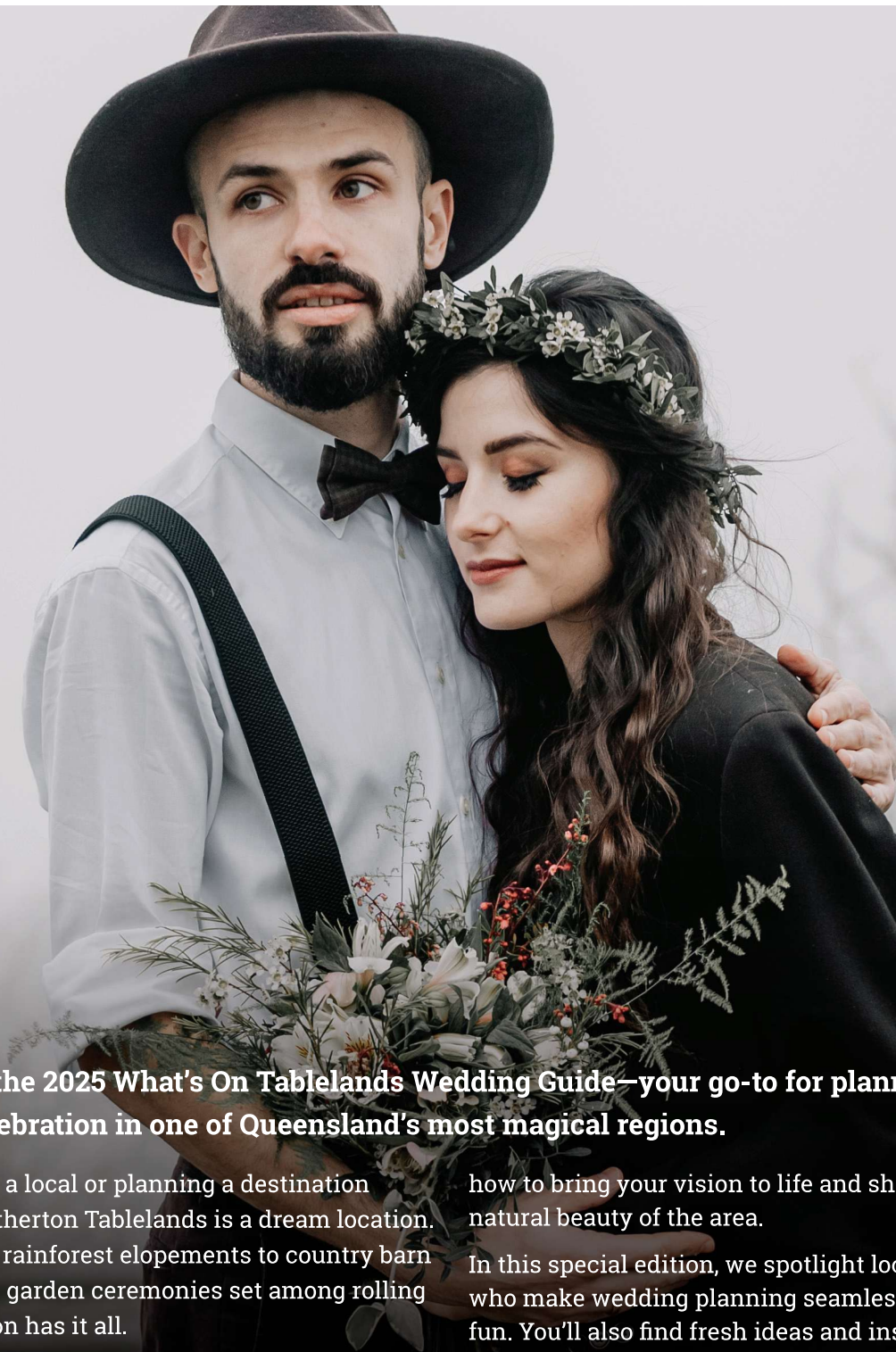


what's on

Tablelands 2025 Wedding Guide



Welcome to the 2025 What's On Tablelands Wedding Guide—your go-to for planning a beautiful celebration in one of Queensland's most magical regions.

Whether you're a local or planning a destination wedding, the Atherton Tablelands is a dream location. From romantic rainforest elopements to country barn receptions, and garden ceremonies set among rolling hills—this region has it all.

