



I went to a group pop-up wedding where couples showed up at a surprise venue with no planning

April 6, 2016



PopBliss couples on their way to their pop-up wedding, from left to right: Rebecca Taylor, Camille Smith, Sean Barrett, and Nikki Osei.

"We're going downtown, y'all!" says Nikki Osei, one of the six brides-to-be aboard a bus traveling down Manhattan's Sixth Avenue. "Are we going to Hudson Yards? Soho?"

When the double-decker reaches Houston Street, it turns right. "The High Line?! Are we getting married on the High Line?"

The bus drives farther west until it arrives at the secret wedding venue. The six couples didn't plan the celebration — they only brought their suits, wedding dresses, and rings.

The rest was up to the [PopBliss](#) team, a pop-up wedding service that organizes group ceremonies. The company threw its first pop-up wedding in New York City on March 31; the next wedding will be in Atlanta in 2017.

"The element of surprise is often missing in traditional weddings, and the preparations are often intended to wow guests, not the couples. We want to wow everyone," Racquel Kristi, PopBliss' founder, tells Tech Insider.

Pop-up weddings promise to cut down on the excessive planning and cost of a typical wedding, which costs between [\\$19,800 and \\$33,100](#) for the average American couple.

PopBliss' two-day celebration was \$5,000 for an all-inclusive package featuring invitations, hotel accommodations, make-up and hair stylists, bus transportation, a decorated venue, an officiant, photographers, tickets for 14 guests, catering, an open bar, a mini-cake, live singers, a DJ, a brunch before the wedding, and a party the evening before.

I tagged along for the first PopBliss wedding. Here's what ensued.

The six couples were chosen out of about 130 applicants. Kristi, who is a wedding planner by trade, said she looked for "cool, modern, courageous couples." The couples meet at the Trump Soho Hotel for a welcome party the evening before the wedding.

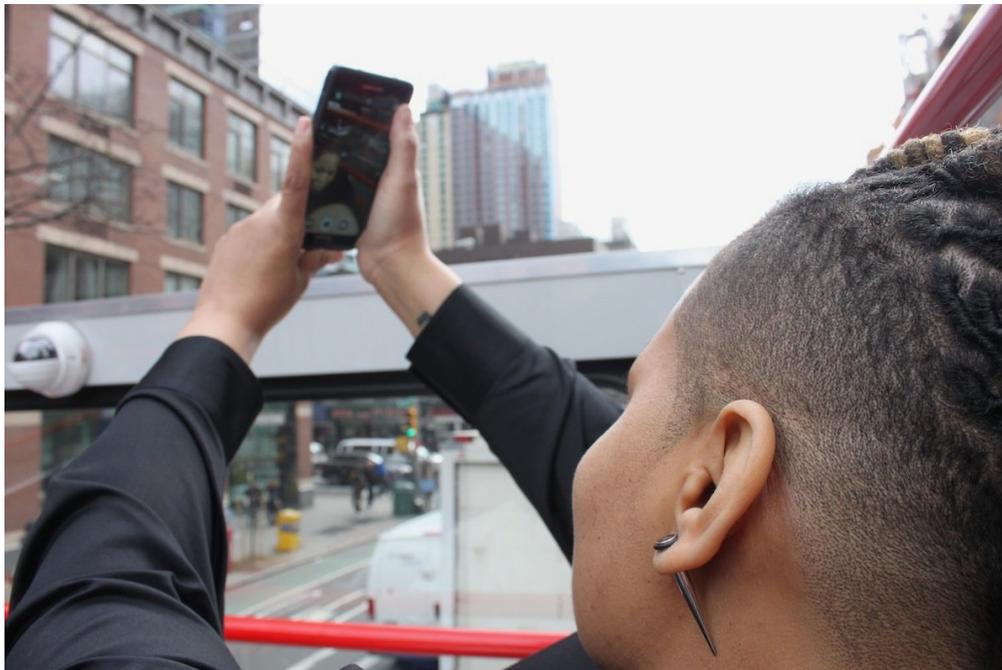


Johnny Díaz and Valerie Vazquez, one of the PopBliss couples.

On the big day, the grooms and brides board double-decker tour buses. First, the couples ride to an undisclosed hotel for their "first looks."



Rebecca Taylor, who will renew her vows with Camille Smith, snaps a selfie.

