

# Maid my day

CHOOSING BRIDESMAIDS WHO HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO HELP YOU PULL TOGETHER YOUR DREAM DAY CAN BE A TRICKY BUSINESS. FOCUSING ON THE FOLLOWING ESSENTIALS WILL HELP YOU SELECT YOUR 2IC WISELY AND ENSURE YOUR TRIP TOWARDS THE AISLE IS FUN, NOT FRAUGHT



She's one of your best friends, but her organisational skills leave a bit to be desired. You were her bridesmaid a few years ago but you haven't felt that close to her for a while. She's your sister – of course she'll be your bridesmaid, right?

For some brides to be, selecting the ideal bridal party can be harder than choosing the gown. But don't despair – if you keep in mind what it is you really want, you'll be able to bring together a bridal party that suits you perfectly.

## SINCERE SUPPORT

Creating your bridal party can be a tough job, and you certainly don't want to get offside with anyone or leave out someone who matters to you. If trimming your list of potentials seems too onerous a task, follow wedding planner Gayle Garmaz's ([exquisiteweddings.co.nz](http://exquisiteweddings.co.nz)) advice: 'Make sure your bridesmaids are people who you know will still be supporting your marriage 10 years down the track.'

Bride Natasha Roughton seconds that. 'Besides choosing people I knew would be reliable and support me, it was important to me that my bridesmaids liked my partner and supported us as a couple.'

Ask yourself: who has stuck with me through thick and thin, and who will continue to do so in the future? It'll help you narrow down your list of potentials to the people in your life who truly matter.

## MOST OBLIGED

Sisters tend to be natural contenders for the role of bridesmaid, but it's not always that simple, especially if you're not close to your siblings, yet feel obliged to choose them. One solution, says Gayle, is to keep your immediate family out of it altogether and just ask your friends or a special cousin or other relative.

Another potentially tricky issue to navigate is the unspoken rule that if you've been someone's bridesmaid, you should return the favour. Bride Natalie Gibb faced this very situation, but she didn't let feeling obliged pressure her into making a decision she didn't feel comfortable with. To accompany her husband's sole groomsman, Natalie chose to have only one bridesmaid: her sister.

'What's ultimately important here is that your family and friends acknowledge and respect that it's your day and your choice,

and understand that they shouldn't necessarily expect to be asked to be your bridesmaid,' says Gayle.

## ALL FOR ONE

There's no need to break into cold sweat for fear of leaving someone out of your bridal circle – there are many alternative ways to include friends and family and ensure they feel involved.

Consider assigning other tasks to those close to you – ask them to do a reading at the ceremony or give a speech at the reception. Involve them in organising the hen party or by offering them the pivotal role of MC. Gayle suggests having people other than your attendants act as witnesses for the signing of the marriage licence – an essential formality at every wedding.

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Being a good bridesmaid requires an understanding of the bride's needs and dedication to a long-term commitment. A sense of humour doesn't go astray either.

When bride Di Gibson was deciding who to include in her bridal party, her friend Margot topped the list thanks to her ability to diffuse even the most stressful situations. 'What could have been tense moments – such as arriving at the ceremony – became funny because of her joking around.'

While your bridesmaids should be attuned to your needs, as the bride you need to appreciate the pressures your bridesmaids might be facing in their own lives. Work and family commitments can absorb a healthy chunk of precious bridesmaid-duty time, and the last thing you want is to be left feeling disappointed by an attendant who seems busier than you are. On the other side of the coin, your bridesmaid is likely to feel guilty if she can't contribute as much as she'd like to.

'Expectations can be great, but by being upfront about what your expectations are, you'll help ensure that nothing is misconstrued,' says Gayle.

## MONEY TALK

Being upfront also means being honest about the costs attached to being a bridesmaid, and you'll need to be prepared for the possibility that not everyone you'd like to be involved can afford it.

Natalie acknowledges that finances can be a touchy issue because everyone's circumstances are different. 'Don't put strain on your friendships over money,' she advises. 'Tell your girls what you'll be paying for and what you won't cover. Or consider asking them to contribute just part of the cost.'

Natasha paid for her bridesmaids' hair and makeup, and as a special thank you bought each of the girls a beautiful set of earrings to wear on the day. Her bridesmaids paid for their dresses. 'This actually had some benefits,' says Natasha. 'Each dress was tailored to the girls' individual body shape, which meant the garments were unique to them and they had the option of wearing them again on another occasion.'

## ROLE PLAY

When you've done the hard yards and selected your ladies – congratulations! Now it's time to decide on their specific roles.

