



THE BRIDE'S COCKTAIL HOUR

Planning Guide & Workbook

Everything you need to create the cocktail hour
your guests will remember *long after the last dance.*



PLAN BEAUTIFULLY.



HOST CONFIDENTLY.



CREATE LASTING MEMORIES.



EXPERIENCES THEY'LL
NEVER FORGET.



WELCOME, *Beautiful Bride!*



CONGRATULATIONS!

This is such an exciting time, and we're honored to be part of your journey.

Cocktail hour is more than just a break between "here comes the bride" and the reception — it's the *first experience* your guests will have together as they celebrate you.

This guide is here to help you plan with confidence, ask the right questions, and create a cocktail hour that feels true to your style and *unforgettable* for your guests.



PLAN BEAUTIFULLY.
HOST CONFIDENTLY.
CREATE LASTING MEMORIES.

Linda ♥

FOUNDER & COCKTAIL HOUR QUEEN
EVERYTHING BUT THE WINE



MADE FOR CONNECTING

We create experiences that bring people together and set the tone for an incredible celebration.



HOSTED WITH CARE

We set up, serve, and clean up so you can be present and enjoy every moment.



DESIGNED BEAUTIFULLY

Every detail is curated to reflect your vision and elevate your wedding day.



MEMORIES THAT LAST

We help you create the kind of moments your guests will remember long after the last dance.



Let's create the cocktail hour your guests will talk about for years to come.



PART ONE LEARN

Expert guidance and insider tips to help you create a cocktail hour your guests will *never forget*.

1



WHY COCKTAIL HOUR MATTERS

Discover why this hour sets the tone for your entire wedding day and creates the first impression your guests will remember.

2



FIVE MISTAKES BRIDES MAKE

Avoid the most common cocktail hour mistakes that can impact your guest experience—so you can plan with confidence.

3



HOW TO CREATE A COCKTAIL HOUR GUESTS LOVE

Simple, thoughtful elements that make your cocktail hour feel intentional, inviting, and unforgettable.

4



WHY HOSTED EXPERIENCES MATTER

Learn the benefits of a hosted cocktail hour and how it elevates hospitality, flow, and guest connection.

5



WEDDING TIMELINE

A sample timeline to help you plan the perfect flow so every moment of your day feels seamless.

6



QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY COCKTAIL HOUR VENDOR

The must-ask questions to ensure your vendor is the perfect fit for your vision and values.

7



WHY EVERYTHING BUT THE WINE

What makes our luxury charcuterie cart experience unique, memorable, and the perfect addition to your celebration.



Knowledge today. Unforgettable memories tomorrow.

Why COCKTAIL HOUR MATTERS

While you're taking photos...
YOUR GUESTS ARE BEGINNING
THEIR EXPERIENCE.

THIS IS WHEN:

- ♥ First impressions are made.
- ♥ Conversations begin.
- ♥ Families meet.
- ♥ Friends reconnect.
- ♥ Excitement builds for the reception.



Five MISTAKES BRIDES MAKE DURING COCKTAIL HOUR

Cocktail hour sets the tone for your entire wedding celebration. Avoid these common pitfalls so your guests feel cared for, engaged, and excited for what's next.



01 NOT HAVING ENOUGH FOOD.

Guests arrive hungry. Without enough food, energy dips and experience suffers before the celebration even begins.



02 LONG BAR LINES.

When guests wait too long for a drink, conversations stop and frustration builds. Flow matters.



03 NOTHING FOR GUESTS TO DO.

Without something to enjoy, guests drift, stand around, and check their phones instead of connecting.



04 DEAD SPACE.

Unused areas make your event feel disconnected and awkward instead of warm and welcoming.



05 WAITING INSTEAD OF CELEBRATING.

Cocktail hour should be part of the experience, not something guests just endure until the reception begins.



A thoughtfully planned cocktail hour keeps guests happy, creates connection, and makes your wedding unforgettable.

