

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO MICHIGAN WEDDINGS

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OVERVIEW



GREAT TIPS AND TRICKS FOR YOUR WHOLE WEDDING DAY

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO MICHIGAN WEDDINGS

BE FULLY PREPARED, AND ROCK YOUR WEDDING DAY WITH ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE

Welcome to our Ultimate Guide to Michigan Weddings

Hello and welcome! Jeff and I wanted to create something invaluable to all of our future brides to look over and use to help plan their wedding day to the fullest. But, even if you're not one of our future clients, we hope this will help you with your own Michigan Wedding planning.

We will try to cover every aspect of the complete wedding day, from start to finish. We wish to help you know what exactly to expect throughout the course of a typical wedding day, as well as some tips to make your own wedding experience that much more enjoyable. We will link to a few of our other blog posts throughout this guide, which will give you further ideas and expand on the topics we are discussing below.

And, just to warn you, because this is an ultimate guide to your wedding day, it will be quite a long post. So, for a little bit of extra help, you can click on any of the bullet points directly below and be taken instantly to that part of the wedding day experience. This way, you can always reference this guide no matter what part of the day you are planning or have questions about.

In this guide, we will cover the following topics:

- [Getting Ready](#)
 - [Hair & Makeup](#)
 - [Bridal Party Photos before Getting Ready](#)
 - [Getting into your Dress](#)
 - [Groom Getting Ready](#)
 - [Getting Ready Shenanigans](#)
- [The First Look](#)
 - [The First Look with the Groom](#)
 - [The First Look with Father/Mother](#)
- [The Ceremony](#)
 - [Ceremony Lighting](#)
 - [Unity Ceremonies](#)
 - [Ceremony Details & Programs](#)
 - [Coordination of the Ceremony Details](#)
 - [Michigan Indoor Ceremony Location Ideas](#)
 - [Michigan Outdoor Ceremony Location Ideas](#)
- [After the Ceremony](#)
 - [The Family Formals](#)
 - [The Family Formals Sample Photo List](#)
 - [Tips for Planning your Family Formals](#)
 - [The Bridal Party Formals](#)
 - [The Bridal Party Formals Sample Photo List](#)

- [Tips for Planning your Bridal Party Formals](#)
 - [Bride & Groom Romantic Portraits](#)
 - [The Cocktail Hour](#)
- [The Reception](#)
 - [The Grand Entrance](#)
 - [Cake Cutting](#)
 - [Speeches & Toasts](#)
 - [First Dances](#)
 - [Other Special Dances](#)
 - [Bouquet & Garter Tosses](#)
 - [Open Dance Floor](#)
 - [Late Night Snacks/Buffets](#)
 - [Reception Exit](#)
 - [Optional Wedding Reception Games](#)
- [Full Sample Wedding Day Timeline](#)
- [Closing Remarks](#)

So, without further ado, let's begin with the Getting Ready portion of the wedding day.



Getting Ready for Your Big Day

Getting Ready for Your Big Day

The first step to a successful wedding day, is planning exactly how the day will go. Of course, you'll want to have an awesome Wedding Day Timeline already all picked out before you even reach your wedding day, but let's start here, at the Getting Ready stage.

While you are preparing to get ready to marry the love of your life, there are a few things that will need to be accounted for. You'll need to plan exactly where you will be going, whether that is a salon, hotel room, ceremony location, your own home, or elsewhere. Then, you'll need to plan a time for everyone to meet. This includes your bridal party, parents, friends, family, and the vendors, like the makeup and hair artists, florists, photographers, etc.

One of our recommendations to our clients, is to always make sure that everything is ready to go the night before at least. This means, you'll want to pack your bags with all the essentials that you won't be able to live without on your wedding day. The obvious things, such as your dress, rings, etc., will be easy to remember to bring, but there are some other things that need attention as well.

You'll be surprised to know that there is a lot more than you think, when it comes to this pre-packing before your wedding day. However, Jeff and I have comprised a list of the [29 Items You Can't Forget On Your Wedding Day](#).

There are also some other things that you should have ready for your photographer on your wedding day, before he or she arrives. If you have them all in one spot, they can warm up for the day, by photographing these items quickly, before capturing some candids of your hair and makeup being finished. They are as follows:

- Wedding Invitations & Save the Date Cards
- Veil & Hair Pieces
- Rings (all three in one place)
- Shoes
- The Dress
- Bouquet & Boutonniere
- Any Jewelry
- Perfume
- Your Something Borrowed & Something Blue
- Any gifts

Now you may be wondering why you would need some of the above items to be photographed, am I right? Well, let's put it this way... If you're hoping to have a wedding album from your photographer from your wedding day, then you'll want all of the above to help your wedding day album showcase all parts of your day! That includes all of the details that you've spent so much time (and perhaps money) planning for, and making sure is Pinterest perfect! You can read more about this in our article called, [Why Wedding Details Can Make or Break Your Wedding Album](#).



Hair & Makeup

Hair & Makeup

Okay, so you have everything you need and you've packed your bags and are ready to get started. Perfect! Well, what's first? Simple, hair and makeup. You and your bridesmaids will want to get

started on this bit earlier than you may realize. Most brides, start this process at 8am, or even earlier! It truly depends on how many bridesmaids you have, and who all is getting their hair and makeup professionally done before your ceremony.

You'll want to allow for plenty of time, and you, as the Bride, will want to start first! You may think, "But I really would like to be last, so my hair and makeup is fresh for the ceremony!" Ah, while that may be true, trust me when I say this is not a great idea. Why?

Well, if you are last to get your hair and makeup, nothing can start if you're not finished. I'm going to tell you now (and I'll probably repeat this point multiple times over), but all weddings run late. There is never one consistent point throughout the day that this happens, but it is inevitable that it will happen. And, I have seen it happen, quite often, when the bride is the last one to get her hair and makeup done.

When that happens, she is usually stressed because she's running late. The other girls took too long getting their hair and makeup done, and now she's going to have to have less done to herself. Or, she'll just arrive late to the ceremony, which will make the groom stress that she's not really wanting to marry him... Oh man, I could go on forever about this. (Especially when it comes to pictures thrown into that whole mix. Lol)

So trust me when I say, get your hair and makeup done first. Before your hair and makeup artist(s) leave however, have them retouch your hair and makeup up one last time to feel fresh and ensure that everything is in place.



Bridal Party Photos Before Getting Dressed

Bridal Party Photos Before Getting Dressed

Now that your hair and makeup is all done, I'm sure you're ready to get dressed and head out to the next step of your wedding day journey. However, I wanted to throw a wrench into that plan, by discussing this next part quickly.