The maid of honour is crucial to your wedding – and your sanity. As your right-hand woman, she can help with everything from your invitations to taking stewardship over the hen party. On the big day she'll be there to keep you calm, hold the bouquet when you're exchanging your vows, supply tissues should you tear up and lift your train to prevent it from getting dirty.

If your maid of honour happens to be married, she's officially called the matron of honour. She's tasked with performing the same duties as a maid of honour, but because she's been there done that, you'll find her advice and experience invaluable – and she'll be able to guide you through any pre-nup jitters. ▶

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## BRIDAL PARTY

*‘Create a dedicated Facebook profile, then use it to share event invitations or hen party suggestions and post pictures of bridesmaid dresses that might tickle your bridal party’s fancy’*



It's your bridesmaids' job to assist the maid/matron of honour with any pre-wedding and wedding day duties, including the all-important hen party.

Having said that, not every bride fancies the clear-cut traditional bridesmaid responsibilities. Natasha, for one, chose one of her girls to effectively act as head bridesmaid, but that's as far as it went. 'What mattered to me was how reliable and supportive they all were,' she says.

### SMALL PACKAGES

She's little and completely adorable. And, as your flower girl, she's guaranteed to round out your bridal party with a healthy dose of the 'awww' factor.

Cuteness aside, Gayle says it's important to be mindful of the child's age and capabilities.

'Consider how likely she is to follow your direction or go her own way,' she says. 'A bit of practise will help familiarise her with what's expected, but if you do choose someone who'll wander, it's something you'll have to accept and go with on the day.'

### LOG ON

While it'd be ideal to have all the members of your bridal party in the same country,

and preferably the same city, that's not always the case. Thank heavens for email, Facebook and Skype.

Email is a great way to coordinate shopping trips and to share any thoughts you have about the wedding. It's also a great way to maintain regular contact with your bridesmaids. The only downside is that email trails can get long and it's easy to lose track of where you were in the conversation.

That's where a Facebook page for the bridal party can come in handy. Create a dedicated profile, then use it to share event invitations or hen party suggestions and post pictures of bridesmaid dresses and accessories you've come across that might tickle your bridal party's fancy.

As for Skype, communicating with bridesmaids on the other side of the world has never been easier – or cheaper. The free conference call feature enables you to have a conversation with up to four other Skype users simultaneously, making it a brilliant way to stay connected with your chosen few while updating them on everything from fabric samples to colour swatches. **W**

BY DEIRDRE ROBERT

## THE HEN PARTY

Attention, bridesmaids! Lesson number one when planning the hen party is to respect the bride's wishes and to take her personality into account. The following ideas might come in handy when planning the ultimate girls-only event.

### All care and responsibility

- ◆ The maid of honour might take the reins when organising the hen party, but it's important to involve the other bridesmaids and perhaps friends or family members the bride wasn't able to include in the bridal party.
- ◆ Play to each of the girls' strengths and talents when assigning tasks. An arty bridesmaid could be responsible for the invitations, for example.
- ◆ Create a spreadsheet so you can easily keep tabs on important elements such as who can attend, guests' contact details and who's in charge of what.
- ◆ If you're planning a weekend away, consider the costs involved. If you give people plenty of notice, they'll have a better chance of saving their pennies for the occasion.

### Risqué or relaxed?

- ◆ Be mindful of your audience. If the bride's grandma or mother-in-law will be attending, you might want to refrain from exposing them to a night of pole dancing or the rippling six-pack of a stripper. Instead, organise a separate bridal shower to appease the older generation.
- ◆ If it's the bride who's conservative, consider a special high tea as the main event. Auckland's Stafford Villa ([staffordvilla.co.nz](http://staffordvilla.co.nz)) and The Langham ([auckland.langhamhotels.co.nz](http://auckland.langhamhotels.co.nz)) offer delicious treats in an intimate setting.
- ◆ Lovers of fine wine who enjoy being in tune with nature could consider combining wine tasting with a breezy bicycle ride in beautiful Hawke's Bay or Marlborough. Visit [onerybikehb.co.nz](http://onerybikehb.co.nz) or [winetoursbybike.co.nz](http://winetoursbybike.co.nz).
- ◆ If you're a group of adrenaline junkies, head to Taupo or Queenstown and take the plunge with one of New Zealand's most scenic skydives. Visit [taupotandemskydiving.com](http://taupotandemskydiving.com) or [nzone.biz](http://nzone.biz).
- ◆ For a fun and flirty hen party, mix raunchiness with theatrics by signing up for a burlesque class through Auckland's [latinrhythm.co.nz](http://latinrhythm.co.nz). If it's liquid courage you need, you're in luck – each class kicks off with a glass of bubbles.