THE DETAILS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

How to Create a COCKTAIL HOUR GUESTS LOVE

A memorable cocktail hour doesn't happen by chance. It's all about intention, thoughtful details, and creating an experience your guests will truly enjoy.



✓ FOOD

Offer a variety of high-quality bites that are beautiful, fresh, and easy for guests to enjoy while mingling.



✓ DRINKS

Keep the bar flowing with signature drinks, wines, and choices for all tastes. Quick service keeps the conversation going.



✓ MUSIC

Set the right tone with background music that enhances the atmosphere and keeps the energy just right.



✓ SEATING

Provide comfortable places for guests to relax, connect, and take a break when they need to.



✓ GUEST FLOW

Create natural movement with well-placed food, bars, and seating to keep the energy flowing.



✓ INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES

Give guests something to engage with, from live stations to fun touches that spark conversation and connection.

When every detail works together, your cocktail hour becomes more than a transition—it becomes one of the most memorable parts of your day.



Why HOSTED EXPERIENCES MATTER

Not:

Food sitting
on a table.

Instead:

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE.
GUESTS GREETED.
FRESHLY PREPARED
INDIVIDUAL BOARDS.
INTERACTION.
HOSPITALITY.

A hosted experience transforms cocktail hour into something your guests will talk about long after the last dance.



- ✓ **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**
Our team handles every detail so you can relax and enjoy your day.



- ✓ **GUESTS GREETED**
A warm welcome sets the tone and makes every guest feel valued from the very beginning.



- ✓ **FRESHLY PREPARED INDIVIDUAL BOARDS**
Made to order for your guests throughout cocktail hour for the highest quality and freshest flavors.



- ✓ **INTERACTION**
Our team engages with guests, shares recommendations, and creates a fun, inviting atmosphere.



- ✓ **HOSPITALITY**
True hospitality goes beyond food and drinks—it's about creating memorable moments and connection.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT WHAT'S SERVED—
IT'S ABOUT HOW YOUR GUESTS FEEL.

That's what they remember most.



The WEDDING TIMELINE

COCKTAIL HOUR & PHOTOS HAPPEN TOGETHER

*While you're creating memories,
your guests are enjoying an experience.
Everyone wins.*

*Cocktail hour is
not just a break in
the timeline—it's
part of the story.*

*Let's make it
unforgettable.*



3:00 PM

CEREMONY

You say "I do!" and
begin your new chapter.



3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

COCKTAIL HOUR & PHOTOS

While you're taking photos,
your guests enjoy drinks, delicious bites,
and meaningful connections.

(Duration: 90 minutes)



5:00 PM

GRAND ENTRANCE

It's time to introduce
the new Mr. & Mrs!



5:15 PM

DINNER & TOASTS

Enjoy a delicious meal, heartfelt
speeches, and joyful moments.



6:30 PM

DANCING & CELEBRATION

The dance floor opens and
the party begins!

WHAT YOUR GUESTS WILL DO DURING COCKTAIL HOUR



Mingle and connect with
family and friends



Enjoy signature drinks and
beautifully prepared bites



Explore the venue and
capture photos



Listen to great music



Relax in comfortable
seating areas



Catch up, laugh, and
make memories together



A WELL-PLANNED COCKTAIL HOUR KEEPS
THE CELEBRATION FLOWING AND TURNS
EVERY MOMENT INTO SOMETHING UNFORGETTABLE.

Happy guests. Seamless timing. Beautiful memories.



Questions TO ASK ANY COCKTAIL HOUR VENDOR

The right questions help you choose a vendor who delivers more than just food — they create an experience your guests will remember long after the last dance.



DO YOU STAY AND SERVE?

You want a team that stays for the entire cocktail hour to serve, assist, and keep everything running smoothly.



IS SETUP INCLUDED?

Professional setup creates a beautiful first impression and allows you to be present and stress-free.



IS CLEANUP INCLUDED?