One of the fun things to do before getting dressed, is getting a photo of yourself and your bridesmaids with your hair and makeup finished. A lot of brides choose to wear special outfits before they get into their dresses, and it's fun to take a quick photo before getting finished with your getting ready portion of the day.

Some brides choose special robes for their girls, while others choose t-shirts that have sayings on them like, "Bride, Bridesmaid, Maid of Honor, etc.". And it's always fun to get your squad together for a quick picture in these outfits. Have some fun with it if you can too! If you have a spare bottle of champagne, shake it up a bit while you're on the bed with your girls, and make it pop for a picture while you're bouncing around on the bed. (I have yet to capture this myself, but I'm dying to do so. Lol)

Or, if you're running low on time, just get together, arm in arm with everyone for a quick snap, before moving on to getting into your bridal gown.



Getting Into Your Dress

Getting Into Your Dress

Okay, so you have your hair and makeup done, and you were able to grab a quick fun shot of yourself with your bridesmaids before getting into your wedding finery. What's next? Ah yes, now it's time to wear that beautiful gown you purchased for your day!

This is always a favorite time for brides, bridesmaids, and mothers/grandmothers of the bride. It is one of the moments where all of this wedding craziness starts to feel real. But, before you run off to get into your dress, there are a couple of things to think of first.

First, you'll want all of your bridesmaids, and any family members, to be dressed first. (At least, any of those who will be assisting you into your own gown anyhow.) Next, you'll want to find a room that has a big window (for beautiful lighting of course!), and not a lot of clutter strewn around.

Once you have chosen your location, and everyone else is dressed, then it will be time to get into your own gown.

Now, it's time to slip into your wedding gown, and awe everyone in the room. (I will be awed too, trust me. I *love* seeing what dresses are chosen by the brides I work with!) And, if you have time, allow your photographer to capture you in your dress alone, near the window, just in case they don't have an opportunity to grab a solo shot of you later on during the day.



Groom Getting Ready

Groom Getting Ready

Ah-hah! I bet you thought that I forgot about the husband to be, am I right? Well, don't worry, we won't forget about him at all. When the groom gets ready, it'll be quick and less detailed than while you are perfecting your beauty like no other. However, that's not to say that there isn't stuff for him to do or to look out for during this stage of the day.

Just like with yourself, the Bride, you will want your groom to make sure everything is packed the night before. And, you'll want to make sure that the details of his attire is out and ready to go for some quick pictures, before he even gets dressed! The items that you'll want him to leave out and have ready is as follows:

- Suit/Tux
- Tie/Bowtie
- Shoes
- Cufflinks
- Gifts
- Watch

Once those have all been captured, then it'll be time for him to get dressed. He won't need to get dressed before nor after his groomsmen, but, he should have at the very least, his Best Man dressed before himself. As, his Best Man will assist him with getting dressed.

Once he is dressed, then your photographers should get a few shots of him by himself, and with his groomsmen all together. Most of their getting ready time will be casual and not hurried one bit. This is because it takes them significantly less time to get ready than women tend to, so maybe even plan a small outing for him and his buddies to pass the time. (A bar, or pool hall, or some other fun manly place will work.)



Getting Ready Shenanigans

Getting Ready Shenanigans

Be ready for some shenanigans to happen on either side of the aisle while getting ready. Some of the fun things Jeff and I have encountered, or heard of, throughout the course of the getting ready part of the day, are as follows:

- Keg stands (with the guys)
- Mimosa Serenades (karaoke at it's finest by the ladies.)
- Bar Hopping (guys)
- Food Fights (anyone lol)
- Jumping on the Bed with your Pals
- Group Hugs



The First Look

The First Look

You may be wondering, “[What is a First Look, and Why Should I Have One?](#)” Well, simply put, it is a unique and special moment, a few hours before the ceremony, where the Bride (you) and the Groom (your man) see each other for the first time on the wedding day. Usually, it is arranged by your lovely photographers (Jeff and myself) to be a location that is away from everyone else, so you can enjoy a moment together, without everyone ganging up on you both.

Now, if you’re more of a traditional couple, you may not wish to have a First Look on your wedding day. However, this is quickly becoming less like a fad, and more like a new tradition in the wedding industry, and let me tell you a few reasons as to *why* it is becoming so popular. (You can also read more in our article titled, “[Traditions Be Darned - Why You Need A First Look](#)”.)

1. Your Nerves Will Vanish

I can write a whole article about this first reason why you should have a First Look. However, simply put, being able to see one another, alone, for 5-10 minutes, before the ceremony, will greatly reduce the nerves that both of you are more than likely feeling.

2. You Might Not Get Another Chance for Alone Time with Your Spouse-to-be

With a First Look, you’ll allow yourself and your husband-to-be to have a heavenly bit of time, alone together. Most people will tell you that this is your day, and they would be right, it is. However, unless you have a First Look, it’s very likely that you won’t be able to spend a single moment with the love of your life alone, until after the wedding.

3. You Can Speak and Feel Together

Most brides don’t realize that by the time you’re walking down the aisle, your groom is stunned speechless by your beauty and by the reality of the moment. And when you arrive

next to him, the ceremony has begun already, and so he can't tell you, well, *anything* about how he feels, what he thinks about your dress, etc. With a First Look, you'll be able to laugh and cry together freely, and solidify your desire to walk down the aisle, together.

4. Don't Rush Your Portraits

Most people, when planning their wedding, don't realize just how crazy the portraits can be after the ceremony. Not only do you have to have family formals done, but also the bridal party formals, and your formal portraits as husband and wife together. Sure, that might not seem like a lot, but when you don't have a First Look, and you only allow an hour for pictures, you'll end up at your reception stressed, and thankful that it's all over. With a First Look however, you'll have plenty of time throughout the day (because you don't have to wait to see one another until the ceremony time) to get all of your portraits handled, even if Aunt Susan and Uncle Joe are two hours late to the party.

5. At Least 40% More Pictures

Let's just face it now, weddings are not cheap. Wedding Photographers (when professional and experienced) are not cheap either. So, why wouldn't you want to get as many pictures from your photographers as possible!? I mean, after everything else is gone and eaten, all you'll have left are your photographs (and possibly video) from your day. With a First Look, you'll have plenty of time for pictures for everyone, and you'll get the best bang for your buck with your wedding photographer.



The First Look with the Groom

The First Look with the Groom

So, now that you know a little more about the First Look, let's talk about how it would happen with your groom in a little more detail, shall we?

