



Matrimonial *Mania*

Venues, menus, invitations, transport, the cake, entertainment: planning your big day is a heavyweight task. But fear not! Hong Kong's hands-on army of wedding planners will help you carry the load

After you say "I do!"

So you've said "yes", calmed down after the initial 48 hours of excitement and found yourself cutting out wedding gowns from magazines. What next?

Take a long, hard look at your schedule, advises Karen Wang, founder of Tiara, a Hong Kong-based party planner and event management company.

"In a city like Hong Kong, everyone is busy. If you can't afford the time, don't get married. It's meaningless if only one party comes to plan the ceremony," she says. "Weddings requires a lot of effort and attention. It requires an entire team, and both of you to be fully present."

Although a foreign concept to many families, some of the city's busiest and wisest couples are taking her advice and enlisting the services of a professional planner.

"Just as you may employ an experienced interior designer to design a beautiful living space, a seasoned planner brings with them a creative vision and foresight that will streamline the process and take your wedding

inspirations a step further," says Michele Li, founder of The Wedding Company.

Li insists that any wedding with more than 100 people on its guest list would benefit greatly from the planning and organisation of a professional. There are just too many minor details that need to be taken care of, she says. "Things that the bridal party doesn't want to be burdened with."

You will also need to choose your so-called circle of trust, be it your mum, husband-to-be, sister, bridesmaid (or schnauzer?).

"Sometimes, 'the more' is really not 'the merrier,'" says Effie Mak of Plus One Weddings. "Try not to get lost in the sea of advice you will be bombarded with. And bring only one or two people you really trust when you have to make the important decisions."

Right place, right time

When shopping for your dream venue, there are three simple rules: 1. Start early; 2. Start early; 3. Start early

"The top venues can be booked up to two years in advance, especially for auspicious



OPPOSITE PAGE
Entrance table by Plus One Weddings;

THIS PAGE TOP LEFT
AND MIDDLE wedding ceremonies coordinated by Plus One Weddings;

TOP RIGHT AND
BELOW event planned by Marriage Maestros



TOP LEFT TO RIGHT

Wedding cake in an event by Marriage Maestros; Chinese wedding coordinated by The Wedding Company, photo taken by Dennis Mok

INSET

Stage in a wedding by Marriage Maestros

wedding dates,” warns Li.

But before you start Google-ing venues, you will need to consider the following:

- How many people will you be inviting?
- Do you want a civil or religious ceremony?
- What style of reception do you have in mind: banquet, cocktails, or sit-down dinner with dance floor?
- What traditions, such as tea ceremonies, do you wish to observe?

Then, start brainstorming the minor details like budget range and colours to hone in on a theme.

“Work from the small things out,” says Evelyn Mills, founder of Marriage Maestros. “Since venues are bound by many limitations, start with the technical details first. Can your chosen venue accommodate all your requests?”

For bigger families, two-day ceremonies are common. The first day often consists of a ceremony and lunch, followed by a banquet on the second evening. Though more expensive, a spread-out programme makes for a more laid-back and relaxed, happy couple. It also allows more people to share in the occasion.

And for the couple who still don’t know what they want, Mills suggests booking a more spacious and versatile venue.

“Try to visualise your theme in the space because certain places can give off an ambience that is expensive to alter.”



Kate Chau, owner of Katemagg Event & Wedding, on the other hand, takes a wilder approach to finding the perfect venue.

“Forget the restrictions of reality, and dream with your other half. Find a quiet place and spend some time to visualise what you want to see in a wedding: colours, people, animals, plants, anything. They can be things that mean something to you, or they can just be things that make you happy.”

You’re Cordially Invited...

Most planners will tell you that every step is crucial on the wedding schedule, but they all agree that setting a date and sending out invitations are the first things to cross off your to-do list. “The latest you should go to a designer and printer is three months before the mail-out date,” says Sandy Chan of Limetea Design Studio.

Chan says that unlike the simple card and envelope our grandparents would have sent, today’s brides and grooms are getting wildly creative, calling for loose-card content, pop-ups, laser cuts, fabric, hard covers, box invites, and even book binding.

Environmentally aware couples are also demanding greener solutions, such as eco-friendly paper, which can now achieve the same effects as more industrial varieties. So your invitations can still sparkle and shine without messing with Mother Nature.

Talk to the Parents

A wedding is much more than just a celebration for two people: it’s a coming together of two families. So keep an open dialogue with your parents; ask their approval on sensitive things such as colour and traditions.