Your vendor should handle teardown and cleanup so you can move seamlessly into your next part of the day.



IS FOOD REPLENISHED?

Fresh, abundant food throughout cocktail hour keeps guests happy and the experience elevated.



ARE GUESTS INDIVIDUALLY SERVED?

Individual service ensures a high-end experience and keeps the presentation beautiful from start to finish.



WHY IT MATTERS



Your guests feel cared for



You enjoy a stress-free experience



Everything runs smoothly



The flow of your day is seamless



It leaves a lasting impression

Remember... The right vendor doesn't just provide food — they create an experience your guests will remember long after the last dance.

ASK THESE QUESTIONS. PROTECT YOUR DAY. ELEVATE THEIR EXPERIENCE.



BONUS

QUICK
CHECKLIST



BONUS

YOUR 5-MINUTE *Cocktail Hour Quick Checklist*

BEFORE YOU DIVE INTO THE PLANNING WORKBOOK...

Take just five minutes to make sure you've thought through the essentials.

If you can check every box, you're already on your way to creating
a cocktail hour your guests will remember.

- ☐  **HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE YOU WANT GUESTS TO HAVE?**
How do you want them to feel—not just what do you want them to eat?
- ☐  **DOES YOUR TIMELINE ALLOW ENOUGH TIME FOR GUESTS TO RELAX?**
Aim for 60–90 minutes while you're taking photos.
- ☐  **IS THERE ENOUGH FOOD FOR EVERYONE?**
Happy guests begin with great hospitality.
- ☐  **WILL DRINKS BE EASY TO ACCESS?**
Long bar lines can slow down the entire experience.
- ☐  **HAVE YOU CREATED PLACES FOR GUESTS TO MINGLE?**
Conversation happens naturally when guests are comfortable.
- ☐  **IS YOUR MENU INCLUSIVE?**
Consider allergies, dietary restrictions, and non-alcoholic options.
- ☐  **WHO IS HANDLING SETUP, SERVICE, AND CLEANUP?**
A hosted experience lets everyone—including you—enjoy the celebration.
- ☐  **WILL YOUR COCKTAIL HOUR FEEL MEMORABLE?**
Think beyond food. Consider music, seating, décor, interaction, and flow.



BONUS TIP

The most unforgettable cocktail hours aren't the ones with the fanciest food—they're the ones where guests felt welcomed, connected, and cared for.

♥ Ready to dive deeper? ♥

TURN THE PAGE TO BEGIN PLANNING EVERY DETAIL
OF YOUR COCKTAIL HOUR.





YOUR COCKTAIL HOUR *Planning Workbook*

Everything from this point forward is designed to help you create a seamless, memorable cocktail hour that reflects your vision and leaves your guests talking *long after the last dance.*



INSIDE YOUR WORKBOOK



WORKSHEETS
TO GUIDE YOU



TIMELINES
TO STAY ON TRACK



BUDGET TOOLS
TO PLAN WISELY



IMPORTANT
QUESTIONS
TO ASK



INSPIRATION
TO SPARK IDEAS



REAL BRIDE
NOTES



EXPERIENCE-FOCUSED
PLANNING



MEMORIES THAT
LAST FOREVER

♥ *Let's create a cocktail hour that feels like you.* ♥



THE BRIDE'S COCKTAIL HOUR *Checklist*

Use this checklist 3–6 months before your wedding to plan a cocktail hour your guests will never forget.
A little planning now = a memorable experience for everyone.



DEFINE YOUR VISION

- ☐ Decide the overall feel you want for cocktail hour.
- ☐ Consider the flow: casual & social or elegant & elevated?
- ☐ Think about the atmosphere you want to create.

Why it matters:

A clear vision helps every detail come together beautifully.



KNOW YOUR GUESTS

- ☐ Estimate the number of guests attending.
- ☐ Think about dietary restrictions and preferences.
- ☐ Consider ages and what will appeal to a variety of guests.