First, communicate with your photographer your wish to have a first look, and then discuss location ideas with them. Once all the details are finalized (before the day of the wedding if you

can), you can go into your day knowing that you'll have a few precious minutes alone with the love of your life.

Once it's time for the first look, the photographer(s) will set everything up. Here is how Jeff and I accomplish first looks for our couples:

1. First, we place the groom, facing away from where the bride will enter.
2. Second, we signal to the bride to come into the space where the first look is held.
3. Third, she'll walk slowly up to her groom, and tap him gently on the shoulder.
4. Lastly, the groom will turn around and look at his bride-to-be.
5. Bonus: The groom will cry a river of tears, and you will have some of the best, emotional moments with him of your entire day and life.
6. After we get all of the first look photos, Jeff and I will vacate the area for 5-10 minutes (depending on the pre-discussed schedule), while you two enjoy some alone time together.

And that's it! It's really that simple! Simple, easy, romantic, fun, and unforgettable.



The First Look with Father / Mother

The First Look with Father/Mother

Ah-hah! I bet you thought that the First Look section was complete, didn't you? Well, not quite. You see, there is a second type of First Look that is starting to trend in weddings now too. It's the First Look with your Mother and/or Father. (Typically the father.)

When this special First Look occurs, it usually takes place *before* the First Look with your spouse-to-be. And, it's completed in the same way as I described above. However, it can be another moment of pure happiness and bliss between yourself and the people you love the most, that can be otherwise missed throughout the course of the wedding day.

Jeff and I haven't captured too many of these yet, but, we would love to capture many more, and make this a big thing in the wedding industry, because it is just that beautiful of a moment on a wedding day.



The Ceremony

The Ceremony

YAY! It's the moment that everyone has been dreaming of and waiting for! It's time for your wedding ceremony! The music will be playing softly as ushers seat guests, the groom will be standing at the front of the aisle with the officiant eagerly awaiting your debut. The bridesmaids and groomsmen will start to make their way down the aisle, and then, it'll be your turn. And, if you're like me, you will have dreamt of this moment ever since you were a little girl.

You'll take a big deep breath, glance at your father (or whomever is walking you down the aisle) for that last minute reassurance, and then begin your own walk down the aisle. As you pass by friends and loved-ones, your eyes will be fixated on your husband-to-be. Once you arrive, you'll smile at one another, as you listen to the officiant talking about love and marriage. You'll blush and laugh and cry. And then, you both will say your vows. They'll either be vows of your own making, or ones provided by your officiant. And then, after it all, you will be pronounced, man and wife, and then you will finally, be married.

Are you ready for it? Can you feel it? Can you see it? Well, in the matters of making sure you're ready for it, let's talk about some things you can do to prepare for this lovely scenario from your dreams, shall we?



Ceremony Lighting

Ceremony Lighting

You may be wondering what lighting has to do with anything, when it comes to the ceremony. Well, that's just it... it has a *lot* to do with the ceremony, if you want great pictures at least. Let's put it this way, if you were to schedule your ceremony to take place at noon, the lighting (outside at least) will be very harsh, as the sun will be high in the sky. People will be squinting and the lighting in the pictures may turn out to be uneven.

What do I recommend you do? Well, if you're having a First Look and an outdoor ceremony, then I recommend having the ceremony roughly two hours before sunset. This way, you will have plenty of time for sunset pictures after the ceremony. And, if you're not having a First Look, but are still having an outdoor ceremony, then I would recommend having the ceremony roughly 3 hours before sunset, so you can have the romantic sunset for your pictures.

A good rule of thumb for pictures at least, is that the lower the sun, the more romantic the light will be from the sun.

None of that will matter as much, if you're having an indoor ceremony. However, if your ceremony is indoors, then make sure that the lighting on the altar is even. That means, if you only a spotlight shining on yourself and your husband-to-be, don't expect any photos of the entire wedding party standing at the altar, as the lighting will be harsh on you both, but too dim on the rest of the wedding party. It's best to have soft, even lighting across the entire altar to ensure perfect pictures of everyone.



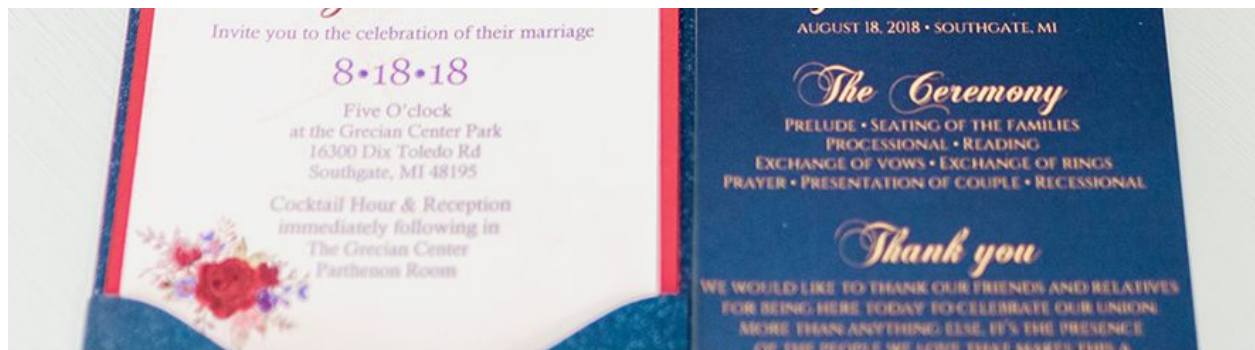
Unity Ceremonies

Unity Ceremonies

When it comes to your ceremony itself, only you will know what will happen. Usually, there is a procession, a unity ceremony, the vows, and then the kiss, followed by a procession back down the aisle. However, not all of that will even happen in some ceremonies, and that's fine. It's your day, so make it yours!!

Especially with your unity ceremony, if you're having one. I've seen some traditional things, such as a Unity Candle (Jeff and I went with this option), planting a tree together, tying some ropes together, sand ceremonies, first communions, and more. However, I have heard of some other ceremonies that would be amazing to capture, such as: Washing each other's feet, signing the family bible together, wrapping yourselves in a unity blanket, have a handfasting, creating/sealing a time capsule, tie a ribbon with your wishes on a maypole, or even branding a piece of leather together!

Regardless of which method you choose, the point of the unity ceremony is to reflect that you are both in it together now, come what may. So make this special mini-ceremony, your very own, to reflect both of your personalities, coming together.