The Tablelands is home to a vibrant wedding community of talented photographers, florists, celebrants, venues, caterers and stylists who know

how to bring your vision to life and showcase the natural beauty of the area.

In this special edition, we spotlight local professionals who make wedding planning seamless, creative, and fun. You'll also find fresh ideas and inspiration to help your day go ahead with ease—rain or shine!

Let this guide be your first step toward a truly unforgettable celebration, happy planning!



Photography

Top tips for wedding day photography

1. Choose a photographer you connect with

Your photographer will be with you most of the day so feeling relaxed around them makes a huge difference. Many photographers have a real knack for helping people feel comfortable, which is especially helpful if you're a little awkward in front of the camera. Trust their experience and don't be afraid to experiment.

2. Light is everything... and location helps too!

Golden hour (just after sunrise or before sunset) creates magical images. Talk to your photographer about making the most of natural light and locations, this is one of the perks of choosing a local!

3. First look moments

First look photos are becoming more popular, giving couples a chance to share a quiet, emotional moment before the ceremony and calm a few nerves too.

4. Have an all-weather plan

Rain, wind, or full sun? It is the Tablelands! Discuss backup locations with your photographer in case the weather turns. (We talk more about wet-weather weddings in this guide!).

5. Relax and be present

The best photos happen when you're in the moment. Laugh, cry, dance! Photos capturing genuine emotions will always be the ones you love the most.





Blooms

Floral wedding trends on the Tablelands

If there's one thing the Tablelands is known for, it's the incredible variety of blooms that grow here with ease!

It's no surprise that you can access an abundance of fresh, seasonal flowers that not only look stunning but also support our local farmers.

Whether you're tapping into the artistry of a talented local florist or having a go at DIY arrangements, the Tablelands makes this a fun and exciting part of wedding planning. A popular trend is to opt for natural, garden-inspired arrangements with a cottage or whimsical feel. Try to keep bunches loose with trailing greenery, and pops of colour. Native florals are also a unique way to add texture and personality to bouquets

and arbours. Seasonal picks are key as not only are they more sustainable, but they also hold up better in our sub-tropical climate. Spring and summer bring snapdragons, roses, and zinnias, while cooler months offer stunning camellias and chrysanthemums.

An option you may not have considered: herbs! Rosemary, for example, is a timeless wedding herb that symbolises *remembrance* and *fidelity*, making it a special addition to a bouquet for those who have lost a loved one, and grows easily on the Tablelands!

Looking for inspiration? Visit a local flower farm, chat with a grower, or ask your florist what's in season. Choosing local blooms is a beautiful way to connect your wedding day to the Tablelands.