Why it matters:

Happy guests feel included, cared for, and remember the experience.



PLAN THE FOOD & DRINK EXPERIENCE

- ☐ Choose a menu that fits your style and satisfies your guests.
- ☐ Don't forget non-alcoholic options.
- ☐ Consider presentation—beautiful food creates conversation.

Why it matters:

The right food and drinks set the tone for the entire celebration.



TIME IT RIGHT

- ☐ Plan for 60–90 minutes of cocktail hour.
- ☐ Allow enough time for guests to relax and mingle.
- ☐ Coordinate timing with your photographer and timeline.

Why it matters:

A well-timed cocktail hour keeps energy high and your timeline running smoothly.



CREATE CONNECTION

- ☐ Include interactive or engaging elements if desired.
- ☐ Provide plenty of seating, lounge areas, and gathering spaces.
- ☐ Think about music, lighting, and ambiance.

Why it matters:

Thoughtful touches turn a pause in the timeline into a meaningful part of your day.



CONFIRM THE DETAILS

- ☐ Review all vendor details and services.
- ☐ Confirm setup, serving, and cleanup are included.
- ☐ Double-check your floor plan and vendor arrival times.

Why it matters:

Attention to detail ensures a seamless, stress-free experience for you and your guests.

NOTES & REMINDERS ♥

THE BRIDE'S COCKTAIL HOUR *Timeline* WORKSHEET

PLAN THE MOST MEMORABLE HOUR OF YOUR WEDDING DAY.

Use this worksheet with your planner, photographer, venue,
and vendors to create a seamless cocktail hour experience.

✓ PRINT THIS PAGE AND BRING IT TO YOUR VENUE PLANNING MEETING.



WEDDING DAY TIMELINE

TIME	EVENT	NOTES
_____	 Getting Ready	_____
_____	 First Look (Optional)	_____
_____	 Ceremony	_____
_____	 COCKTAIL HOUR BEGINS	_____
_____	 Bride & Groom Photos	_____
_____	 Family Photos	_____
_____	 Wedding Party Photos	_____
_____	 Grand Entrance	_____
_____	 Dinner	_____
_____	 Toasts	_____
_____	 First Dance	_____
_____	 Open Dancing	_____

NOTES ♥

COCKTAIL HOUR PLANNING

Cocktail Hour Starts: _____

Cocktail Hour Ends: _____

Total Length: _____

WHILE WE'RE TAKING PHOTOS...

- ☐ Guests are enjoying cocktails
- ☐ Guests have plenty of food
- ☐ Guests have comfortable seating
- ☐ Music is playing
- ☐ Guests are mingling
- ☐ Guests are being served
- ☐ Bar lines are flowing smoothly
- ☐ Guests have something to experience

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR PHOTOGRAPHER

- ☐ How long will family photos take?
- ☐ How long will wedding party photos take?
- ☐ Will bride & groom portraits happen during cocktail hour?
- ☐ Can we finish photos before guests enter reception?

Helpful Reminder ♥



Cocktail hour and photos
should happen at the
same time.

While you're creating memories
with your photographer, your
guests should be creating
memories with each other.

THE BRIDE'S COCKTAIL HOUR *Budget Planner*

PLAN BEAUTIFULLY. HOST EFFORTLESSLY.
MAKE MEMORIES THAT LAST A LIFETIME.

Use this planner to map out your cocktail hour budget and
create an experience your guests will never forget.



