

"How we did our wedding with a budget of \$1500."



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According to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the average Australian wedding costs \$36,200. Of course, there are many different figures and it's extremely difficult to work out an exact average as each and every wedding is unique. Figures also depend on who the survey is conducted by and what they want to achieve with the result.

From personal experience, I've seen people spend anywhere from \$20,000 up to \$100,000 for their big day. Some would argue that you can't put a price tag on the most important day of your life. Some might say it's a huge waste of money. Some girls dream of a big white wedding from an early age... but I was never one of them. I just wanted the cake.

A month before we got engaged, my partner and I had booked a six-month backpacking adventure across Latin America. While we did initially look at some wedding venues around Sydney, it wasn't long before we realised it wasn't what we wanted: Having to save for a wedding from scratch after coming home totally skint was not exactly our idea of fun.

We were all about the upcoming Latino adventure instead – our mouths watered at the thought of eating tacos with too much chilli sauce (if there is such a thing). So just before waving goodbye to Sydney, we made a last minute decision to elope.

We spent just under \$1,500 tying the knot in a Mexican cenote – a natural limestone sinkhole with turquoise water. I purchased a white beach dress from Myer for \$60, and we kept our lips sealed.



Image: Monica Lopez Photography.

To us, it was seeing and experiencing new parts of the world that was important. And of course, being together. Eloping seemed like the best idea, not only for an adventure, but financially, too.

That's how I found myself in a little hotel in the back streets of Playa del Carmen, pulling my wedding dress out of my dirty backpack, glad that I had wrapped it so carefully. As I straightened the crumpled heap, I wondered how many brides had carried their wedding gown in a backpack for six weeks before wearing it.

With all the warnings we had received about backpacking in certain regions, I was a bit worried about having my bag stolen. I had the

scenario clear in my head: I was ready to give up my wallet, phone and passport if necessary. But not the dress. Never the dress.

It was June and monsoon season in Mexico. The days were a sweltering 37-degrees but as long as we didn't get a monsoon on the wedding day, we didn't care.

On the special morning, we got up at snail's pace and had breakfast margaritas by the pool. Nemorio, a local Mexican taxi driver who understood no English (and unsurprisingly, not much of our Spanish), drove us to our wedding destination - a beautiful cenote between Playa del Carmen and Tulum - which had been picked by our Mexican photographer, Mónica.

Two hours earlier, I had visited a French hair and make-up artist, Sarah, who tried her best to change my rustic-backpacker appearance into something a little more acceptable for a bride.



Image: Monica Lopez Photography.

We met our Russian celebrant Anna at the cenote, exchanged our vows and promises, and headed to the beach for a sunset photo shoot. What remains now are wonderful memories of that sun-kissed (and very

multicultural) day, sharing an adventure together and of course, eating and drinking too much.

Oh, and wearing sombreros.

Getting engaged, we were flooded by all kinds of differing opinions about how we should get married. From "You should have it on the beach!" to "Oh my god let's go to Bali for it!" Even after people found out we eloped they asked: "So you'll have a big celebration when you return?" It's an event that gets everyone's two cents' worth.

As with everything, eloping has its pros and cons. While we were able to have a stress-free, relaxed day by the beach on an overseas adventure, we would have loved to have our friends and families there with us too.

The bottom line is - when it's your wedding there are only two people who need to be happy. Do it your way. There are so many options to consider, but getting married and having a wedding are two very different things.

Eloping, whether in Australia or overseas, is certainly a wonderful option, in our humble opinion.

**NB -- advice not for people whose families might hunt them down and hurt them upon eloping.*