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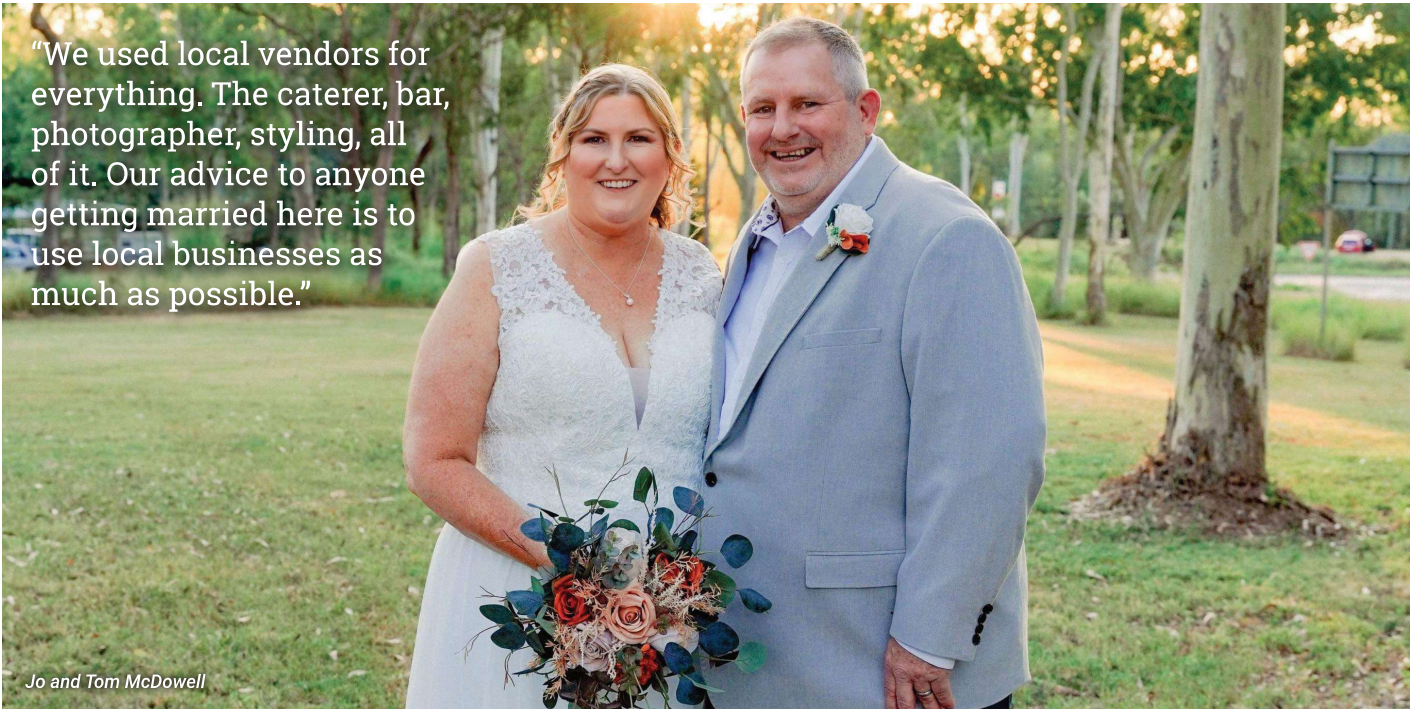
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Tales of the Tablelands

Mia Bain explores the love story of **Jo and Tom McDowell**

"We used local vendors for everything. The caterer, bar, photographer, styling, all of it. Our advice to anyone getting married here is to use local businesses as much as possible."



Jo and Tom McDowell

Locals Jo and Tom have spent the past 16 years building a beautiful life together on the Atherton Tablelands, and two years ago, they officially tied the knot in a celebration that perfectly reflected their love of community, nature, and each other.

Sitting with Jo and Tom, it's immediately clear how strong their bond is. Their warmth and comfort with each other is effortless. They are one of those couples whose connection is built on years of living fully, leaning into the highs and lows of life, and always finding joy in the everyday. The pair found their way to the Tablelands six years ago. Jo is originally from Ravenshoe, but both she and Tom grew up in Cairns. Between them, they've raised six kids and now have two grandchildren. They speak about their family with great affection, and while sharing their stories, you can tell that both have a lot of love for the blended family they share.

Surprisingly, their love story was not one of 'love at first sight'. In fact, Jo didn't like Tom at all when they first met. "Do you want to hear this story?" Jo laughed. "We were

both married, and I worked at a service station in Wonga Beach. The girls and I from work would have a shared morning tea once a fortnight and Tom invited himself along'. At the time, Tom made deliveries to the servo.

"I hated his jokes," Jo said. "When he arrived, I would say 'Tell him I am not here, I am stocking the fridge.'" Life eventually led them in different directions, but fate had other plans. Two years later, after both their marriages had ended, Jo was working at Mobil when a cigarette rep walked in. It was Tom, only this time, his jokes had improved.

Slowly, they enjoyed getting to know each other. It was back in the day when Facebook was only on your computer, and Jo found herself racing home to see if he was online. Since then, their connection has grown into a life full of shared passions. They both love footy, although there's a healthy rivalry between teams. They adore travel and camping, and have a long-standing love of the races. "We used to own racehorses and love attending the races across the region." Despite Tom working night shifts, the

couple say they have more time together than ever. "I come home from work to have lunch with Tom, we plan things most weekends and love to be spontaneous." They can go from sitting around at home, to dolled up in a taxi on the way to the races in a flash.

Their love for the Tablelands is as strong as their love for each other. "We love the lifestyle here," Jo explains. "The nature, the amazing markets, the food and local produce". But mostly it is the community and network of friends that they have quickly established. Their favourite way to spend a weekend is out camping with friends and family.

During our chat, they rattled off countless local spots they love - some well-known, others 'top secret'. "We were camping the other weekend, and I looked up and said, now this is 5-million star accommodation," Tom said, with a real sense of contentment on his face (although he did mention that they are partial to a cheeky 5-star holiday too!).

