



Wedding Traditions

Wedding is one of the most significant events in people's life. Around 170,000 couples get married in Canada every year. And because our country encompasses many cultures, the wedding ceremonies often reflect these multi-cultural backgrounds.

Wedding clothes seem to reflect cultural aspects of the wedding ceremony the most. In European and North American cultures a bride wears white gown because this color traditionally symbolizes youth and innocence. An Armenian bride may wear a red silk wedding gown on her wedding day. An Israeli bride prefers "something blue" – the color of the Israeli flag. A Chinese bride chooses red gown because red color signifies love and prosperity. Traditional Indian brides wear pink and red saris on their wedding day, adorning themselves extravagantly with gold jewelry. An Arabic bride will dress in a beautifully ornate Caftan. Caribbean brides may change her cloths up to five times during the wedding party. According to the Korean customs, the bride's makeup in-



cludes a large red dot on each cheek to ward off evil spirits or demons. In Indian and Pakistan cultures the bride-to-be receives traditional henna staining of her hands and feet. This traditional art form invokes intricately designs to create beautiful paisley or medallion symbolic patterns.

In most cultures Grooms usually prefer moderate wedding cloths, but in some ethnical communities the grooms care about their outfit as much as brides. An Indian groom often wears a turban with a veil of flowers streaming down in front of his face. A Pakistani man wears a distinctive traditional turban. In Spanish culture the groom usually wears an embroidered shirt, hand made by his future wife. The groom in the Philippines could be wearing a black tuxedo.

Wedding dates in China are carefully chosen according to astrological signs. It is also customary for couples to be married on the half-hour or their wedding day rather than at the top of the hour. In this way, the couple begins their new lives together on an 'up-swing', while the hands of the clock are moving up, rather than down.

After the traditional Croatian wedding ceremony and marriage vows have taken place, female relatives remove the bride's wedding veil and replace it with a scarf and apron while singing to her. This symbolizes the new bride's status as a wife. Then all of the guests walk three times around a well which represents the holy trinity, and throw apples into it, to ensure the newlywed's fertility.

Sweets, eggs, and money are woven into to wedding themes of India. They symbolize, respectively, a sweet life, fertility, and prosperity. The Hindu wedding ceremony includes customary rit-

uals to ward off evil spirits. After the wedding vows have been exchanged the groom's father or brother showers flower petals on the newlyweds; then he holds a coconut over the bride and groom's heads and circles it around them three times.

A couple getting married in Korea might incorporate ducks or geese into their wedding ceremony. Both ducks and geese mate for life and represent faithfulness.

Traditional Pakistani marriage celebration lasts for four days. On the first day, the bride and groom's families celebrate the upcoming nuptials separately. The second day is reserved for a big celebration called Mendi that includes dancing and singing ancient songs. The wedding rites and ceremony in Pakistan take places on the third day. After wedding vows are exchanged, the Holy Koran is held over the new bride's head as she joins her husband's family. On the fourth day, the couple hosts their first dinner as husband and wife.

A Russian marriage civil ceremony, the bride and groom receive bread and salt, that symbolizes health, prosperity and long life. When a traditional Orthodox couple gets married in Russia, they are crowned as royalty for the day. The bride and groom must stand on a special carpet as they recite their marriage vows, but first they race each other to it: whoever reaches the carpet first will, presumably, be the head of the household.

Towels have always been an important element of Belarus culture, with different regions producing towels of different colors and patterns. Additionally there was a padnozhnik towel that the bride and groom stood on during the wedding ceremony. More

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importantly, perhaps, is the symbolic tying of members of the groom's family to members of the bride's family using towels – symbolizing the uniting of the two families.

The night before a girl in Poland hears her wedding bells, her mother and female relatives redo her customary single maidenly braid into two. This traditional wedding hair style symbolizes the new step the bride-to-be is taking into marriage. The “money dance” is always popular at a traditional reception in Poland. Guests pin money to the bride's wedding dress to buy a dance from her. The money collected during the dance is sent with them to spend on their honeymoon.

Instead of the customary wedding cake, traditional bread called Korovai, is served at Ukrainian wedding receptions. This sacred bread is decorated with symbols which represent the everlasting union of the couple getting married.

A Caribbean Island wedding reception can go on all night, with traditional steel-drum island music, lots and lots of sweet but potent rum punch, wild dancing and many toasts to the health and happiness of the new couple. The food at a typical island reception reflects the uniqueness of the Islands. Where else in the world would you find curried goat, spicy chicken jerky, fried plantains and conch fritters at a wedding feast? Tradition calls for a “Black Cake,” with the recipe handed down from mother to daughter and improved upon by each succeeding generation.

