarity, not interrogation.

Pro tip: If something matters to you and it's not standard—get it written into your contract. Verbal agreements fade; written terms survive stress and memory gaps.

SECTION 1: Legal & Ceremony Foundations

These questions affect whether your ceremony can legally and practically take place in the venue. They're the foundation everything else builds on.

- Has a legal ceremony taken place here before?
- Are there indoor and outdoor ceremony options?
- If outdoors, is the space attached/annexed to the building, or standalone? (This affects legal status in some cases.)
- Is there a wet-weather backup, and when must the decision be made? (Day-of? 24 hours prior?)
- Who on-site coordinates with our solemniser/registrar on the day?
- How does the solemniser/registrar access the venue before guests arrive?
- How long before the ceremony can we access the space, to decorate, get the space ready?

- What level of decoration do the venue provide in the ceremony space?

SECTION 2: Ceremony Setup & Flow

- What rooms or spaces can the ceremony take place in?
- Is there a room hire fee for the ceremony space, or is it included in the package?
- How early can the ceremony space be accessed for setup? (90 minutes? 2 hours?

The night before)

- Who is responsible for setup:
 - Chairs or benches
 - Aisle runner or marking
 - Ceremony table for signing
 - Couple's decorative items (arbour, arch, flowers)
- If the couple brings an arch or structure, who installs and secures it?
- Are candles, lanterns, or naked flames permitted?
- Are confetti, petals, bubbles, sparklers allowed? Where? (Inside only? Outside only?)
- What's the cleanup protocol for loose petals or confetti?
- Is the ceremony space reused immediately after for:
 - Drinks reception
 - Guest photos with backdrop
 - Guest seating (if moving to second room for meals)
- How much turnaround time is needed between ceremony and next use of the space?
- Are there restrictions on ceremony length or start times?
- If a live musician is performing during the ceremony, where do they position? Is there power?

SECTION 3: Practical Logistics (Often Overlooked)

- Is the venue exclusive to your wedding on that date, or are there multiple weddings simultaneously?
- If multiple weddings: Are there separate ceremony spaces? Separate catering areas? Separate parking?

- What is the maximum and minimum guest number allowed?
- Are children welcome, and are there any restrictions? (Age limits? High chairs provided?)
- What time can:
 - Suppliers (florist, photographer, videographer, musicians) arrive and begin setup?
 - Guests arrive?
 - Is there a set time for the Ceremony to officially begin?
- Is there a set start time window, or flexibility?
- Who greets the couple and bridal party on arrival?
- Where does the bridal party wait before the ceremony? (Is it private? Climate controlled?)
- What happens if the ceremony needs to be delayed? For how long?
- Is there a "ceremony call time" that's communicated to guests?
- Where are guest bags/coats stored during the ceremony?
- Are there accessible bathroom facilities near the ceremony space?
- Is there adequate parking, or must guests use street parking / external lot?

SECTION 4: Accommodation & Bridal Party Considerations

- Is there a room block for wedding guests at negotiated rates?
- Are special rates offered for wedding guests outside the room block?
- Is the couple offered a complimentary suite, or an upgrade from the standard rate?
- Can the couple stay the night before the wedding? (Highly recommended for stress-free morning prep for the ladies.)
- What time is check-in/check-out on the wedding weekend?
- Is early access available on the wedding day for:
 - Hair & makeup setup
 - Photographers
 - Bridal party prep and final touches
- Is there a separate, private space for:
 - Groom / partner prep (away from bride sightline)
 - Parents' pre-ceremony gathering
 - Bridesmaids / wedding party to gather and dress
- Can this prep space be held from a set time? For how long?

- Is there a designated area for children to settle pre-ceremony?
- Are refreshments (water, snacks, coffee) available to the bridal party during prep?

SECTION 5: Food, Drinks & Reception Flow

- Where do guests go immediately after the ceremony?
- Is the transition from ceremony to reception outdoor or indoors? (Does weather impact this?)
- Are arrival drinks included in the package or charged separately?
- What arrival drinks options are offered?
- Is a menu tasting included? For how many people? (2? 4? Unlimited?)

- Can the couple select different menus for different dietary preferences?
- How are dietary requirements (vegetarian, vegan, allergies, religious restrictions) handled?
- When are final guest numbers due?
- What happens if final numbers drop significantly below the initial estimate? (Refund? No adjustment?)
- Is there flexibility to adjust numbers in the final week if last-minute guests confirm?

- Is late-night food available? Cost? Menu options?

- Are supplier meals provided for:
 - Photographer
 - Videographer
 - Musicians / DJ
 - Other key suppliers
- Can the couple customise meal timing—e.g., starters while guests finish arriving?

- Is there flexibility around speech timing and when meals are served?