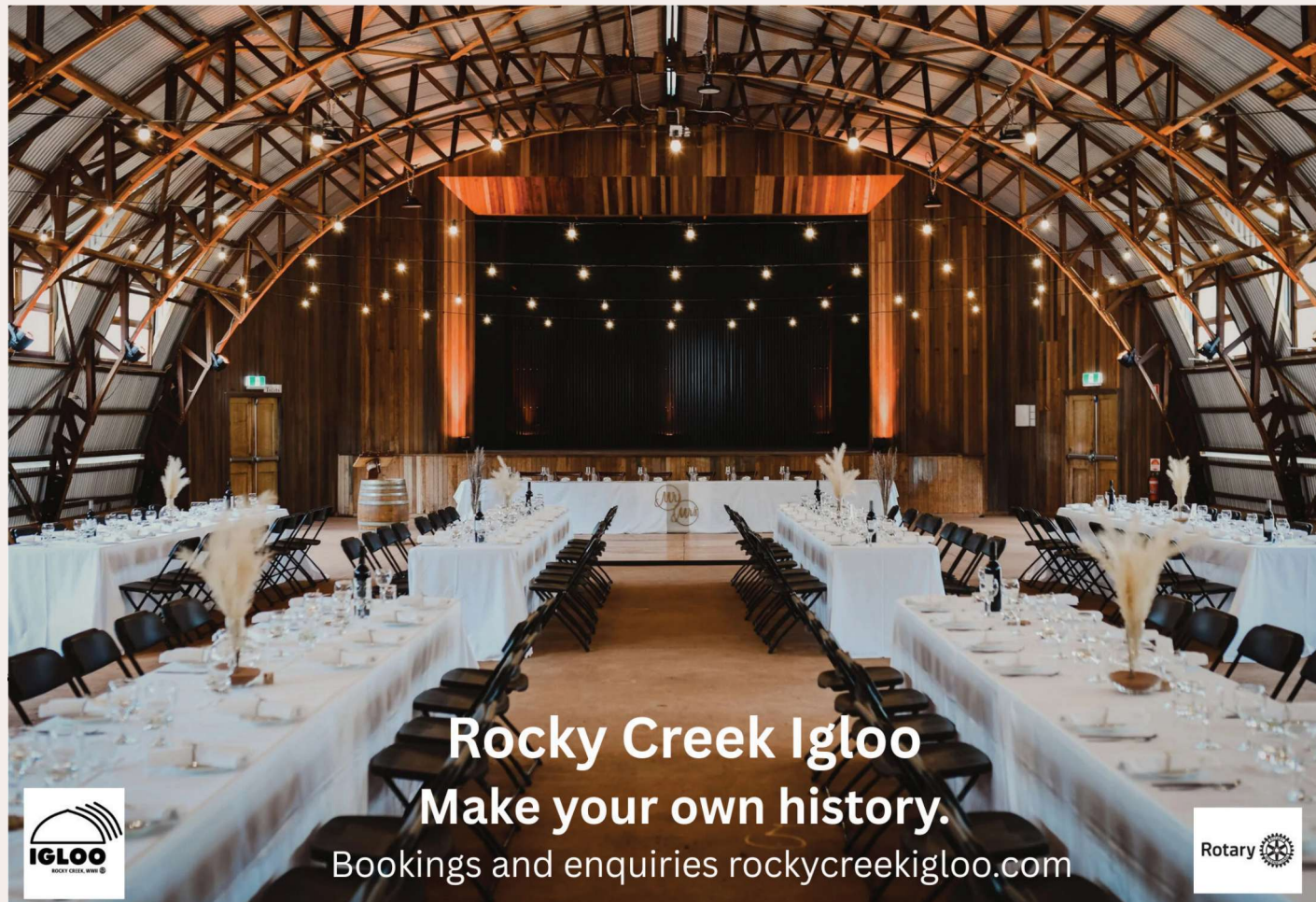
Whilst they were busy building their lives together, they gently made their way toward married life, free from pressure or expectation. And when it came time to get married, they knew exactly what they wanted. They chose the Igloo at Rocky Creek for its rustic, country charm. "We wanted a wedding inspired by the area", Jo said. The

"We wanted a wedding inspired by the area"...


photos from their day reflect that perfectly with botanicals and colours that captured the natural beauty of the Tablelands. And of course, Jo said supporting local was a huge part of the day. "We used local vendors for everything. The caterer, bar, photographer, styling, all of it. Our advice to anyone getting married here is to use local businesses as much as possible."