Ceremony Details & Programs

Ceremony Details & Programs

First, before you order the 1000+ programs for your wedding ceremony, let me offer you a small piece of advice... Don't. Lol! But seriously, don't. Why? Because not every single person you've invited will show up, much less take a program. Sure, you'll want to make sure you have enough, but, usually, only one person in a group of two will take a program. Even less when there are children invited to your wedding ceremony. Don't be like Jeff and I with at least 200 extra programs from our ceremony lying around in storage after your wedding. (Simply because I'm too sentimental to throw them out, lol.)

Another tip before purchasing the now 500+ programs you are considering, is to have at least 5 separate people double check all spelling and grammar on said program. The last thing you need is for your new mother-in-law to get upset at you for misspelling her name by mistake. Trust us, you'll want to have several people look over your programs before you order them.



Coordination of the Ceremony Details

Coordination of the Ceremony Details

Let's face it, there is a *lot* to plan for with weddings. Even for something as quick as the ceremony itself, there are tons of things that need to be planned, set up, and executed as the day moves on. One of our recommendations, is to consider hiring a wedding coordinator. This way, you'll have someone who is contact with all of your vendors, and knows exactly how you want your ceremony space to look.

He or she can take charge on the day of your wedding, and handle setting up all of the smaller details, so you don't have to worry about them. They'll make sure all of the vendors arrive on time, and can take charge during the family formals as well.

However, if you can't afford a wedding coordinator, then my next suggestion would be to have a friend, who isn't in the wedding party, but is someone you can rely on to take charge. They can make sure things are set up, and that the family members who needs to stay behind when it's time for family formals to begin, are where they should be. It'll simply make your day much smoother if you have someone who can take charge when need be.

And, if you think that your wedding photographer should do this task, I must tell you now, that your photos may suffer for it. Sure, Jeff and I (read this as just I, lol) will take charge when it's time for all of the formal portraits, but there is only so much he and I can do. We won't know who Aunt Jane is just as much as we won't know who Uncle Billy is. We can call out family names when it's time for them to take their pictures with you, but we won't know if everyone is there, because... well, we're taking pictures. As much as we want to make your day as easy as possible, there is truly only so much we can do.



Michigan Indoor Ceremony Location Ideas

Michigan Indoor Ceremony Location Ideas

Before we completely stop talking about the ceremony part of the day, Jeff and I wanted to quickly give you a couple of ideas for indoor and outdoor ceremony locations found within the State of Michigan. So, without further ado, here are some Indoor Ceremony Location Ideas for Michigan... Or you can check out our [10 Romantic Michigan Wedding Venues You Need to Know About](#) article.

1. [Colony Club](#)

2310 Park Avenue
Detroit, MI

This spectacular location is in the heart of Downtown Detroit, and is a stunning venue for both Ceremonies and Receptions. The staff is highly professional and the way they decorate the place, will make you feel like royalty.

2. [King's Court Castle](#)

2325 Joslyn Rd
Lake Orion, MI

If you truly wish to have a fairytale wedding in Michigan, then you will be hard pressed to beat this venue location. Not only do they have a dedicated wedding chapel (which, will require professional flashes for the best lighting), but they also have the one and only, Canterbury Village! You won't find a cuter village for your wedding pictures, nor a more romantic venue that showcases real suits of armor, and such a grand elegance, that your guests will be blown away!

3. [Planterra Conservatory](#)

7315 Drake Road
West Bloomfield, MI

Simply one of the best indoor locations, for winter weddings. You may be wondering why I

specified for only winter weddings? Well, because it is a greenhouse, the plants need a constant temperature. And during the summer, that temperature is hot. But in the winter time, it is absolutely divine, and all of the greenery and elegance this place has, is a very welcome sight.

4. [The Henry Ford](#)

20900 Oakwood Boulevard

Dearborn, MI

One of the coolest weddings I've ever been to, took place at The Henry Ford Museum. This place rocks! Not only was everyone luxuriously beautiful, but extraordinarily unique! The ceremony itself was held outside in a little enclosed area, under a gorgeous tree. And then the reception, took place throughout the entire museum! By this, I mean that after dinner had finished, the guests were allowed to go through the entire museum at their own pace, and without being disturbed by the public. It truly was one of the coolest weddings I had ever been to. Check it out.

5. [Willowbrook Mill](#)

201 Mill Street (P.O. Box 719)

Northport, MI

Okay guys, I have to be honest here. I've never been to Willowbrook Mill... but, I sure have *dreamed* of photographing a wedding here! Willowbrook Mill is a fantastic twist between Rustic and Elegant, and it makes my heart sing, anytime I see pictures from this location. So, if you're planning a wedding here, can you do me a favor and hire me to photograph it please? Okay, thanks. ;)



Michigan Outdoor Ceremony Location Ideas

Michigan Outdoor Ceremony Location Ideas

The last point about ceremonies I wish to discuss in this blog post, is some outdoor ceremony location ideas. I've, in my mind anyhow, saved the best for last, so to speak... Jeff and I love

outdoor ceremonies more than anything else, so I'm a little biased here, but he and I feel that they're truly the most beautiful and romantic of ceremonies you could have on a wedding day. So, without further ado, here are five of our recommendations for outdoor wedding ceremony locations in Michigan.

1. [Taylor Conservatory & Botanical Gardens](#)

22314 Northline

Taylor, MI

The first item on our list, is the ever beautiful Taylor Conservatory & Botanical Gardens. This venue is located only minutes from where Jeff and I live, and we have had the pleasure of photographing at least 3 weddings here already. The gardens are the most lovely in Summer and early Fall, and there is even a covered area for receptions to be held on the grounds.

2. [Mission Table](#)

13512 Peninsula Drive

Traverse City, MI

If you're a lover of the great northern part of our state, and of wine, then what better place could you have your wedding, than at the ever stunning Mission Table in Traverse City? Seriously, Jeff and I are in love with this place! He and I have only photographed one wedding here, but it certainly has made us wish for many many more. The staff are friendly, and the setting just cannot be beat! The vineyards are a perfect spot for a First Look with your spouse-to-be, and the location where they host the outdoor ceremonies is a dream if I ever saw one.

