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The Auckland Wedding Venue *Checklist*

92 questions to ask before you sign — written for New Zealand venues, by a photographer who has worked in them since 2015.

HOW TO USE THIS

Print one copy per venue. Tick as you go, and write the answer on the lines — the answers are the point, not the ticks. When you get home, put the sheets side by side. That comparison is worth more than any brochure.

The one thing that matters most: don't compare advertised hire fees. Ask every shortlisted venue for a single itemised total for your actual guest number on your actual date, including every fee in section 2.

A \$2,000 venue that needs \$9,000 of hired equipment costs more than a \$7,000 all-inclusive one. The headline number tells you almost nothing.

IF YOU ONLY ASK TWENTY

These are the ones that cause the most regret when nobody asks them. They're marked ★ in the full list.

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| 5 Can we have an itemised total for our actual guest number on our actual date? | 37 What kitchen does an outside caterer actually get? |
| 7 Is there a minimum spend — and can it be met on food alone? | 43 Do you charge for vendor meals, and when are they served? |
| 14 Can the price rise between signing and our date? Is there an escalation clause? | 47 Can we BYO, and what's the corkage — per bottle or per head? |
| 18 What's the maximum capacity, and what's the number where the room still feels good? | 56 Is a venue coordinator included — and is that the same person who'll be here on the day? |
| 26 How many hours does the hire cover, and from what time to what time? | 60 Are open flames and candles permitted? Under what conditions, and at what cost? |
| 27 What time can suppliers access the site to set up? | 66 Can you show us the wet-weather plan right now, so we can stand in it? |
| 29 What is the music curfew, where does it come from, and is it in our contract? | 67 Does it fit all our guests, seated? |
| 34 Do you host more than one wedding per day? How many events are on site that weekend? | 77 If we're on Waiheke — what time is the last ferry on our day? |
| 35 Is catering in-house only, from an approved list, or can we bring our own? | 78 Which way does the ceremony site face? |
| | 79 What time does the sun set here on our date? |
| | 85 Can we have an open flame for the ceremony — an agni, havan or unity fire? In writing, with conditions? |

Figures and rules referenced in this checklist were compiled from published New Zealand venue, vendor and council sources, current as at August 2026. Venue policies change — always confirm directly with the venue. General information only, not legal advice.

1. BEFORE YOU BOOK THE TOUR

- ☐ 1 What is your true guest number — the one you can't cut?

Do this first. Everything else is downstream of it, and it's the single biggest lever on cost.

- ☐ 2 Is our date fixed, or is the venue allowed to set it?

Australian industry data puts around a third of couples setting their date from venue availability. Decide which of you is in charge before you fall in love with a venue.

- ☐ 3 Do we have any non-negotiables — a specific caterer, an open flame, a dry bar, 300 guests?

One non-negotiable can eliminate 80% of venues. Find that out on the phone, not after a two-hour round trip.

- ☐ 4 Are you available on our date, and what's your response time like?

Slow or vague replies now are a preview. If they're hard to reach while they're selling to you, imagine month eleven.

2. MONEY AND THE CONTRACT

- ☐ 5 ★ Can we have an itemised total for our actual guest number on our actual date?

- ☐ 6 What is the venue hire fee, and what exactly does it include?

Tables, chairs, linen, glassware, cutlery, PA, lectern — name them individually. "Everything you need" is not a list.

- ☐ 7 ★ Is there a minimum spend — and can it be met on food alone?

The food-only vs food-and-beverage distinction is worth thousands, and it decides whether a dry wedding is even viable here.

- ☐ 8 Is there a per-head minimum — a floor guest number we pay for regardless?

Some Auckland hotels set a 150-adult floor on their main ballroom. A 90-guest wedding pays for 150.

- ☐ 9 Does the minimum spend change by day of week, month, or public holiday?
On the one full Auckland rate card published publicly, a winter weekday costs 77% less than a summer Saturday.

- ☐ 10 Are all your figures GST-inclusive?
Ask explicitly. Very few New Zealand venues state it on their website, and 15% on a \$30,000 quote is not a rounding error.

