

Wedding costs are rising. Should the value of your gift go up also?

Guests weigh etiquette expectations against rising living costs

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Wedding season is in full swing, and if you're wondering how much cash to slip into that card, you're definitely not the only one. (Jamie Hopkins/CBC News Graphics)

As wedding season ramps up across Canada, many guests are grappling with a familiar question at a time when seemingly everything costs more: how much should they spend on a wedding gift?

Between dishing out money for travel, hotels and new clothes, attending a wedding can add up quickly. At the same time, more couples are asking for cash gifts or honeymoon contributions rather than items from registries, leaving some guests wondering what is expected.

"There's so many different circumstances ... that it's hard to have a concrete number that you give every single time," said Sydney MacDonald, whom CBC spoke with on a recent afternoon in Calgary's Beltline.

"I think for some of the weddings that we've gone to, usually the \$100 to \$200 range has kind of been what I've gravitated towards."



"I'd say \$250," said Meghan McKay, also from Calgary.

Patrick Griffin, visiting from St. John's, said \$100.

"I prefer a gift," said Faye Bian. "\$50 to \$100 — that's maximum for me."

Those calculations are becoming increasingly common as Canadians balance wedding etiquette with the realities of a higher cost of living.

"I am factoring in how much I can give as a young person living today, which is way more expensive than it used to be, and also how close I am to them," said Lauren Dubie, who is planning her own wedding in 2028.

"I would much rather cash," said Dubie. "I feel like registries are so outdated."

Wedding costs rising

Wedding etiquette is evolving at a time when the festivities themselves are becoming more expensive.

The average Canadian wedding costs between \$30,000 and \$42,000, according to WeddingWire Canada and The Knot's 2025 Global Report.

Weddings are more expensive because practically everything is costing more these days. Inflation is up nearly 20 per cent since 2021, according to Statistics Canada. More specifically, hotel prices have increased more than 40 per cent over the same period, while flower prices are up roughly 18 per cent.

Amanda Figueredo, owner of Day of Diva Planning & Coordination, said food and beverage costs have been among the biggest increases.

"Definitely we're seeing a hike in the cost of signature drinks," she said. "Back in the day, they used to be \$10. Now they're more like \$17."

She said the price gap between buffet and plated meal options has also narrowed.



Amanda Figueredo is the owner of Day of Diva Planning & Coordination. This is her seventh year planning weddings in and around the Calgary area. She is seen here at the Modern Rentals showroom in Calgary. (Ina Sidhu/CBC)

She cautions against tying gifts directly to wedding expenses.

“In the past it used to be: cover the cost of the meal,” she said. “But there are a lot of other factors that play into the cost of a wedding.”

Her advice?

“Whatever people can give. But I think maybe around \$100 is a good place to start.”

No fixed rule, experts say

Wedding industry professionals say there is no universal rule for wedding gifts, and guests should never feel pressured.



“The wedding gift is really what comes from the heart and that’s always in balance with what your means are,” said Lenora Kingcott, producer of Bridal Expo, Calgary’s fall bridal fair, and a wedding industry veteran of more than 30 years.

Kingcott said the long-standing idea that guests should "cover their plate" — giving enough to offset the cost of their meal — is increasingly viewed as outdated.

Kingcott said around \$100 per guest is a common benchmark.

“And I think it goes up from there when people have more means or more heart connection with the couple.”

This summer, many wedding guests are faced with figuring out how much they should give for a gift as the rising cost of everyday items cuts into household budgets.

Kingcott said social media posts about wedding etiquette can sometimes create unrealistic expectations.

“When I do see a lot of hysteria on TikTok, for example, I always want to remind everyone that when they’re looking up things about etiquette on gift giving, those are suggestions,” she said.

“They aren’t rules. They aren’t meant to make anyone feel less than.”

Is cash king?

Changing lifestyles are also reshaping gift-giving traditions. Many couples already live together before marriage and have established households long before their wedding day.

As a result, traditional registries filled with kitchen appliances and household items are becoming less common.



Jennifer Bruce and her husband, Ryan, got married in September 2025 in Calgary. (Mackenzie Kelly Photography)

When Jennifer Bruce married her husband last September on a downtown Calgary rooftop, they asked guests to contribute to a honeymoon fund rather than giving a physical gift.

Bruce is 40 and a homeowner. They spent roughly \$35,000 on the wedding, she said, but they didn't need anything.

"It was just about the party, and anything that kind of went towards the honeymoon was just a bonus for us."

Traditions vary culturally

In some cultures, including within the South Asian community, giving money as a wedding gift is a long-standing tradition.

"There's so much prosperity in the meaning of money," said Sarika Verma, creative director of Two14 Events and Accessories in Toronto.

"When we give money, it's attached to abundance, prosperity and success for the couple."

Verma, who has worked in the industry for more than two decades, said guests attending weddings with multiple events in the Toronto area often will bring a card with cash to each event.



"In my experience planning Asian weddings, monetary gifts are by far the most common," agreed Lisa Lee-Truong, the owner of Vancouver-based Shing Weddings.

She said red envelopes are gifted for good luck.

Lee-Truong said the dollar amount has increased over time.

"Years ago, \$100 per person was generally considered a standard gift, but today I commonly see guests giving between \$150 to \$200 per person. Of course, the amount depends on the guest's relationship with the couple and their circumstances, but there's been a shift upward in recent years."