3. [Little Sable Point Lighthouse](#)

287 N Lighthouse Dr.

Mears, MI

This lovely lighthouse is the perfect setting for a sunset wedding ceremony. How do I know? Well, that's because Jeff and I have photographed one! Lake Michigan will always be one of my favorite parts of Michigan as a whole, and what could be more romantic than a wedding ceremony on the beaches of Lake Michigan, with a beautiful lighthouse in the background? You'll be hard pressed to find another, I would say. ([Want to see an engagement session from this area? Go here!](#) You can also view [a wedding we captured at Little Sable Point Lighthouse, here!](#))

4. [Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore](#)

Special Use Permit Office

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

P.O. Box 40

Munising, MI

If you have dreamt of having your wedding ceremony in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, among the waterfalls and forests of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, then click the link above, and start your planning there. This area is to die for, if you're a lover of nature

and adventures! If you want a romantic and almost elven/fantasy feel to your wedding, then definitely try planning your wedding at one of the many State and/or National Parks found throughout this area. ([Want to see an engagement session from this area? Go here!](#))

5. **Castle Farms**

5052 M 66 North

Charlevoix, MI

Last but definitely not least on this list, is the beautiful venue of Castle Farms in Charlevoix, Michigan. This is the ultimate outdoor location if you're wanting to host a fairytale wedding of your dreams, in front of (and inside of) a real castle! You are bound to feel the grandeurs of royalty while having your wedding at this stunning and unbelievable location! Now, just as the last item of the indoor ceremony locations list... Jeff and I have never photographed a wedding here either! But, we dream of it! So, if you're getting married here, please do us (and yourself) a solid, and hire us to be your photographers for it. Thanks! :)



After the Ceremony

After the Ceremony

Now that your ceremony has been prepared for, it's time to think about everything that will happen *after* the ceremony! You might be thinking that after the ceremony, it's just a few pics and then a huge party at the reception location. But, there is a bit more to it than that. Sure, there are a lot of pictures that can happen, if you don't have a First Look planned, but there are some other things that need to take place as well.

First, think about when and where you will be signing your Marriage License. Your officiant should help you with this, but if not, and I'm your photographer, I will be able to assist you with no

problem. (I'm also Ordained, and can marry you if you cannot find someone, or if your officiant suddenly disappears before the wedding day. [Read about the first wedding I've officiated here.](#))

After you've finished thinking about that, you'll need to ponder whether or not to have an exit from the ceremony location itself. Will you have bubbles blown at you, or leaf confetti? Will you have a receiving line, or would you rather release each row of guests yourself instead?

And finally, you'll need to think of the pictures that you need to have completed before your Grand Entrance takes place at the Reception. We can help you with that in the sections below. You'll find a few lists of what photos should be taken, along with a few tips that I've learned over the past 6 years as a wedding photographer. I'll also briefly talk about the Cocktail Hour, before going forward into the Reception information.



The Family Formals

The Family Formals

Congratulations! By this point in your wedding day, you will now be married to that special someone in your life. That means, that you now have (roughly) double the amount of family members than you did just prior to your wedding ceremony. How exciting!

And now, it's time to focus on your family formal portraits for the day. This is a special part of the day for everyone involved, as many people travel, sometimes halfway across the globe, to be present for your big day. So, it's important to have some pictures together with your loved ones who are here to celebrate your love.

For Jeff and myself, this another moment throughout the day that we cherish and enjoy. You see, this is where we get to meet the people who are most important in your life! We start to learn and

understand more about you and your husband (or wife), and how your lives were shaped, and by whom they were molded.

But, you may be wondering, “Where do I even begin with knowing who to have pictures with, and who *not* to have pictures with?!” Well, there really is no right answer I’m afraid, but, I will include a short sample list of common pictures from this part of the day.

The Family Formals Sample Photo List

- Bride & Groom with Bride’s Immediate Family
(Parents, Siblings, Grandparents, Nieces, Nephews)
- Bride & Groom with Bride’s Parents
- Bride & Groom with Bride’s Siblings
- Bride with her Parents
- Bride with Mom
- Bride with Dad
- Bride & Groom with Bride’s Grandparents
- Bride & Groom with Bride’s & Groom’s Parents
- Bride & Groom with Groom’s Immediate Family
(Parents, Siblings, Grandparents, Nieces, Nephews)
- Bride & Groom with Groom’s Parents
- Bride & Groom with Groom’s Siblings
- Groom with his Parents
- Groom with Mom
- Groom with Dad
- Bride & Groom with Groom’s Grandparents
- Bride & Groom with All Family Members (if time allows)

Some tips for planning for your Family Formals:

1. Depending upon the level of cooperation, each large family formal picture will take roughly 5 minutes to complete. So, with that in mind, always start with the photographs that are most important to you, especially if you’re short on time for pictures.
2. Allow the older guests to be photographed first, so they aren’t waiting around as long, and can sit down sooner if they need to.
3. Always start with the largest of the groups first, and begin to whittle family members down to the most immediate members last.
4. Should you not be able to complete your entire Family Formal list, ask your photographers if they would capture the rest at the reception.

5. Never assume that your photographer will capture a family photo that is not on your list, or has not been agreed to verbally on the day of. They are not privy to the particular needs of your family and it's dynamics. (We're human too, you know? :))
6. Finally, have a friend or relative who knows most of your family members that you wish to have photographed during this section of the day, to assist you and your photographer(s). Give them the list you gave your photographer, so they can ask those people to stay until they've been photographed, or to at least help call them up to the photo location when it is their turn to be photographed. Another tip that extends this one, is to simply tell everyone who will be photographed, to not leave the ceremony location (or to head to where the photos will be taken, if it is not where you hold your ceremony) ahead of time. That way, they all know to stay, and won't wander off to the reception or the bathroom, which may hold your entire family formals portion of the day up.



The Bridal Party Formals

The Bridal Party Formals

After the Family Formals are finished, next you'll want to get a few pictures with those closest to you: your Bridal Party! This means, that your friends and family who stood at the altar with you while you tied the knot, are ready to get their portraits taken with the lucky Bride and Groom! These can be very formal, or very fun. It's your day, so you'll have to choose just how fun you'll want them to be.

Don't worry, Jeff and I will help you with this too. We've created another short list of some of the must have photos you should take with your Bridal Party.

