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What a Cape Cod Wedding Actually Costs in 2026: A Line-by-Line Budget

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.

capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-wedding-cost

If you’ve started pricing out a Cape Cod wedding, you’ve probably noticed something frustrating: the “average” cost is all over the map. One source says \$17,000. Another says \$83,000. National wedding-cost estimators spit out a number that has never once set foot on a beach in Wellfleet.

So let’s do something more useful. Below is an honest, itemized budget built around a **100-guest Cape Cod wedding**, with realistic 2026 ranges for every line item — then we’ll show how it scales down to a 50-person micro-wedding and up to 150 guests. We’ll also walk through exactly where the big money lives and how shoulder-season timing can quietly save you five figures.

One important note up front: every figure here is an *estimated 2026 range*, not a quote. Cape pricing swings hard based on your date, town, vendor, and guest count. Treat these as planning brackets to pressure-test real quotes against — not guarantees.

The honest answer: what a Cape Cod wedding costs in 2026

For a typical 100-guest Cape Cod wedding with a sit-down or stationed dinner, a tent or mid-tier venue, photography, florals, and music, most couples in 2026 should plan for roughly **\$45,000–\$75,000 all in**. You can do it for meaningfully less by trimming the guest list and the date, and you can spend far more if you book a marquee waterfront resort. But that mid-range bracket is where most “real” Cape weddings actually land.

Here’s where that money goes.

The line-by-line budget: 100 guests (estimated 2026 ranges)

Line item	Low	Typical	High
Venue / site fee	\$3,000	\$8,000	\$20,000+
Catering (per head × 100)	\$9,000	\$15,000	\$25,000
Bar service	\$3,000	\$5,500	\$10,000
Rentals (tent, tables, linens, lighting)	\$4,000	\$9,000	\$18,000
Photography	\$3,500	\$5,500	\$9,000
Videography	\$2,500	\$4,000	\$7,000
Florals	\$2,500	\$5,000	\$12,000
Music (DJ or band)	\$1,500	\$3,500	\$9,000
Officiant	\$300	\$600	\$1,000
Cake / desserts	\$600	\$1,200	\$2,500
Hair & makeup	\$600	\$1,400	\$3,000
Attire (both partners + alterations)	\$2,000	\$4,000	\$9,000
Invitations / stationery	\$500	\$1,200	\$3,000
Transportation / guest shuttles	\$800	\$2,000	\$4,500
Lodging / room block (couple’s portion)	\$500	\$1,500	\$4,000

Line item	Low	Typical	High
Planner / coordinator	\$1,500	\$4,500	\$10,000
MA marriage license	\$50	\$50	\$50
Beach ceremony permit	\$50	\$110	\$200
Estimated total	~\$36,000	~\$76,000	~\$150,000+

A few honest caveats on this table:

- **Catering is the single biggest lever.** Plated dinners on the Cape commonly run **\$90–\$250+ per person** before tax and service. A famous Cape Cod **clambake** — lobster, steamers, corn, chowder — typically lands in the **\$95–\$175 per head** range depending on the lobster market that summer, which can move quite a bit year to year.
- **Tax and service/gratuuity are real and large.** Many full-service venues and caterers add **18–24%** on top of food and bar. On a \$20,000 food-and-bar subtotal, that’s another \$4,000–\$4,800. Always ask whether a quote is “plus-plus” (plus tax, plus service) — that detail alone can swing your total by thousands.
- **Tented “backyard” weddings aren’t automatically cheaper.** A bare lawn means renting *everything*: the tent, flooring, lighting, generators, restrooms, kitchen tent, and tables. Those rentals frequently total **\$10,000–\$18,000+**, which is why the line item is so wide.

How it scales: 50 and 150 guests

Costs don’t scale in a clean straight line, because a big chunk of your budget is *fixed* regardless of headcount — photographer, DJ, officiant, planner, your attire, the marriage license. Those don’t get cheaper with fewer guests.

- **~50 guests (micro-wedding):** Expect roughly **\$25,000–\$45,000**. Your per-guest costs (catering, bar, rentals, invitations, favors) roughly halve, but fixed vendor fees stay put. Net effect: a 50% smaller guest list usually cuts the *total* by only about 30–40%. The upside is you can spend more per person and still come out ahead.
- **~150 guests:** Expect roughly **\$60,000–\$110,000+**. Every per-head line scales up, and you’ll often size up the tent, bar staffing, and rentals too. This is also where venue minimums and capacity caps start steering your choices.

How to save: shoulder season is your biggest discount

The Cape’s peak wedding months are **June, September, and early October**, with Saturdays in those windows commanding the highest prices and getting booked first. If you want the same coastline for less, here’s where the real savings live:

- **Go shoulder-season.** **May, late September, and October** can shave 20–40% off venue and vendor pricing while still delivering gorgeous light and mild weather. (Late October and beyond, you’re rolling the dice on weather — plan a tent or indoor backup.)
- **Skip Saturday.** A **Friday or Sunday** — or a weekday — frequently unlocks lower venue rates and better vendor availability.
- **Trim the guest list before anything else.** Because catering and bar are per-head, every guest you cut saves across multiple line items at once. Twenty fewer guests can easily mean **\$3,000–\$6,000** back in your budget.
- **Mind the bridge.** Saturday-of-a-summer-weekend traffic over the Sagamore and Bourne bridges is a genuine logistics factor. A guest shuttle isn’t just a nicety — it can prevent a late, stressed ceremony. Build it in early rather than scrambling later.

A note on the marquee names: yes, the legendary waterfront resorts — Chatham Bars Inn, Wychmere Beach Club, Ocean Edge, Wequassett — are spectacular, and they sit comfortably at the top of the range (often well into six figures all-in for a full-guest-count Saturday). They're worth touring if they're in budget. But you do *not* need one of them to have a beautiful, unmistakably-Cape-Cod wedding. Plenty of inns, clubs, farms, and tented private properties deliver the same ocean light for a fraction of the cost.

The small line items people forget

These rarely break the budget, but they surprise people:

- **MA marriage license:** about **\$50** (set by your town/city), and Massachusetts has a **mandatory 3-day waiting period** between applying and when the license is valid — so don't leave it to the last week.
- **Beach ceremony permits:** these vary by town. The **Cape Cod National Seashore** runs around **\$50**, **Orleans** around **\$100**, and **Yarmouth** around **\$110**, with rules on group size, timing, and what you can set up. Always confirm directly with the specific town hall or the National Seashore, because fees and rules change season to season.

All prices above are estimated 2026 planning ranges and will vary by vendor, date, guest count, and town. Use them to sanity-check real quotes, not as fixed costs.

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