The traditional Greek wedding reception is usually a huge party and can last through the night. There is feasting, drinking and dancing, which includes the famous Greek circle dance. Candy coated almonds, called koufeta are served to the guests as reception party favors.

At one time, as a way of proposing matrimony, a Filipino man would throw a spear at the front of the house of the girl he wished to marry. This act would symbolize her unavailability, and begin the engagement process. The first witnesses pin the bride's veil to the groom's shoulder to symbolize the couple being clothed as one.

Next, they hang a white cord around the couple's necks which represents the eternal bond between them.

Jumping the broom is an African custom that originated as the symbolic jumping the doorway, or threshold from a carefree single life into the responsibilities of domestic life and a future together. “Tying the Knot” means that the couple is actually bound together at the wrists during the ceremony, linking them together symbolically. The bride, as a symbol of modesty, will hide her face behind a veil of braided hair. As an offer to the Gods to join in the celebration, wine is poured onto the ground.

The Jewish ceremony has a special marriage chamber set up only for the occasion. It is called Chuppah and is made up of four poles, which are decorated with flowers; this upholds a canopy in order to provide privacy. The

groom is escorted by the best man to the Chuppah, where they meet up with the rabbi, the groom's parents and the bride's mother.

Orange blossoms have long been the flower of choice for a girl getting married in Spain. Since the orange tree bears fruit and blossoms at the same



The Flower girl and Ring bearer are dressed as miniature versions of the bride and groom. The Father of the bride holds a dish, filled with coins and then covered, that symbolizes the bride's dowry.

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time it's flowers represent happiness and fulfillment. Before getting married in Spain couple exchanges their vows in church, the groom gives his bride a wedding present of thirteen coins. This gift is a symbol of his commitment to support her. The bride-to-be then carries these coins, in a little bag, to her wedding ceremony.

Common theme in Italian wedding ceremony is past and present with strong emphasizes food. A strong link with family life, food is the focal point of festivities. The sheer volume of food reflects how highly anticipated and festive a typical Italian wedding is. The menu at an Italian reception is nearly as important as the wedding itself. Guests may be served as many as 14 different courses with wine and other beverages. To ward off evil eye, the groom would carry a piece of iron in his pocket on his wedding day, since his happy situation might provoke envy, and invite supernatural danger.

An important part of Portuguese reception is called "Copo d' Agua" (cup of water.) During this ritual, the Bride and Groom go from table to table to spend time with their guests, and ensure that everyone is having a good time and enjoying their meal; a champagne toast is offered as the newlyweds cut their wedding cake, and offer the first slice to a single friend, to bring them luck.

Although there are so many various and distinguish wedding customs, some rituals are similar in many wedding celebrations. For example, throwing rice at the bride and the groom, where rice as well as confetti, orange blossoms, corn, barley, chickpeas, and dates and figs is a symbol of fertility and long life.

Almost in all cultures exchanging engagement rings is a part of the wedding vow. In many wedding ceremonies glass breaking is considered good luck. Jewish tradition of stomping on a glass wrapped in cloth symbolizes the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Destroying a glass during an otherwise happy ceremony also symbolizes the mix of joy and sorrow in life. According to the Russian wedding tradition, champagne glasses are thrown to the floor after the couple is toasted, if the glasses break, they shall have happiness in their marriage. In Italian culture the number of pieces of shattered glass symbolize the years the happy couple will share together.

Whether a couple chooses to celebrate its wedding according to the old traditions of their grandparents or to the modern/Canadian way, it must remember about the legal aspects. To be married in Ontario, you must fill out a marriage license. You can get one from the municipal clerk office of your city or download it the government website. Once you have filled out the

application, apply for the marriage license in person.

After marriage, couple may receive a Record of Solemnization of Marriage. Remember that this is not a legal record. The person who performed the marriage must forward the Record of Solemnization of Marriage and the marriage license to the Office of the Registrar General for registration. Once your marriage has been registered, you may apply for a marriage certificate by sending a marriage certificate application form to the Office of the Registrar General. (Source: <http://www.cbs.gov.on.ca/>)

In Canada, ethnic communities have been influenced by other cultures and their customs are beginning to change. Different cultures may meet in one wedding ceremony. Most wedding ceremonies are a sort of midpoint between those that are celebrated in the Canada and those that were celebrated by the generations before, but obviously the most common thing in all weddings is love and joy of the future happy life.