The Bridal Party Formals Sample Photo List

- The Entire Bridal Party Together with Bride & Groom

- Bride with Groomsmen
- Groom with Groomsmen
- Bride with Bridesmaids
- Groom with Bridesmaids
- Bride with Maid (or Matron) of Honor
- Groom with Maid (or Matron) of Honor
- Groom with Best Man
- Bride with Best Man
- Bride with each individual Bridesmaid
- Groom with each individual Groomsman

Some tips for planning for your Bridal Party Formals:

1. Make sure everyone is traveling together, if possible. That way, no one is late for the pictures, and no one gets lost on the way.
2. Bring or plan props ahead of time. This could be something as simple as a pair of sunglasses, or something as fun as some fake lightsabers for your own lightsaber duel!
3. Remind everyone to be on their best behavior. I usually tell everyone, "The sooner we get these pictures done, the sooner you can attend the party." And then I wink (which is a sight to see in of itself) weirdly at everyone, and everyone laughs with (at) me. Lol
4. Bridesmaids should have their bouquets with them during this pictures, even if they are only used for one shot.
5. Groomsmen should leave anything that they keep in their pants pockets (keys, wallets, cell phones), in the vehicles they arrived in, so they don't have weird lines and objects poking out of their pants in the photos.



The Bride & Groom Romantic Formals

The Bride & Groom Romantic Formals

More pictures?! Oh yes, more pictures indeed. And, aside from the Family Formals, we feel that these pictures, the Bride & Groom Romantic Formals, are very important indeed, going forward in your lives together. You see, these are the ones that you'll frame and have next to your bed. These are the ones where you will truly remember the happiness of your day together. These will be the dreamy, almost fairytale-like photos you'll gush over for years to come! So, let's talk a little more about these, shall we?

When you have a First Look, these are generally done right after, with some cute "Just Married" ones after the Ceremony. However, if you're not having a First Look, be sure to have plenty of time for the Family Formals, Bridal Party Formals, and your Bride & Groom Romantic Formals. You won't want to forget these precious photos of just you and your significant other together.

You'll want these pictures to be taken closest to sunset, when the light is golden and dreamy. However, if you're inside for these portraits, then you'll want to be somewhere where there are lots of big windows for as much natural and beautiful light as possible.

As for the poses, your photographer should be able to handle them no problem. However, you can pop over to this article on our blog if you need ideas: [The Top 7 Most Beautiful & Romantic Wedding Portraits You Need](#)



Cocktail Hour

Cocktail Hour

Once your ceremony is finished, most people have a cocktail hour to entertain their guests while they're having their pictures taken. One great thing about having a First Look on your wedding day, is that most of those pictures can be taken before the ceremony even begins! And when that happens, you can enjoy the cocktail hour yourself!

However, if you've elected not to have a First Look, then you most likely won't be able to participate in this part of the day. Even saying that makes me a little sad. :(

Regardless of which method you choose, we wanted to give you a few ideas of what can happen during the cocktail hour itself! So, let's dig in, shall we?

- **Games:**
If you're having an outdoor reception (or even an indoor one that has some seating and space outside for guests to enjoy), then you might want to plan some games to partake in. One popular game we see in Michigan, is Cornhole. People like to gather around and watch the players toss bean bags while sipping on their drinks. Other outdoor games could be: Giant Jenga, Checkers, or Ladder Golf.
- **Music:**
You'll want some sort of music playing to set the mood of your cocktail hour. Some people elect to hire musicians to play during this hour, while others allow their DJ to do the work. Either way, music will go a long way to making your cocktail hour more enjoyable for everyone.
- **Drinks:**
If you're having alcohol at your wedding, perhaps use this chance to create some signature drinks for people to choose from. And, if you're not having alcohol at your wedding, do the

same, but with non-alcoholic drinks. Either way, you can really show off your personality with the creations that the staff behind the bar creates for you.

- **Finger Food:**

Many cocktail hours are about an hour before dinner, so don't fill everyone up beforehand! Instead, offer little bits of finger food to tide people over until the main course of dinner can be had.

- **Comfortable Seating:**

As always, you want your guests to be comfortable, while they're waiting for you to have your pictures taken. (Or, you'll want to be comfortable with them because you had a First Look.) So make sure that there is plenty of comfortable seating for everyone who attends your cocktail hour. You'll be thanked for it, I'm sure.



The Reception

The Reception

Whew! What a whirlwind day it has been so far... Or at least, it will be by this point. The Reception is the great party after the Ceremony that celebrates the love and commitment between the Bride and Groom, their families, and their friends. It's the part of the night that everyone looks forward to, as they'll be able to eat, dance, and mingle with the people they love most in this world.

A lot can happen at the reception, and we'll cover most of what we have seen in our 6 years as professional wedding photographers, as well as offer tips and tricks where we are able. So, get ready, as there is a lot to plan for when concerning the Reception on your wedding day.



The Grand Entrance

The Grand Entrance

Photos are all done, the last cocktails have been drank, the guests are seated, and you're finally ready to begin your Reception in style. So, along with your DJ, you'll be introduced to everyone in the reception area, as the new Mr. & Mrs. of the day! So, what should you do for your Grand Entrance? Well, as always, that is up to you. But, we have a few ideas if you'd like to hear them...

1. Hire a Choreographer & Dance In

While you don't need to hire a choreographer to do this, it will help. But, the main thing on this is to practice a lot, before your actual wedding day. That way, you can dance right into the reception area like the stars you were meant to be!

2. Simple Introductions

If you don't fancy yourself a dancing person, and want to keep your grand entrance simple, then do so! Have your DJ introduce you and your new spouse, and then get on with the night.

3. Tie It In

Tying your Grand Entrance into either your First Dance, or your Cake Cutting can make things flow smoothly and allow the guests that are older (and more likely to leave just after dinner) to enjoy these moments right along with you.

4. Skip It

It's your day, and if you would rather skip the Grand Entrance all together, then please do. Don't let anyone bully you about how your day should be, because in the end, it is just that: your day. A lot of couples who attend their own cocktail hour (because they had a First Look), skip the Grand Entrance because they're already there!



Cutting the Cake

Cutting the Cake

While cutting the cake seems to be becoming less and less popular in today's weddings, many couples still opt for this timeless tradition to happen at their reception. It's quite a symbolic representation of the first task that the Bride & Groom must complete together, which is why it has been in almost every wedding since Ancient Roman times.

Amazing photo opportunities can arise from this tradition, whether it's because you and your spouse are romantics and take this tradition to heart, or because you're both silly and want to smash some cake into each other's face. Either way, the photos from this can be amazing. We highly recommend planning to cut the cake, directly after your Grand Entrance into the Reception. That way, you can go directly into speeches and dinner, and all of your guests will be able to watch you complete your first task together, as husband and wife.



Toasts, Speeches, Blessings, and Dinner

Toasts, Speeches, Blessings, and Dinner

Another big part of the reception, is of course, when your closest friends and family give their speeches or toasts. This is where you get to hear funny stories from your childhood, how you connected and met your best man or maid of honor, heartfelt moments when your friendship changed their lives, and so much more! These are a great way for your guests to learn more about you, and those closest to you, as well as to celebrate your life up to this moment.