Looking ahead, Jo and Tom are excited for what's to come. They dream of one day, in the very distant future, having a cruiser bus to explore Australia together. For now though, they're making the most of every chance to travel, whether it's planned or spontaneous. "We're always up for an adventure." For a couple so full of love and life together, it had to be asked: what advice would they give to couples planning their wedding or starting married life? Jo shared, "Let each other be their own person, don't lose yourself, and you will complement each other." She added, "Tom is my best friend, my rock, and he makes me laugh. There is nobody I can rely on as much as him." Tom shared the exact same sentiment. "She is the love of my life."

If you know someone you think the Tablelands community would love to learn about, we welcome submissions. Email info@whatsontablelands.com.au with details.



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Trail Dates & Quiet Escapes

Dominique Bain shares some of the Tablelands' most charming walks

Whether you've lived here for years or are heading up the hill for a weekend escape, the Atherton Tablelands always seems to have one more track worth walking. With pleasant weather, peaceful tracks, and landscapes that shift from crater lakes to open savannah, this part of the world is tailor-made for slow, romantic wandering. Here are some local favourites for new flings, old flames, honeymooners, and those who are perfectly happy exploring on their own.

Lake Eacham is a familiar choice, but still one of the best. The loop around the lake is an easy 3km, mostly shaded, with glimpses of water through the trees, birds overhead, and local wildlife. It is utterly peaceful and perfect for slow meandering and long chats. There are plenty of lakeside spots to spread out a picnic rug, so pack a platter in an esky for afterwards — local cheese, crackers, and a sweet treat to finish. On a sunny summer day, it's very hard to resist a dip in the lake at the end (don't forget your swimmers!). Whether you spend an hour at the lake, or half a day, it's definitely the kind of outing you'll want to repeat.

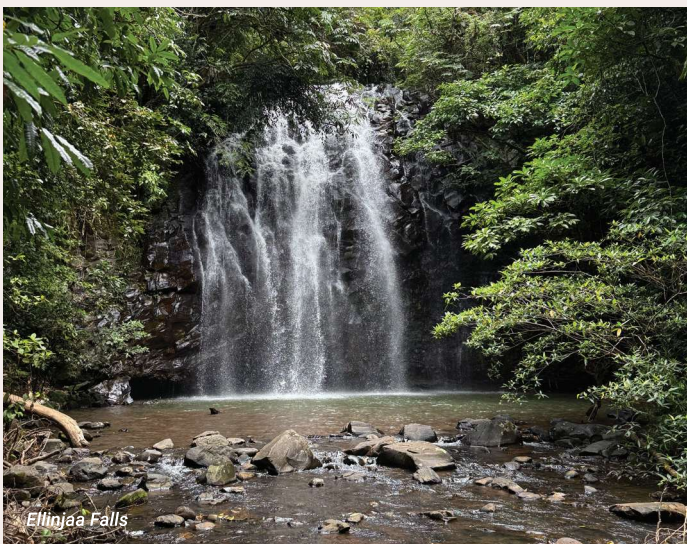
The **Curtain Fig** walk barely takes five minutes, but it earns its place. The scale of the tree is still impressive, even if you've seen it a dozen times, and the short loop

through the rainforest is quiet and tranquil. From there, it's a quick drive to Yungaburra. Stroll through the village, grab a coffee, browse the boutique stores, flip through the second-hand bookshop or op shop, and wander down to Peterson Creek to try your luck spotting a platypus.

Kauri Creek, near Tinaroo, is a classic rainforest walk. It's around 5km return, mostly shaded, with creek views and a good chance of spotting wildlife. It's quieter than most weekend spots and feels a bit off the radar. In the wet season, you'll want to keep an eye out for leeches. Not exactly romantic, but nothing says commitment like helping someone peel one off their ankle. After the walk, the creekside picnic area is a lovely place to sit and share a quiet lunch surrounded by forest. For something more open, Lake Tinaroo is just a short drive away and offers a calm, romantic spot by the water's edge.

