

The Invite

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WEDDING ETIQUETTE



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Every aspect of planning a wedding requires a certain etiquette. Wedding expert Aleit Swanepoel gives advice on the first step in planning your big day – the wedding invitation

When should you send out the invitations? If your guests are local, you can send a save-the-date by email three to six months in advance with the date and ask them to indicate whether they can make it or not. This will eliminate resending invitations. Guests living overseas need six months to a year to plan and make travel arrangements. You can send the invitation out six weeks in advance if numbers are high to cut down guest numbers.

What should the deadline be for RSVPs? This is the couple's preference but the norm is either six weeks before the wedding or one month after delivery.

If you have a gift registry or wedding website, should you include this on the invitation, and if so, where? The SA market likes to include this on the wedding invitation. However, I recommend creating a wedding website that includes additional details such as dress code, dietary requirements, map, RSVP and gift registry instead of having this on the save-the-date. Often, those who get married later in life and already have all household necessities request a donation to a charity, cash towards a honeymoon fund, or suggest a few friends club together to buy one big gift. Never ask for cash directly, rather be tongue-in-cheek, for example, "In our house we have plenty, but our piggy bank is empty."

Is it rude to say that children aren't invited? If not, how do we word this? This is not rude at all. You're paying per head and it's costly to pay a premium for children. To state "Regret no children" is quite acceptable. Alternatively, hire child-minders to give parents peace of mind.

How do we describe dress code on the invitation? Be very specific. The Aleit trend is to specify separately for ladies and gents. Dress code can also be themed, eg "urban chic" or "winelands cocktail". If your event is formal, be specific: say "black tie".

Do we invite people singly, or do we have to include a partner? It is not ethical to invite people to an evening event on their own. It's also not safe these days and uncomfortable to be without a plus one. However, if there is a large, young crowd who are mostly single, place them as a group at a table and ensure you have a shuttle service so nobody drives home intoxicated.

If a couple is having a small reception for family and close friends, should they invite people to the ceremony separately? Make guests attending just the ceremony feel special by specifying cocktails will be served directly after the ceremony. For those attending the reception, include the dinner details on their invitation.

In the case of a traditional wedding with different ceremonies, are these all listed on one invite? Or does one send separate invitations? Send separate invitations. Send an electronic invite for the traditional wedding and a formal invitation for the white wedding.

Paper invitations or email invites – which is best? Email invites are more eco-friendly, but receiving a hand-delivered invitation is charming. If you do, use recycled paper.

Last word? My rule for the guest list is simple: if they don't even know the name of your pet, they shouldn't be invited! 🐾



Aleit Swanepoel is the founder of premier wedding and events coordinators and consultants The Aleit Group, SA's premier wedding and events coordination consultancy. He is considered one of the country's most knowledgeable wedding experts. www.thealeitgroup.com