- ☐ 11 What's the deposit, is any of it refundable, and when is final payment due?

- ☐ 12 Is a service charge or gratuity added automatically, and at what percentage?
Hotel contracts commonly add 20–25% of the food and beverage total.

- ☐ 13 Is a damage or cleaning bond required, what forfeits it, and when is it returned?
Commonly \$500–\$2,000 in New Zealand, usually held against a credit card.

- ☐ 14 ★ Can the price rise between signing and our date? Is there an escalation clause?

- ☐ 15 What's the cancellation and postponement policy, and what happens if we reduce guest numbers?
Ask about the guaranteed-minimum guest number and the exact date it locks.

- ☐ 16 Do you require public liability insurance from us or our suppliers?

- ☐ 17 Is everything we've discussed today going into the contract?
Verbal promises are the single most common cause of venue disputes. If it isn't written, it didn't happen.

3. CAPACITY AND SPACE

- ☐ 18 ★ What's the maximum capacity, and what's the number where the room still feels good?
Two different numbers, and good venues will tell you both. The gap is often 30 people.

☐ 19 Does that number assume a dance floor, band or DJ, bar, cake table and gift table are all in the room?

☐ 20 Is there a separate ceremony space, or does it become the reception space?

☐ 21 If the room gets flipped, where do guests go — and who does the flipping?

☐ 22 How many toilets, and where are they relative to the reception?

☐ 23 Is there a getting-ready room? Does it have natural light and a mirror, and what time can we access it?

☐ 24 Where do gifts get stored, and is it locked?

Not a decor question if your guests give cash — and at many Auckland weddings they do.

☐ 25 Is the site step-free? What's the plan for guests with mobility needs on grass or gravel?

Consistently listed on every checklist, consistently the one nobody actually asks.

4. TIMING, CURFEW AND ACCESS

☐ 26 ★ How many hours does the hire cover, and from what time to what time?

☐ 27 ★ What time can suppliers access the site to set up?

Ask this separately from guest hire time. Most Auckland packages run 7–9 hours total and the clock usually starts when guests arrive, not when your decorator does.

☐ 28 What time must pack-down be finished? Can we collect things the next morning?

☐ 29 ★ What is the music curfew, where does it come from, and is it in our contract?

- ☐ 30 Does the curfew differ for amplified vs acoustic, indoor vs outdoor?
Matters enormously if you're having dhol, a live band, or a church choir.
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- ☐ 31 Is there a hard site-clear time for guests?
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- ☐ 32 What does overtime cost per hour, and how late can we push it?
Commonly \$200–\$400 an hour in New Zealand.
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- ☐ 33 What happens if the timeline runs late — do you cut the night short, or charge?
Ask this if your family's speeches or protocol traditionally run long. A hard seven-hour package forces a choice between protocol and dancing.
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- ☐ 34 ★ Do you host more than one wedding per day? How many events are on site that weekend?
This is where your set-up time comes from. Two weddings a day means a short install window, no room for a ceremony to run over, and other people's guests in your photos.
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5. CATERING

- ☐ 35 ★ Is catering in-house only, from an approved list, or can we bring our own?
If a specific caterer is non-negotiable for you, filter on this before anything else.
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- ☐ 36 If external caterers are allowed, what would it take to add ours to the list?
Usually Food Act registration, public liability insurance and a site visit.
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- ☐ 37 ★ What kitchen does an outside caterer actually get?
At one published Auckland estate, caterers are confined to the garage and scullery with two trestle tables and a dishwasher. That may be fine — your caterer decides, not you, and not the venue.
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- ☐ 38 Is there a kitchen surcharge for using an outside caterer?
No Auckland venue publishes this figure, so you have to ask.
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☐ 39 What are the per-head menu tiers, and what's actually in each?

☐ 40 Is there a tasting, and is it free or charged?

Essential if you're relying on an in-house kitchen for a cuisine that matters to your family. "We do Indian" covers an enormous range.

☐ 41 How are dietary requirements and allergies handled, and are they charged extra?

Plated service is the format most likely to lose someone's allergy — choices are collected weeks ahead and tracked to seat numbers.