Over in Mareeba, **Granite Gorge** makes things a bit more interesting. The walk involves scrambling over large granite boulders rather than following a formed track, and it's marked with painted arrows to guide the way. It's uneven underfoot and can be a bit of a workout, but that's what makes it loads of fun — especially if you're up for something more active. Rock wallabies are often spotted along the way, and you'll get good views across the surrounding bushland. It's not ideal for anyone with mobility issues, but if you don't mind climbing, it's a great way to mix things up!

On the other side of town, **Emerald Creek Falls** offers a slightly longer but more straightforward walk. The track follows a gentle incline past granite outcrops, opening up to wide valley views and dry eucalypt forest. It's exposed in parts, so it can get hot in summer, but the views—and the chance to cool off at the top — make it worth it. It's especially nice in the late afternoon, when the light softens and the crowds thin out. Bring swimmers if it's warm, something refreshing to drink, and stay long enough to watch the sun hit the rocks for a quiet, memorable finish to the day.





Nothing says romance like multiple cascading waterfalls surrounded by lush rainforest, so it would be remiss not to include the famous and scenic **17km Waterfall Circuit** near Millaa Millaa. With short, relaxing walks at each stop, it's easy to visit all three: Millaa Millaa, Zillie, and Ellinjaa. Each offers a stunning natural backdrop, and at Millaa Millaa and Ellinjaa, there are beautiful spots to swim and enjoy a romantic picnic together. If it's chilly, wrap up in a blanket and share a thermos of coffee with the sound of the falls in the background.

On the way home, stop by the incredibly scenic **Millaa Millaa Lookout** (also known as Gentle Annie Lookout) for panoramic views of the region below. The view is absolutely spectacular at any time of day, but sunset

"This part of the world is tailor-made for slow, romantic wandering."

makes it especially worth the detour.

These are just a handful of the trails around the Tablelands — there are plenty more worth exploring, whether you're after quiet rainforest tracks, breezy lookouts, or bush tracks. Wherever it is, it's a simple and inexpensive way to spend time together without the fuss.

Planning a photoshoot? If you're a couple planning engagement or wedding photos on one of these trails, it's worth checking in with local photographers — many know the best times for light, weather, and crowd-free shots. And if you're including these spots in guest welcome bags or your wedding website, consider dropping a pin or printing a tiny trail map for visitors looking to explore.



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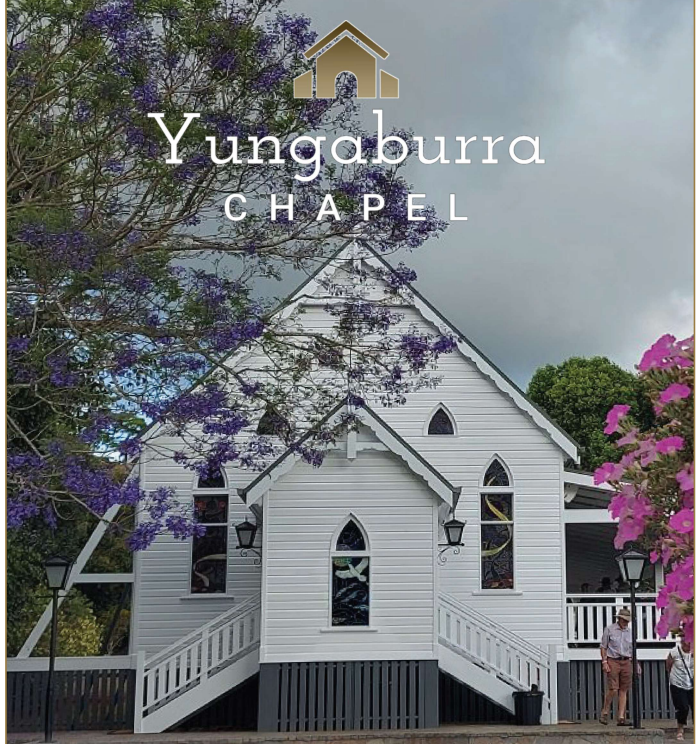
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Wet Weather Weddings

So it's raining on your wedding day... now what?!

Here on the Tablelands, we're no strangers to a sudden downpour. Even in the middle of the dry season, a sunny morning can flip to a stormy afternoon without much warning. It's part of what makes this region so lush and beautiful, but let's be honest, it's not ideal if you've planned an outdoor wedding.