- Can speeches happen before dinner, during, or after?
- Are there breaks built in for cake cutting, first dance, or other moments?
- What is the venue's stance on outside alcohol (BYOB policies)?
- Are there corkage fees if the couple brings their own wine or drinks?

SECTION 6: Music, Sound & Atmosphere

- Is there a PA system or microphone for the ceremony? (Quality? Operator included?)
- Is outdoor sound/amplification permitted?
- Are there sound restrictions due to neighbours or local regulations?
- Is there adequate space and power for live musicians?
- If live band or DJ: Can they do a soundcheck in advance?
- Are there volume restrictions, or noise curfews?
- What is the latest time music can play?
- Can music continue into an after-party, or does it stop at an official time?
- Does the venue provide a DJ or sound system, or must the couple hire external?
- If the couple brings a musician for the ceremony, will the venue facilitate their setup and timing?

SECTION 7: Décor, Deliveries & Styling

- When can décor be delivered to the venue?
- Is there secure storage for décor items before the wedding day?
- Who sets up decorations—the couple/family, the florist, the venue, or split responsibility?
- Who removes decorations after the wedding?
- Are there restrictions on:
 - Florists (must use venue florist, or external allowed?)
 - Signage (size, materials, placement rules)
 - Arches / structures (height, weight limits, installation method)
 - Hanging installations (from ceiling? Wall-mounted only?)
 - Lighting (string lights, uplighting, projections)
 - Candles or open flames
- Are table layouts flexible, or are tables preset?
- When is the seating plan deadline?
- Can room layouts change on the day if needed, or are they finalised in advance?

- Is there flexibility to use alternative spaces if guest count changes significantly?
- Can the couple bring in outside décor, or must items be sourced through the venue?
- What is the venue's policy on wedding favours or gifts left at place settings?

SECTION 8: Photography & Videography

- Is flash allowed indoors during the ceremony?
- Are tripods permitted for photographers and videographers?
- Is drone photography allowed? (Indoors or outdoors?)
- Where can photographers park, load in, and stage equipment?
- Are there good indoor photo options in bad weather?
- Can photographers access the venue before guests arrive for couple portraits?

- Is there a designated "first look" space if the couple wants to do one?
- Can photographers move freely throughout the ceremony and reception, or are there restricted areas?
- Is there a quiet space where the photographer can set up a formal couple portrait session post-ceremony?

SECTION 9: Payments, Contracts & Flexibility

- Deposit amount and payment schedule? (e.g., 25% on booking, 50% at 6 months, balance 2 weeks prior)
- Final balance due when? (Exact date)
- What methods of payment are accepted? (Bank transfer, card, cheque?)
- Cancellation policy? (Full refund if cancelled >12 months out? Sliding scale for later cancellations?)
- Date change policy? (Can the couple move the date if circumstances change? Cost?)

- What happens if the venue must cancel on the couple?
- What happens if weather forces a plan change? (Indoor backup included? Or rescheduling only?)
- If the venue becomes unavailable, is the couple offered an alternative date or full refund?
- Is the contract clear on what's included and what's charged separately?

- Are there hidden fees (service charges, venue dressing fees, cake-cutting fees)?
- What is the refund policy if the couple reduces guest numbers closer to the date?

SECTION 10: Special Considerations & Problem-Solving

- If the couple is from mixed cultural or religious backgrounds, how flexible is the venue on ceremony structure?
- Are there accessible facilities for elderly or mobility-restricted guests?
- If a guest has specific needs (allergies, religious requirements, accessibility), how does the venue support this?
- How does the venue handle vendor disputes or last-minute supplier issues?
- Is there a point person or contact the couple can reach if problems arise on the wedding day?
- Is there a wedding co-ordinator and will they be there on the day?

Final Advice from a Solemniser

Venues are experts in hospitality. Solemnisers are experts in ceremony flow and legal requirements. Couples are experts in what matters most to them.

The smoothest weddings happen when these three perspectives communicate clearly:

- Expectations are clear from the start and written into the contract
- Questions are asked early, before deposits are paid and flexibility vanishes
- Nothing important is assumed—assumed details often become sources of stress
- The solemniser is looped in early on ceremony logistics, not brought in at the last minute
- The couple feels supported, not managed or controlled

If you're unsure about any ceremony-related detail, check it with your solemniser before committing to the venue. If something feels vague or "we'll sort it later," push for clarity now. Vague may become chaos under pressure.

Your venue should feel like a partner in making your day run smoothly—not an obstacle to negotiate around. If questions feel unwelcome or answers feel evasive, that's useful information. Trust it.

Important Note

This guide is provided for couples planning a legal wedding in Ireland. For ceremony specific advice, unusual venues, legal clarity, or mixed-belief ceremonies, consult a registered solemniser. A good solemniser acts as a bridge between your vision, the venue's systems, and legal requirements—protecting you from assumptions that create stress on the day.

Your solemniser should be part of your planning team from the start, not an afterthought.