“Communication is key, especially with larger ballroom-type weddings,” says Li. “We strongly suggest consulting with the parents if the bride has her heart set on a white

wedding, for example.”

Tastes and opinion aside, budget is also a major factor for most families.

“Start talking to them from the beginning of the planning process,” says Mak. “Don’t take ‘whatever you like’ as an answer because they will slowly accumulate opinions and input from relatives and friends, and, chances are, they will have something to say by the end.”

Mills, on the other hand, has a more practical approach to this sometimes sensitive issue: they ask who’s footing the bill and who’s doing the hosting.

“Sometimes it’s two very different families with very different expectations, customs and dynamics. So, of course, opinions can vary widely,” she says. “We usually sit down to deal with the issues, and sometimes, we will look at who’s paying and who’s the host. But generally, both parties should be comfortable with the decisions.”

Breathe Easy

There are clearly myriad ways to stage the perfect wedding, but most of all it should be a relatively stress-free and joyous experience.

“Enjoy the process or you’ll miss the point of having a wedding in the first place,” says Wang. “When you look back, it should be a part of your journey together. And hopefully one that you can laugh about. Yes, a wedding is essentially a show, but it’s a show about you. So, enjoy it.”

TOP LEFT TO RIGHT

Wedding reception coordinated by Tiara; reception designed by Marriage Maestros; banquet by The Wedding Company, photo taken by Dennis Mok



A *Foreign* Affair

Imagine the train of your dress unfurling on a balmy Polynesian breeze, or the warm Bali sand between your toes as you recite your vows. Destination weddings are all the rage

all photos provided by Marriage Maestros and Bliss Creations

Since Air Pacific launched its first direct flight between Fiji and Hong Kong last December, brides and grooms have had another destination to add to the list of wedding wonderlands to explore. It's a growing trend and one that's no longer strictly the domain of wealthy expatriates. Increasingly, Hong Kong-based couples, especially those that are avid travellers, or have met and lived overseas, are taking their nuptials offshore.

But while marrying abroad may sound exotic and glamorous, they are impossible to plan without a strong

backroom crew, because if planning a one-night banquet in your own city is stressful enough, imagine organising a trip for all your guests in a country where everything – language, customs, martial traditions – is radically different.

“Aside from jetlag, time zones and language barriers, one of the biggest issues with planning overseas weddings is communication,” says Effie Mak, owner of Plus One Weddings. “You must have everything written in black and white and send photos for reference because what you have in mind may be very different





from their interpretation.”

It might sound obvious, but Mak reminds her clients to pay a few visits to the proposed venues instead of just relying on photos. More importantly, couples must be patient with the country’s pace and limitations, such as the type of flowers that are in season.

“Basically, we have to tell clients to slow down. Sometimes it takes a little longer to organise things than it would in Hong Kong,” says Evelyn Mills, founder of Marriage Maestros, which specialises in staging local and Balinese celebrations.

The calibre of overseas venues and vendors has improved significantly of late, says Mills. That’s understandable given the growing popularity of destination weddings and the amount of money foreigners are pumping into their businesses. Many are on a par with what you would find in Hong Kong.

Unlike Hong Kong, however, booking in advance may not always be a good idea because the market of new vendors and service providers shifts rapidly, explains Sonya Yeung, founder of Bliss Creations. “So yes, you can lock in what you want. But three months down the road, a new vendor will start operating, and you might like them more.”

Usually, couples do the legal side of proceedings in their home country and merely conduct a ceremony overseas. This has its benefits: since no legal body or

official celebrant is required for this ceremony, couples can hire actors, or even invite friends to wed them – allowing more freedom to tailor-make the experience.

An average destination wedding is usually a three-day trip, five for the couple, that begins with a meet-and-greet barbecue on the first day, then a free day and a rehearsal dinner on the second, followed by a cocktail and banquet on the third day and a farewell lunch on the last.

Your money will go a lot further in most South Asian destinations. On average, Mills says, 20 tables in Hong Kong are equivalent to hosting 80 to 100 guests over three days.

A final word of warning: be careful when choosing the date as bad weather can scupper the best laid plans. Indonesia, for example, is best enjoyed in the summer months, whereas Thailand mirrors Hong Kong. Cambodian weather, on the other hand, is the most wedding-friendly after October, while Fiji is perfect all year round.

Despite all the paperwork, phone calls and organisation, a destination wedding is worth every bit of your hard work. And the secret to a successful offshore celebration? Start early, says Yeung. She recommends that couples visit a destination wedding planner six to nine months before the big day. 