

'We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony': the rise of secret weddings

Level: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. What is happening in these images? What usually happens during a wedding?



b. What words and phrases do you associate with weddings? Write them in the box.

c. Which words and phrases are exclusively used to talk about weddings? Which can be used to talk about other events and situations?

d. Which of your words are used in the article?

2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

appeal	ceremony	circles	complex	deceptive
groom	hassle	honeymoon	navigate	nuptials
scale back	struggle	temptation	thrilled	upset

1. a wedding ceremony _____
2. make something smaller in size, amount, etc. than it used to be _____
3. a strong feeling of wanting to have or to do something _____
4. a group of people who are interested in the same things or who have the same profession _____
5. a formal public event with special traditions, actions, or words _____
6. a quality that something has that makes people like it or want it _____

'We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony': the rise of secret weddings

Level: Advanced

7. a man who is getting married _____
8. trying to trick someone by telling them something that is not true _____
9. a holiday that two people take after they get married _____
10. causing problems for you or annoying you very much _____
11. try hard to do something that you find very difficult _____
12. with a lot of details or small parts that make it difficult to understand or deal with _____
13. very pleased and excited _____
14. make someone feel sad, worried, or angry _____
15. deal effectively with a complicated situation _____

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. It was hard not to give in to the _____ to read the messages, especially when the phone was right there on the table, unlocked.
2. There is a _____ web of relationships between the two families, which makes holidays and birthdays rather tricky.
3. If it's too much _____, we can do it another time.
4. There's no one I trust more to _____ these tricky political situations.
5. They will need to _____ the peace-keeping operation now that the new government has taken power.
6. We are _____ that George is going to join the team.
7. After the awards _____, guests will have dinner in the Great Hall.
8. Despite her PhD, she never felt really comfortable in academic _____

'We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony': the rise of secret weddings

Level: Advanced

It is not just celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck who are arranging private nuptials. Getting hitched without telling anyone is catching on, cutting costs, reducing stress – and avoiding rows with the in-laws

Leah Harper

3 August, 2022

- 1 Wedding season is upon us and – after two years of Covid chaos that saw nuptials scaled back, postponed or cancelled – you may think the temptation would be to go all out. But instead of expanding the guest list many couples are choosing to have almost entirely secret ceremonies.
- 2 With Covid numbers remaining high and the UK's cost-of-living crisis meaning that many couples are feeling the pinch, it's no wonder that some are less than eager to send out save-the-dates. Plus, in celebrity circles, getting married in secret is all the rage.
- 3 So what is the appeal of keeping quiet when it comes to tying the knot? "For us, it was just a really relaxed and enjoyable day," says Jess, 29, who married Gerald, 37, in Brighton in March. They told just four people – which didn't include their parents – and headed to the beach for ice-cream and champagne after the ceremony.
- 4 "I've been to friends' weddings where they've been mega-stressed and everything cost a fortune," she says. "We didn't have to worry about who would get on with who or if people liked the food."
- 5 Easing the anxiety and pressure of having a "big day" is part of the appeal for many couples who marry in secret. "Secret weddings are becoming more common," says Landis Bejar, the founder of a therapy practice that specializes in helping brides and grooms manage wedding stress. "People are looking for ways to get out of the spotlight and avoid the fuss of weddings. They just want to get to the part where they are married."
- 6 For Ian, 55, who married Ceri, 48, a secret wedding also felt more genuine. "We got married for practical reasons and so asking people to travel to a wedding felt deceptive," he says, "but it ended up being a lovely, romantic thing."
- 7 The couple had been together for about 20 years when they decided to get hitched and only told their children in the car on the way to the ceremony. "Another reason we didn't tell anyone was that we didn't want them to think that either of us was ill, or that we were fishing for presents. We did have a photographer, but my favourite photos are just the ones we took on our phones."
- 8 The cost of a formal wedding – which averaged £17,300 in 2021 – can be an added source of stress. In 2018, when Mursh travelled from Sheffield to San Francisco to marry Tash (both 34 and teachers) without telling any of their friends, they followed it with a month-long honeymoon touring the US – and still spent less than they might have done on a more traditional ceremony. "I've got a really big family and Bengali people invite hundreds of guests to their weddings," he says. "It would have cost each side £30–35k and it seemed like a lot of stress and hassle."
- 9 Forty-three-year-old Kerry's secret wedding to Nicky, 38, in Norfolk took less than three months to plan and cost them less than £600. "It was very relaxed and it was perfect for us."
- 10 Another big contributor to the stress of wedding planning – especially while trying to keep the costs down – is the guest list. People struggle with the invite list for a small wedding, and often with complex family relationships, sometimes it can feel easier to get married in secret and tell people later.
- 11 Gerald agrees that "you can end up inviting a lot of people who you don't actually ever speak to." For Mursh, getting married in secret offered an easy solution: "Instead of leaving anyone out, we were leaving everyone out."

'We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony': the rise of secret weddings

Level: Advanced

- 12 Of course, even if the couple in question enjoy keeping their plans under wraps, there's no guarantee that those who might have expected a wedding invitation will be quite so thrilled about it. "It did upset some people," says Kerry. "We had booked a space for 146 people and there were only five of us so, the night before, I said to Nicky: 'We've still got time; if you don't want it to be just us, we'll just phone everyone and tell them it's short notice but we're getting married tomorrow.' But he said, 'No, let's leave it as it is.'"
- 13 "It's worth remembering that, if you have a secret wedding, some people will be hurt," says Bejar. "They will have had expectations that they would be there, and they will feel left out. It's good to consider ways to navigate that reaction. Think about how to say, 'This was right for us.'"
- 14 For most, however, the reaction from friends and family was positive – if sometimes a little surprised. "We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony – Gerald's mum thought he was joking!" says Jess. "But everyone was happy and supportive."

© Guardian News and Media 2022

First published in *The Guardian*, 03/08/2022

'We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony': the rise of secret weddings

Level: Advanced

3 Understanding the article

a. Answer the questions with information from the article.

1. On average, how much should you expect to spend on a formal wedding in the UK these days?
2. How are famous people influencing the way people decide to spend their 'big day'?
3. How have the pandemic and inflation influenced the way people are choosing to get married?
4. What did Mursh and Tash do with the money they saved by having a secret wedding?
5. What other factors often add to the stress of a wedding?
6. What are the dangers of getting married in secret?

4 Key language

a. Find phrases that fit with the meanings.

1. use all your energy, strength, and determination to achieve something (paragraph 1)
2. have less money than you need (paragraph 2)
3. very popular (paragraph 2)
4. get married (paragraph 3)
5. be really expensive (paragraph 4)
6. remove yourself from a place or situation in which everyone is looking at you (paragraph 5)
7. get married (paragraph 7)
8. the person that you are talking about at the present time (paragraph 12)
9. keep something secret (paragraph 12)
10. without being given much warning before something happens (paragraph 12)

b. Use the phrases to talk about the article.

c. Then use each one in a sentence or short anecdote of your own, which are not related to the article.

'We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony': the rise of secret weddings

Level: Advanced

5 Discussion

a. Discuss the questions.

- How many weddings have you attended in the past ten years or so? How would you describe them?
- Which is the most memorable wedding you attended? Why?
- How has the way people get married changed since your parents' or grandparents' "big day"?
- How do you think the ages of the people interviewed in the article affected the way they chose to get married?

6 In your own words

- a. Write a tactful and explanatory email to your friends and family telling them about your recent secret wedding. How will you explain your decision? What consolation can you give them for not having been invited?