ITEM	BUDGET	ESTIMATE / QUOTE
 FOOD / CATERING Charcuterie, passed appetizers, display, and other bites.	\$	
 BAR / BEVERAGES Beer, wine, signature cocktails, non-alcoholic options, mixers.	\$	
 STAFFING & SERVICE Servers, bartenders, setup and cleanup staff.	\$	
 RENTALS Tables, lounge seating, linens, glassware, plates, etc.	\$	
 DECOR & STYLING Florals, candles, signage, linens, decor accents.	\$	
 ENTERTAINMENT Live music, DJ, or other entertainment.	\$	
 OTHER Special touches, custom rentals, favors, welcome drinks, etc.	\$	
TOTAL COCKTAIL HOUR BUDGET	\$	

♥ BUDGET TIPS

- ♥ Cocktail hour is an investment in your guests' experience.
- ♥ Allocate 10–15% of your total wedding budget for cocktail hour.
- ♥ Prioritize food, drinks, and guest comfort.
- ♥ Ask about package options that include setup, service, and cleanup.
- ♥ Don't forget to account for gratuities.
- ♥ Quality over quantity—focus on meaningful details.

NOTES ♥

“ A well-planned cocktail hour
sets the tone for the entire celebration
and creates memories that last a lifetime. ”

EVERYTHING BUT THE WINE

Creating Beautiful, Memorable Cocktail Hour Experiences

THE BRIDE'S QUESTIONS TO ASK *Your Venue*

The perfect cocktail hour starts with the right venue.
Use this list to make sure your venue can support an
unforgettable experience for you and your guests.



1 SPACE & CAPACITY



- What is the maximum guest count for cocktail hour in this space?
- Is the cocktail hour held indoors, outdoors, or both?
- If outdoors, is there a backup plan for inclement weather?
- Is there enough space for guest flow, seating, bars, and food stations?
- Where will the food and beverage stations be located?
- Are there any restrictions on where vendors can set up?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2 LOGISTICS & OPERATIONS



- What time can vendors begin setup on the day of the event?
- Is there a preferred vendor list or any outside vendor fees?
- Are there electrical outlets available for vendors to use?
- Is there adequate lighting in the cocktail hour space?
- Will venue staff assist with any part of the cocktail hour?
- What is the plan for cleanup during cocktail hour?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3 BAR & BEVERAGE



- What bar options are available (open bar, cash bar, hosted bar)?
- Can we bring in our own alcohol or specialty drinks?
- Are there any beverage minimums?
- How many bars are available and where will they be placed?
- Can signature cocktails or mocktails be created?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

4 FOOD & VENDOR INFORMATION



- Are there any food or catering restrictions we should know about?
- Can we bring in outside caterers or food vendors?
- Is there a kitchen or prep area available for vendors?
- Are there any rules about displaying or serving food?
- How does the venue handle trash and recycling?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Helpful Tip ♥

The more questions you ask now,
the smoother and more enjoyable your
cocktail hour (and entire day) will be!



ADDITIONAL NOTES ♥

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

THE BRIDE'S QUESTIONS TO ASK *Your Caterer*

Great food is at the heart of a memorable cocktail hour.
Use this list to ensure your caterer understands your
vision and can deliver an unforgettable experience.



1 MENU & FOOD OPTIONS

What menu options do you offer for cocktail hour?
Can we customize the menu?
Do you offer options for guests with dietary restrictions
or food allergies?
How do you keep food fresh and at the right temperature?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



2 SERVICE & STAFFING

How many staff members will be assigned to cocktail hour?
Will staff be serving food, or will it be self-serve?
How do you handle guest flow and food presentation?
Do staff remain passed during cocktail hour?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



3 TIMING & FLOW

How long do you recommend for cocktail hour?
When will food be ready and displayed?
How do you coordinate with other vendors and the timeline?
What happens if cocktail hour runs longer than planned?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



4 EQUIPMENT & SETUP

What will you provide (tables, linens, displays, etc.)?
What do you need from the venue?
How much space do you need to set up?
Will you handle cleanup of your own area?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



5 PRICING & POLICIES

What is included in your pricing?
Are gratuities included?
What is your cancellation or refund policy?
Is there a minimum guest count?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Helpful Tip ♥

A great caterer will do more
than serve food—they will
help create an experience
your guests will remember.