☐ 42 Are children charged at the adult rate? Are they counted against the minimum spend?

☐ 43 ★ Do you charge for vendor meals, and when are they served?

A wedding runs to a dozen or so suppliers. They need to eat while your guests eat — not after — or you lose coverage of the speeches.

☐ 44 Is there a cake-cutting fee? Can we bring an outside cake?

☐ 45 Can guests take leftover food home?

A genuine requirement at many Pasifika and Filipino weddings, where catering is built on abundance. Most venues have never been asked and will need to check.

6. ALCOHOL AND CORKAGE

☐ 46 Are you licensed, or will we need a special licence?

If you need one, apply at least 20 working days ahead — and note that 20 December to 15 January are not working days, so a February wedding is effectively a November application.

☐ 47 ★ Can we BYO, and what's the corkage — per bottle or per head?

Auckland ranges from no corkage at all to around \$28 per head. On 150 guests that difference is thousands.

☐ 48 What's the bar model — tab, cash bar, or package — and can we cap it?

- ☐ 49 If we're not serving alcohol at all, how does that change the quote?
Ask it plainly. Bar revenue is how many venues make their margin, and a dry wedding on an alcohol-inclusive package means paying for drinks nobody has.

- ☐ 50 What non-alcoholic options do you serve?
A good non-alcoholic list is now standard rather than an afterthought. Ask them to show you what they'd serve, not just say yes.

- ☐ 51 Who holds the duty manager certificate on the night?

7. SUPPLIERS AND RESTRICTIONS

- ☐ 52 Do you have a preferred supplier list? Is it a requirement or a recommendation?

- ☐ 53 Is there a fee to bring in a supplier who isn't on the list?

- ☐ 54 Do you require a certificate of insurance from every supplier?

- ☐ 55 Is a wedding planner or on-the-day coordinator required?

- ☐ 56 ★ Is a venue coordinator included — and is that the same person who'll be here on the day?
This catches more couples than any other question on this list. A venue coordinator makes sure the doors open, the included items are set up, and the rules are followed. That is not the same job as a wedding planner, and 3pm on your wedding day is a bad time to find out.

- ☐ 57 Who is our single point of contact through planning?
High coordinator turnover is a real red flag. Ask how long your contact has been there.

- ☐ 58 How many staff will be working our wedding?

8. DECOR AND WHAT YOU CAN CHANGE

- ☐ 59 Can we bring our own decor, or is styling in-house only?

In-house-only styling is a hard blocker if you need a specific mandap, backdrop or drape vendor.

- ☐ 60 ★ Are open flames and candles permitted? Under what conditions, and at what cost?

Some Auckland venues ban naked flame outright, candles included. One publishes "strictly no fireworks, lanterns or fires."

- ☐ 61 Confetti, sparklers, fireworks, rice, petals — which are allowed?

Synthetic confetti and balloons are increasingly banned in New Zealand on environmental grounds. Biodegradable and petal confetti are often still fine, so ask which.

- ☐ 62 What can we fix things to? Nails, screws, tape, hanging from beams?

Heritage properties are especially strict. This kills hanging installations, drape and suspended mandaps.

- ☐ 63 Do you set up and pack down, or is that on us?
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- ☐ 64 Is there a sound system and microphones, and enough power for a band?
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- ☐ 65 Will a band, caterer, lighting and heaters all run at once without tripping something?

At a marquee or dry-hire site, power has to be mapped load by load. Ask who's doing that mapping.

9. WET WEATHER

- ☐ 66 ★ Can you show us the wet-weather plan right now, so we can stand in it?
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- ☐ 67 ★ Does it fit all our guests, seated?
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- ☐ 68 Is it included in the price, or is it a marquee we'd have to hire?
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☐ 69 Is it guaranteed in our contract, or subject to availability?

☐ 70 Who makes the rain call, and by what deadline before the ceremony?

☐ 71 What's the plan for wind, heat and cold — sidewalls, heaters, shade, umbrellas?

Auckland in March is not Auckland in July, and an exposed coastal site is not a sheltered one.