Of course, you'll want to set some boundaries for this part of the evening. Why? Well, imagine that you and all your guests, attending your ceremony, hours previously. And then, while the speeches are entertaining, your guests will be more worried about something else... Dinner. So, while speeches are an amazing part of the night, you don't want to make your guests wait too long for their dinner. But here are some suggestions to help appease everyone going forward.

1. Limit the number of Speeches:

Lately, we've been seeing a trend where more and more people are standing up and giving speeches. We had one wedding couple, who allowed their entire Bridal Party, to each give a speech/toast. (This was 14 speeches and toasts, and took over an hour to complete.) Back in the day, it used to be just the Best Man who delivered a speech.

2. Limit the time for each Speech:

You can also, always limit the time that your guests of honor have for their speeches. A good speech should be no longer than 3 minutes. Any longer than that, and all of your other guests will become bored, and their attention will drift away to conversations among their own table. (We've seen and heard this happen countless times.)

3. Schedule Dinner to Begin First:

Another suggestion, is to simply allow speeches to take place, after the salads (or whatever the first course of your dinner is) have been placed out for your guests. This way, your guests

are eating, but are still able to pay attention to the speeches taking place, without their stomachs yelling at them to eat.

4. Stagger the Speeches:

Another trick, would be to allow your guests who are giving speeches, to do so at different intervals. Say, one when salads are out, one after dinner has arrived, one after dinner has finished, and one right before the first dances take place.



First Dances

First Dances

The first dances are a big part of your reception. Everyone will bust out their phones and their handkerchiefs and watch and record your dance, with tears streaming down their faces. The best time to have the first dance with your now husband, would be right after cake cutting. However, we most often see it, after dinner, before the dance floor is opened up. Whenever you wish to have your first dance, expect everyone to cheer you on, as they gush with you during this touching and tender moment.

Or, if you really want to throw everyone off, be sure to hire a dance choreographer, or take some dance classes, and really surprise everyone! (The best way to surprise everyone is to start dancing like you are in a prom dance... then switch the music after a few moments and bust your moves to everyone's surprise!!!)



Other Special Dances

Other Special Dances

There are a couple extra special dances you can include in your reception. Some of them are starting to “go out of style” as it were, and others are picking back up again, like they never left! These are of course, all optional, but are also a fantastic way to celebrate your wedding day with those closest to you.

1. **Mother/Groom Dance:**
Mom’s love to feel special, especially when their babies are all grown up and getting married. Treat mom to a special dance between her and her son, and she will love you for it forever.
2. **Father/Bride Dance:**
This dance almost always happens, and hasn’t really gone out of style. However, it’s a great way for dad to have a last moment with his “little girl” before her wedding night is over.
3. **Anniversary Dance:**
This one comes and goes it seems throughout the wedding industry. Some years, it happens at every reception, and other years, we’re lucky to see two of these dances occur. However, the Anniversary Dance is a great way to celebrate the marriage of your guests, and acquire some well deserved marriage advice from the “winners” of the dance. Not sure what it is? Simply put, any married couple at your wedding, starts dancing, and the DJ starts to call off years. “If you’ve been married for 5 years or less, please leave the dance floor.” He or she keeps calling the different amounts of years until you are left with one couple, who has been married the longest, on the dance floor. The DJ will then typically ask that couple, “Do you have some advice to our new couple tonight?” Just make sure that your DJ doesn’t start counting off the years until your photographers have a chance to capture every married couple on the dance floor first!

4. Dollar Dance:

This is a dance that Jeff and I had at our own wedding. While this is a dance that we have seen less of than others, it's a fun way to get people to dance with you and some extra funds for your honeymoon. What this is, is you and your Maid of Honor stand at one side of the dance floor, while your now husband and his Best Man, stand at the other end. People then line up in front of the Best Man or Maid of Honor, and pay them, at least a dollar, to take a small dance with you. These dances usually last 30 whole seconds, but it's a lot of fun, especially if you like competition. (Compete with your now husband to see who gets the most money, and the most dances!)



Bouquet / Garter Toss

Bouquet/Garter Toss

All the single ladies and maybe even the single gentlemen who are attending your reception, will appreciate being included in your matrimonial celebrations. How? Well, toss something at them! Haha! But seriously, what other time do you get to throw some bouquets and rubber band type things at people? We would guess, not very often.

The Bouquet and Garter Toss is one of those traditions that are always coming back into style. It's just like the Anniversary Dance. One year it's heavy in the wedding industry, and the next, you're lucky to see even two of these happen. But, it is definitely a fun way to include everyone at your wedding, especially when coupled with some of the dance ideas above. The best time to do this is before the dance floor opens up to your guests. (Usually after your special dances, before the dance floor opens to your guests.)



Open Dance Floor

Open Dance Floor

Now that you have all of the important events from your reception out of the way, it is time to open up that dance floor, and let all of your guests boogie on down for the rest of the night! Your DJ should know the best music to play for the crowd you have, and should be able to keep them dancing most of the night. However, here is the biggest tip for your dance floor:

If you want people to keep dancing the night away, then you and your husband need to be on that dance floor right along with them!

Seriously, we have seen dance floors die, and poor DJ's try all their tricks to get people to dance (to no avail), simply because the Bride and Groom aren't dancing. :(



Late Night Snacks / Buffets

Late Night Snacks/Bufkets

A newer trend that we are seeing, is that towards the end of the night (usually two hours before the reception is scheduled to end), a snack bar, pizza bar, pretzel bar, burger bar, etc. is opened for people to enjoy while they're dancing. It's a welcome treat, after sweating and dancing the night away, and your guests will love this added bonus!



Reception Exit

Reception Exit

If you want to have a special exit from your reception, then there are a few ways to do this. Typically, your photographer won't be with you until the very end of your reception. (As

receptions can last well into the early hours of the next morning.) However, if your photographer is still around, you can do this at the end of your reception. What you'll want to do, is to have your guests line up into two rows to make a kind of tunnel. You'll want to give them sparklers or glow in the dark light sticks, and wave them around like mad. While they're doing this, you and your new husband will walk through, and give each other a kiss half-way through the "tunnel".

If your photographer won't be around until the end, simply coordinate with the DJ and your photographer, for a time to stage this exit. (Meaning, you won't actually leave the reception, but you'll have the pictures as if you did.) You can do this towards the end of your photographer's time with you, so it'll be some of the last photographs they take.