ADDITIONAL NOTES ♥

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

THE BRIDE'S QUESTIONS TO ASK *Your Bartender*



Drinks set the tone and keep the celebration flowing. Use these questions to make sure your bar experience is seamless, efficient, and memorable.



1 BAR OPTIONS

What bar package options do you offer?
Can we customize our bar menu?
Do you offer a full bar, beer & wine, or signature cocktails?
Are there non-alcoholic and mocktail options available?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



2 LOGISTICS & SETUP

How long does bar setup take?
What space and power requirements do you need?
Can you set up at multiple locations if needed?
Do you provide your own bar, or do you need one?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



3 STAFFING & SERVICE

How many bartenders will be working the event?
Will the bartenders remain for the entire cocktail hour?
Do you offer roaming or passed drinks?
How do you manage large guest counts and lines?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



4 SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Do you provide all glassware, ice, mixers, and garnishes?
Will you provide specialty glassware for signature drinks?
Do you need access to ice, sinks, or water?
Do you bring your own tools and bar equipment?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



5 PRICING & POLICIES

How is your pricing structured?
Are gratuities included in your pricing?
What is your cancellation or refund policy?
Do you require a minimum spend or guest count?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



6 LEGAL & RESPONSIBILITY

Are you licensed and insured?
Who is responsible for checking IDs?
Do you follow state laws for alcohol service?
What is your policy for guests who are intoxicated?

NOTES / ANSWERS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



HELPFUL TIP

A great bartender does more than serve drinks—they create an atmosphere and keep the energy of cocktail hour just right.



ADDITIONAL NOTES

- _____
- _____
- _____

TOOL

7

OF 7

THE BRIDE'S COCKTAIL HOUR *Inspiration*

Beautiful details. Thoughtful presentation.
Unforgettable experience.
Let these moments inspire the cocktail hour
you and your guests will never forget.



EVERYTHING BUT THE WINE
Creating Beautiful, Memorable Cocktail Hour Experiences



BEFORE YOUR WEDDING DAY...

Real Bride Notes

Take a quiet moment together to dream about the experience you want to create for the people you love most.



MY WEDDING VISION

Three words I want guests to use when they describe our wedding:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I WANT OUR COCKTAIL HOUR TO FEEL...

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Relaxed | ☐ Interactive |
| ☐ Elegant | ☐ Welcoming |
| ☐ Fun | ☐ Sophisticated |
| ☐ Romantic | ☐ Joyful |
| ☐ Luxurious | ☐ Other: _____ |



I HOPE OUR GUESTS REMEMBER...

THE MOMENTS I WANT PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT ON THE DRIVE HOME...

THE MEMORIES I HOPE OUR GUESTS TAKE WITH THEM...

A LETTER TO OURSELVES

When we look back on our wedding day, we hope we remember...

The most beautiful weddings aren't remembered for perfection. They're remembered for how they made people feel.

— EVERYTHING BUT THE WINE

NOTES

Ready to CREATE A COCKTAIL HOUR YOUR GUESTS WILL NEVER Forget?



Let's create an intentional,
beautifully hosted experience
that brings people together,
sparks conversation, and leaves
a lasting impression long
after the last toast.

WHEN YOU WORK WITH EVERYTHING BUT THE WINE,
YOU CAN EXPECT:



A FULLY HOSTED EXPERIENCE

We set up,
serve, and
clean up.



BEAUTIFUL, FRESH & ABUNDANT

High-quality
ingredients
guests love.



ENGAGING & INVITING

Encouraging
connection and
conversation.



STRESS-FREE FOR YOU

We handle every
detail so you can
be present.



MEMORABLE & IMPACTFUL

An experience
your guests
will talk about.



DESIGNED AROUND YOU

Custom menus
to match your
event perfectly.

*Ready to create the cocktail hour
your guests will still be talking about after the honeymoon?*

SCHEDULE A CONSULTATION

Linda Eskridge
everythingbutthewine.net
everythingbutthewine@gmail.com
[Book Your Experience](#)

