



The first two months of the New Year in Eritrea always sees a great number of weddings. The streets are jammed with traffic due to the greater flow of vehicles, many with horns blaring as they ferry newlywed couples and their co-revelers.

In three words, Eritrean weddings are romantic, large, and traditional. Eritreans can often be found glued to their television sets, attentively watching wedding home videos. Once in your life, you're born. Once in your life, you die. And once in your life, you get married...so you must do it right, so as to remember it properly. Towards this end, you'll also end up spending a lot of money!

Eritrean culture and weddings are about community-building. For six months leading up to the wedding, both families will get together to cook, prepare, and make traditional drinks including suwa (a beer-like alcohol) and  $\neg$ mes (a fermented honey drink). And of course, these six months are also full of singing and dancing. In Eritrea, the traditional Christian wedding ceremonies last two days.

On the first day of ceremonies, which usually falls on a Saturday, the groom, accompanied by his best-men, goes to the bride's house and takes her to the church service.

After the priest performs the ceremony, the newlywed couple and all their guests go to a nearby park to take wedding pictures. Subsequently, the couple will go for a lavish breakfast, and having had their breakfast, the couple are then requested to dance while a camera crew are busy doing their business and catching every bit of it.

## For Better or Worse...In Sickness and In Health...For Poorer and Poorer! (Richer??)

Written by shabait Administrator  
Wednesday, 24 February 2016 01:29

---

In the past, the reception was often held in a large tent near the groom's home. However, recently, holding the reception at a banquet hall has become more common. Either way, in a tent or a banquet hall, the bride and groom dance with their guests.

On the second day, the events begin early in the morning, with the bride wearing her white gown and the groom sporting an immaculate suit. The couple heads to a park and spends the morning taking pictures alongside loved ones and guests.

The official ceremony then starts as the bride and groom make their way to the bride's home where a reception will be held in their honor. The newlyweds are accompanied by a long line of cars - most often rented specifically for the occasion. At the bride's reception, the family of the bride sit on one side of the tent while the invited family of the bridegroom sit on the other. The closely-related guests tend to sit in front. The ritual starts after lunch, when representatives of both families exchange promises of loyalty and a priest blesses the wedding.

While all this is taking place, the bride is inside waiting to make her grand entrance. When the time comes, she will enter the tent with her groom, and have lunch with the mutual families. They feed each other, symbolizing the promise to support the other family, if necessary.

Once the feast is over, it is mandatory to sing two traditional songs before dancing: Awlo – a song in honor of the family members, whose names are specifically mentioned by the singer; and Masse, in honor of the women who prepared the traditional food for the wedding.

The ceremony is concluded with cake and champagne, and the bride and bridegroom will open the dance. A basket is passed amongst crowd to collect money as a contribution to the wedding. The newlyweds will then leave to the groom's house, where there is another ceremony being held by the groom's family. The bride will leave her house with her groom, accompanied by her maid of honor and bride's maids. However, her family do not attend the groom's wedding party, signifying their respect and blessing in "giving" their daughter. The family of the bride nonetheless will continue to feast and dance long into the night.

While the above description might be beautiful, it is a slightly concerning to see how much money is spent in our traditional wedding ceremonies. It is bewildering to see such extravagant ceremonies, and leaves one questioning where the money is coming from. In my humble opinion, I don't quite see the point in having such huge lavish weddings, which are often only done to impress the bride's family (or your own for that matter). You spent almost all that you have in two days of hectic celebrations, only to end up in potential financial problems at the

## For Better or Worse...In Sickness and In Health...For Poorer and Poorer! (Richer??)

Written by shabait Administrator  
Wednesday, 24 February 2016 01:29

---

beginning of your marriage.

Moreover, the relatives you had spent so lavishly on to make happy tend to forget about you soon afterwards. Sure they might talk about the lavish wedding they attended, but I am quite sure that it is not going to pay the electricity bill.

The other day, a friend (who shall remain nameless) who is getting married in the near future told me that his ideal wedding was to encompass everything within a single day, to get it over with as quickly as possible. He said that, not out of utter stinginess, but rather with care and love for his “better half” and to provide her with the most comfortable life he thought she deserved. He was adamant not to spend his life’s savings - as well as that of the family - to make his or the bride’s relatives happy. Consider that those relatives will only be seen by him and his wife once, or maybe twice, a year - when the married couple have their first child or the baby’s baptism.

But, upon discussing his idea with the bride’s family, to his utter despair, he found out that they were not all in agreement with a small and intimate family wedding. Instead, they preferred the large and ridiculously expensive one. His next response when telling me the story made me laugh a bit, although I also felt sorry for him, because he wasn’t sure if he was marrying the love of his life or her family. “Apparently, our marriage is with each other, but our wedding is with them,” he remarked.

The expenses range from renting a venue for the reception, cars (preferably a fleet of white Benz’s), tuxedos, wedding gowns, bride’s-maids dresses and suits for the best-men, a cake, and a band. Then, there are the formal clothes that close relatives have to buy, while the mother of the bride may feel it is necessary to buy her sisters (if she has any) the same outfit as hers, so that they can all match. These some – of the many factors – make Eritrean weddings so pricey.

Lastly, sure our weddings are romantic and totally different from other cultures, and the fact that they are really quite large also makes them a memorable family affair. But in terms of financial prudence, they are very expensive, to the point where both families, and at times even friends, have to invest tremendously, often beyond their capability. Weddings are supposed to be a celebration that sees the marrying of a couple, and a beginning to a happy and prosperous life together. I am quite sure that weddings are not all about showing how much money you can fork out.