Wedding Reception Games - Optional

Wedding Reception Games - Optional

Should you wish to play some games with your guests at your reception, here are a few fun ideas for you to consider.

1. **Wedding Shoe Game:**

Either a DJ or a family member will help you with this game. Simply put, you and your groom take off your shoes. You then, each swap one shoe for the other. (So, you will have your left shoe and his right shoe, or vice versa.) You then sit in chairs, in the middle of the dance floor, with your backs against one another.

At this point, the DJ or family member who is assisting with this game, will then proceed to ask you and your groom some questions about yourselves. This could be anything from, "Who does the dishes?" to "Who made the first move for a kiss?" To answer the questions, you simply raise up the shoe to the corresponding person. Are you the one who does the dishes? Then raise your own shoe.

Some of the questions, and answers, can be a hoot, so definitely consider this game if you really want people to get to know you both, and to laugh.

Bonus Tip: If you really want your guests to be involved in this game, print out a bunch of your faces (both yours and your grooms), and place them on sticks. Pass them out to the guests (or leave them on the tables for this moment), and have them raise the face that corresponds to their guess for the questions! :)

2. Wedding Bingo:

Now, before you shake your head at me, hear me out. This can be a lot of fun, and can also be a great ice breaker for your guests! You'll want to create some bingo cards (all of them should be different, otherwise everyone will have a bingo), with things that people can find or ask about at your reception. (IE: Birth Months, Instruments, Tattoos, Sports Fans, Odd Talents, etc.) Then, send your guests forth to mingle! They will ask the other guests if they do the questions on their bingo cards, and if they do, that guest will have to initial the space on the card.

3. Kissing Game:

If you're not a fan of kissing anytime people clink their glasses, then this may be for you. Create a special DIY die (IE: a large decorated, square box) to decide the type of kiss. You can label each side with different ideas, such as: kiss on the cheek, big dip on the dancefloor kiss, take a selfie kiss, roll again, bride (or groom) kisses a guest, or come up with your own options. You simply will roll this dice anytime your guests start clinking their glasses together. (Also, have your DJ announce this game at the start of the reception, so your guests know that you're playing this game.)

4. "I Spy" Wedding Game:

One of the most popular games found on reception tables, is a cute little card that has a list of items for your guests to "spy". Simply put, this is a small scavenger hunt. The game will instruct your guests to use their personal cameras (with a unique hashtag on SM for uploading), or disposable cameras you have placed on the tables, to find and snap a few pictures of. You'll want them to find some of the following things:

- a. Group Selfie
- b. Bride in her Dress
- c. A Funny Kiss
- d. A Sparkling Drink
- e. A Tasty Treat
- f. An Old-school Dance Move
- g. A Person Laughing
- h. A Favorite Decoration
- i. & MANY MORE!

5. Bored Games:

Yes, I spelled it wrong, for a reason. Board Games, can be used for dual purposes at your wedding reception. First, you can use them in your centerpieces on your reception tables

for a unique look. Make sure to choose different games for each table, to really get the party going. Secondly, you can make sure that the guests who really don't like to dance, have something to do. Hence, Bored Games. If they're bored, they will leave early. Keep them around with some board games that can be played while you dance the night away!

There are of course, many other options you can do as well. It just depends on how you wish to have your reception proceed, and how good your imagination is! If you need more ideas, feel free to ask and I will gladly give you some more tips, tricks, and ideas to keep your guests entertained all night long. :)



Full Sample Wedding Day Timeline

Full Sample Wedding Day Timeline

Now that we've gone over a lot of the nitty gritty of what happens on a typical wedding day, let's put it all together in a timeline, so you know roughly what happens when, and how much time each part of the day may take.

2:00 pm: Photographer(s) Arrive (Secondary Photographer would be with the groom and groomsmen.)

2:15 pm: Bridesmaids are dressed and ready, brides' hair and makeup is complete.

2:30 pm: Bride gets dressed

2:45pm: Bridal Portraits

3:10-3:30pm: Bridesmaids & Bride Portraits

3:30pm: First Look

3:45-4:15pm: Bride & Groom Portraits with Bridal Party
4:15-5pm: Bride and Groom Romantic Portraits
5:30pm: Ceremony Scheduled Begin Time
5:45pm: Actual Ceremony Start Time
5:45-6:15pm: Ceremony Commences
6:15-7:15pm: Cocktail Hour
6:15-6:45pm: Family Formals (Family sent to cocktail hour as their roles in pictures end)
6:45-7pm: Bride and Groom “Just Married” portraits
7:15pm: Guests start to get seated for Grand Entrances
7:30pm: Grand Entrances & Cake Cutting
7:45pm: Speeches & Dinner
8:45pm: First Dance & Special Dances
9:15pm: Bouquet/Garter Tosses
9:30pm: Open Dance Floor
9:45pm: Staged Reception Exit
10pm: Photographer(s) Leave

Please note that the above is only a sample, and that your own wedding day timeline may look very different than what you see above. But, that’s the beauty of your wedding day. It’s all about you and your needs and wants, and can be tailored however it needs to be. Of course, if you need help with this subject on your own, feel free to reach out to us, and let us know what you need help with! :)



In Closing...

In Closing...

If you've made it this far, then you should know every aspect of the complete wedding day, from start to finish. We also hope that you found our tips and tricks on making your wedding experience, worth while. I know this was a huge article, but I really hope you enjoyed it, and that it has helped shine a light, on a day that may seem clouded with "I don't even know what to expect!" Feel free to reference this guide throughout your wedding planning, and to share it with friends and family who may also be planning a wedding.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read through this article. And, as always, if you ever have any questions, or would simply like us to help you through this crazy maze of a wedding day, feel free to reach out to us! Jeff and I would love to discuss your own wedding day with you, as well as to capture it in its entirety.

Finally, it has to be said, that this is just that, a guide. Your day may be drastically different, or it could be exactly the same. No matter how your wedding day is shaping up, Jeff and I truly wish you the best with your planning, and offer our congratulations on your engagement! Thank you all again for reading our Ultimate Guide to Michigan Weddings!

xoxo,
Jess



Jess & Jeff are Here to Help You

Thank you again for purchasing our downloadable Ultimate Guide to Michigan Weddings! We hope this guide has helped you feel more confident in your wedding planning endeavors. However, do you still need a professional wedding photographer for your big day? If so, feel free to reach out to us, so we can start discussing the details of your perfect day, and how we can make your wedding even better!

All it takes is a simple 15 minute call to get started. We look forward to hearing from you soon! And until then, thank you again, and good luck with your wedding planning!



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