10. ACCOMMODATION, PARKING AND TRANSPORT

☐ 72 Is there on-site accommodation? How many beds, and is it exclusively ours?

☐ 73 Is there a minimum-night stay, and does it change in peak season?

On Waiheke, guest accommodation minimum stays jump to four to seven nights over the 20 December to 10 January peak. If you're marrying there in early January, your guests are booking a week, not a night.

☐ 74 What accommodation is within ten minutes, and do you have a room-block arrangement?

☐ 75 How many cars can park on site, is there a fee, and can guests leave cars overnight?

☐ 76 Does rideshare actually come out here at 11pm?

Ask it exactly like that. "We're 30 minutes from the city" and "you can get a taxi home" are different claims.

☐ 77 ★ If we're on Waiheke — what time is the last ferry on our day?

The last sailings back to Auckland on Friday and Saturday are around 11:00pm and 12:30am. That sets the end of your reception regardless of what the venue's curfew says. It also means roughly \$200 per supplier car on the ferry, plus their accommodation.

11. LIGHT, TIMING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

- ☐ 78 ★ Which way does the ceremony site face?

A west-facing lawn at 4pm puts the sun directly behind your guests and into your photographer's lens. The same lawn at 5pm is beautiful.

- ☐ 79 ★ What time does the sun set here on our date?

Late September in Auckland gives you until about 6:15pm. January gives you past 8pm. That single fact reshapes your whole timeline — and it's why the same venue feels completely different in different months.

- ☐ 80 Does the getting-ready room have a window, and which way does it face?

A dark hotel bathroom and a room with soft window light produce visibly different photographs of the same morning.

- ☐ 81 Is the wet-weather backup space photographable, or is it a function room with fluorescent tubes?

- ☐ 82 Where do we go for portraits, and how long does it take to get there?

A fifteen-minute drive each way is thirty minutes out of your reception.

- ☐ 83 Are drones permitted? Tripods, light stands, off-camera flash?

- ☐ 84 Can our photographer go anywhere, or are there restricted areas?

Also worth asking at a banquet: can someone physically move between the round tables? That decides whether you get table photos.

12. CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS REQUIREMENTS

- ☐ 85 ★ Can we have an open flame for the ceremony — an agni, havan or unity fire? In writing, with conditions?

Most function rooms have sprinklers and smoke detection. Your options are an outdoor or open-sided pavilion, a venue that will formally isolate smoke detection for a window (at least one Auckland hotel prices this as a line item), or a designated ventilated fire area. Outdoors, a fire permit comes from Fire and Emergency New Zealand, and open fires are prohibited in urban residential and business areas.

- ☐ 86 Where does a procession or baraat arrive, and is there room for dhol, dancing — or a horse?

Walk the approach at procession speed. If it takes under a minute, it's too short.

- ☐ 87 Is there a private, quiet, seated side room for a tea ceremony or similar?

With a dozen elders, a tea ceremony is a formal 30–45 minute segment, not a corner of the foyer.

- ☐ 88 Can you cook the cuisine we actually want — and can we taste it?

Vegetarian is often the default menu rather than a dietary sub-count. Jain food excludes root vegetables and needs separate prep and utensils. Halal means certified meat and no cross-contamination with pork or alcohol, down to sauces and vanilla extract.

- ☐ 89 Can we run this across more than one day, and what does that cost?

Mehndi, haldi, sangeet, ceremony and reception is two to four events. A 7–9 hour package doesn't hold it.

- ☐ 90 Is there floor space for formal gifting, presentation or a large unobstructed dance?

Laying out 'ie tōga or dancing a taualuga needs real floor and clear sightlines, not a four-metre square between tables.

- ☐ 91 Is there a clean, quiet room for prayer, with access to water?

- ☐ 92 Can you run two ceremonies in one day, or use two spaces, with a full re-set between?

For interfaith and blended weddings — common in Auckland — also ask whether the coordinator will take direction from two different officiants.

*Every question here is also free on supergibo.com/wedding-venue-checklist — along with why each one matters.
Questions about a specific Auckland venue? We've probably photographed there. hello@supergibo.com*