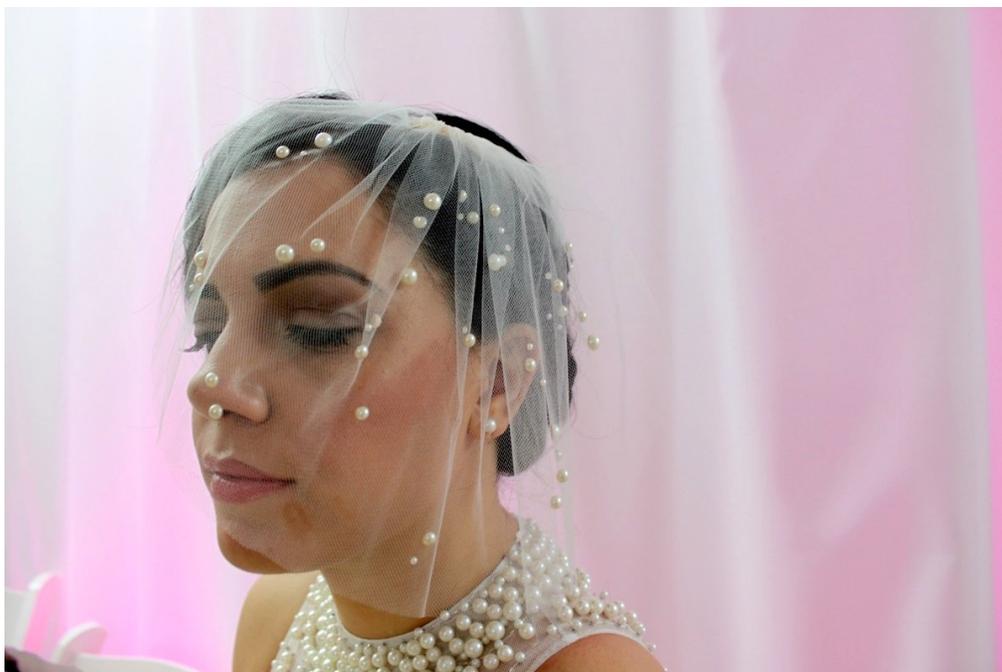


At the hotel, the brides wait upstairs to surprise the grooms.



Nikki Osei.

Bobby Diaz and his fiancé, Valerie Vazquez, applied for PopBliss because it eliminated the fuss of planning. The \$5K price also seemed like a bargain.



Valerie Vazquez.

"It will be a Pinterest-worthy wedding," Kristi says.



Nikki Osei.

For the first looks, each bride walks up behind their partner and taps him or her on the shoulder. Jon Yarger sheds the first tear of the day when he sees his fiancé, Valerie Nome.



Taylor and Smith, who wed at Baltimore's City Hall nine years ago, embrace. When they married, only two of their friends were able to come. Today is special, because all three of their children will be there.



Next, the couples board the bus that will take them to the secret wedding location at the Hudson River pier on Manhattan's west side. The couples carry a change of clothes, their vows, and the rings.



A PopBliss employee, Camille Smith, and Rebecca Taylor.

Cheala Hall, the bride of Aaron Smith, brings a framed photo of her father, who died the year before. Her youngest daughter will carry it as she walks her mom down the aisle.



Nome, one of the brides, peeks out to look at the aisle, a rose petal-covered rug.



The bus reaches the venue for their special day: the Hornblower Infinity yacht.