The good news? A bit of rain doesn't have to ruin your day if you've thought ahead.

Line up a solid Plan B. Don't just "play it by ear." Whether it's a nearby hall, a big verandah, or a marquee with walls, make sure there's a backup space ready to go.

Pack the extras. Clear umbrellas, seat covers or towels, a few warm wraps or shawls for guests, and a basket of towels near the entrance all go a long way. Bonus

points for gumboots or even matching raincoats for the bridal party.

Talk to your vendors. Celebrants, musicians, photographers - they've seen it all and will often have suggestions for quick changes that still look good.

Let guests know. If there's a venue change or delay, have someone on standby to update everyone. A simple group text or social post works.

And finally - lean into it! Some of the most beautiful Tablelands weddings have happened under misty skies, with guests sipping drinks under cover and the newlyweds dancing barefoot on wet grass.

It might not be the weather you pictured, but it can still be magical.

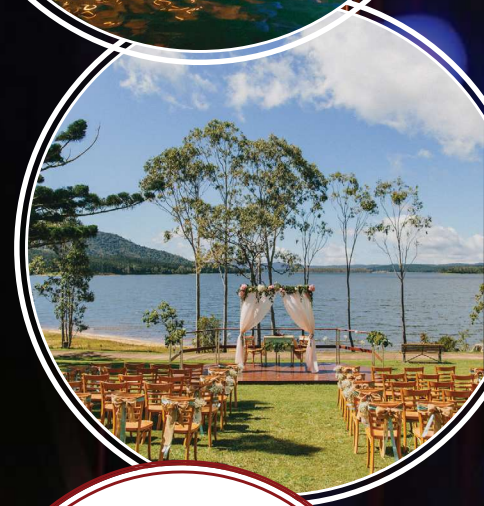


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Little Kids – Big Fun!

Keeping kids entertained at weddings

Weddings are full of big and often serious moments: vows, ring exchanges, speeches, and first dances. But if you've ever attended one with kids, you'll know their priorities are just a little bit different. They're not thinking about entrée choices or complimenting the beautiful floral arrangements. They're wondering how long until the cake comes out, whether they're allowed to touch the microphone, and if anyone will notice if they crawl under the bridal table.

Entertaining kids at weddings doesn't mean putting on a full production. It's simply about creating space for them to be part of the day in a way that feels natural and manageable. A few small touches can make a big difference for them and for everyone else.

Start with the ceremony. If it's outdoors, there's often a little more space for kids to move and for sounds to fade naturally. A few picnic blankets or a basket with soft toys and books near the back can help parents feel more at ease, especially if they're managing restless toddlers. For indoor ceremonies, even a small side area with colouring pages, fidget toys, or some quiet snacks can make a big difference without drawing attention away from the moment.

When it comes to receptions, the golden rule is this: *don't expect kids to sit still for long stretches.*



Activity tables are simple to set up and can include things like pencils, sticker books, or even Lego. Older kids love being given a job. Handing out confetti, collecting guestbook notes, or helping direct people to their seats gives them a sense of purpose and makes them feel included rather than sidelined. If the venue allows it, an open lawn or garden space is your best friend. Quoits, giant Jenga, or even a bubble station—perfect for kids, and strangely irresistible to many adults as well. For night weddings, glow sticks and torches can turn waiting around into a bit of an adventure. And when the music starts, that's often the highlight. Kids often throw themselves into dancing at weddings, and it's hard not to smile watching them!

Some couples choose to hire a babysitter or children's entertainer for part of the night. That might sound like an extra expense, but it frees up parents to enjoy the reception without constantly wondering where their toddler has wandered off to. Even having a teen cousin or family friend keep an eye on things for a few hours can help.

Of course, not every wedding needs a dedicated kids' program. Still, if there are little guests on the list, giving them something to do or a small role in the day can make everything run more smoothly. It helps parents relax, gives kids something to enjoy, and keeps the focus on what matters.

And if all else fails? Pack snacks. More than you think you might need. Never underestimate the power of snacks! They're peace offerings, time fillers, and conversation starters. Snacks solve almost every problem.

Still, what really stays with kids isn't the crackers or the colouring table. It's the feeling of being included. They might not remember the dress or the speeches. But they will remember feeling part of something special! Years from now, those small moments like bopping on the dance floor or the serious responsibility of throwing petals will be part of the story too.

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