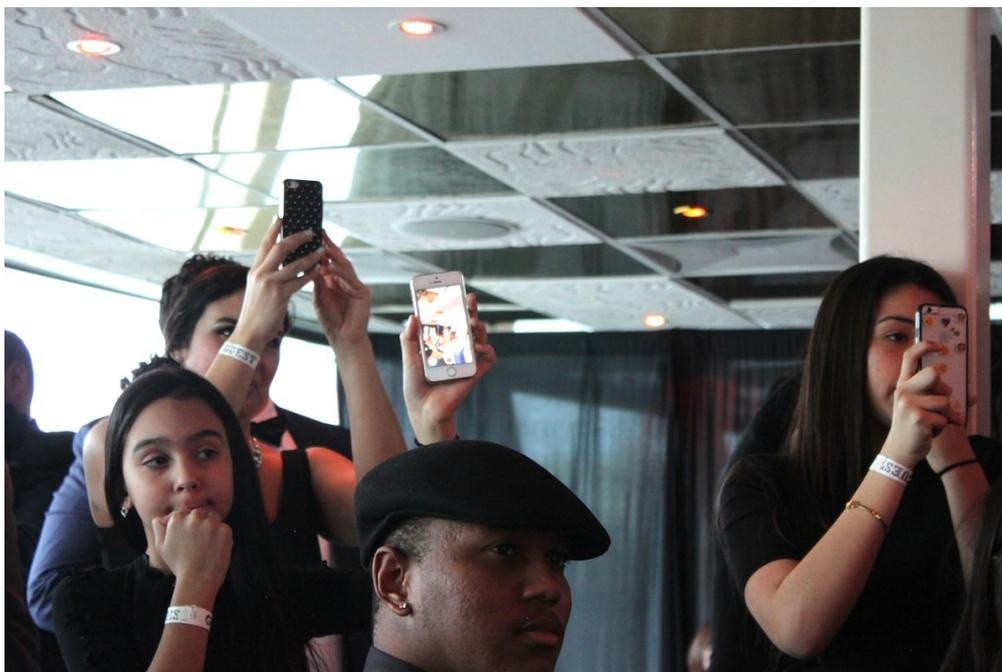
The MC for the night is 107.5 WBLS host, "Eddie Love," who sports a suit and a rat-tail.



The entire celebration is live streamed for family and friends who can't attend.



Many of the guests also hold up their phones to Snapchat and FaceTime the wedding.



One by one, the couples walk down the aisle to meet at the stage. Díaz and Vazquez marry first, with Reverend Mary Rose as their efficient.



"I promise to be your pillow when we watch movies, even if my arm gets that tingly feeling," Díaz says in his vow.

In 2011, he and Vazquez re-kindled their high school romance after her mother ran into him on the subway. Then, in their early 30s, they started dating more seriously.

Vazquez's mother's first impression of PopBliss: "I told [Valerie], 'I love it.' I'm a New Yorker, so it felt very 'Sex and the City' to me."

Tiffany Williams and Dwayne Salandy marry next, with a club mix of "Here Comes the Bride" bumping as they walk down the aisle.



The couple met and found out about PopBliss on the internet. They had their first date after Salandy messaged Williams on Match.com, and when they got engaged six years later, she discovered the pop-up wedding service in a Facebook ad.

"I think the algorithm knew I was interested in a wedding," she says.

After all of the couples have their turn, they stand in a circle and share newlywed kisses simultaneously.



Guests swarm in to get selfies. Hall and her family smile for a photo, the phone's Kim Kardashian case glimmering in the background.



Right after the ceremony, the team starts to fold up the chairs and lay out the tables for the reception. It's a bit of a frenzy, since the families can't exit the boat.



The hors d'oeuvres run out about 15 minutes later, and clumps of guests migrate to the open bar. By this point, it's about 7 p.m.

Two bubbly and no dinner later, I am certainly feeling the rock of the yacht, which then leaves the dock. I speak with a few guests, who, like the couples, haven't eaten since brunch at 11 a.m.

"They only served us juice all day," one guest says. "How can you serve a grown man just juice?"

About an hour and a half later, we sit down for dinner.



On the upper level, the workers serve donuts, chocolate-dipped strawberries, and caramel apples.



Next it's time for the first dances...



...and the cutting of the cakes.



The guests join the couples on the dance floor, and two singers kick the party off with a cover of "Uptown Funk." For the next two hours, everyone dances to hits spun by DJ Kevin G. "Cha Cha Slide" is the final song.



The wedding ends with one last reveal from PopBliss: it will fly each couple to surprise locations for their honeymoons.



"It pushes tradition so far," Williams tells me. "Because everything is a surprise, it feels like an adventure before we start our lives together."

PopBliss is nothing like a traditional wedding, but that's kind of the point. In the era of do-it-all services like Seamless and TaskRabbit, the appeal of pop-up weddings is obvious.



Stressing out over color palettes, seating charts, and catering is a hassle. It's a lot easier to pay an affordable service to do these things for you.

These couples relinquished control (and a private moment), but they also escaped the anxiety of wedding planning.

For Williams, in some ways, it felt like just another party. "I'm excited, but life is going to go on," she said before the wedding. "We got to go back to work on Monday."



Newlyweds Tiffany Williams and Dwayne Salandy.