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## Celebrations 2005

### So, You're Planning Your Big Simcha... Piece Of Cake If You Know What To Ask!

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When entertaining the idea of a simcha, there are so many decisions to make about the three largest components of a party: location, entertainment and the caterer. Where to go, what to serve. An experienced event planning service like Mitzvah Event Productions may be able to assist you with venue/entertainment selection and contract negotiation, but on your own, there are many questions to ask.

#### Location, Location, Location

When choosing a venue for your Jewish affair, there are several considerations. Is the shul close by? Is the airport too far? Do my guests need to schlep to slobutki for Shabbat dinner? For an afternoon bar/bat mitzvah, choose someplace neutral to your synagogue and arrange bus transportation for the kids coming to the bar/bat mitzvah without their parents. A great touch is to plan your Sunday brunch at the hotel where your guests will be staying, so they can enjoy a convenient last meal with the immediate family before taking off.

Does the venue have in-house catering? Or may I hire my own caterer? Most hotels do not allow you to bring in much more than candy, favors and sometimes wine.

Is there an on-site coordinator? When Grandpa Morrie gets called up for the Motzi, who will make sure he hasn't gone to the restroom? Will a representative be responsible for coordinating and troubleshooting any issues that arise during the event.

What are the cancellation policies? It is important to read and understand every contract before signing on the dotted line. Consider the weather if you are planning an outside party. Will the venue provide tenting? If not, what if it rains? Are there alternative spaces to use on the property? Some may believe it to be good luck if it rains on your wedding day, but the worst way to start the ceremony is with chairs sinking into the wet grass.

Are rentals included? Most venues offer basic round and long tables, chairs and a few basic color selections of linens. If you require specialty linens and chairs or chair covers, your event planner can provide you with a vast array of colors and fabrics from which to choose. Linens can definitely make your table spectacular. There is an elegance to the beautiful texture and sparkle that linens can bring to a table. And for goodness sake, the tablecloth must go to the floor.

Does the venue serve kosher? Do they have a mashgiach on staff or is that an extra expense? Do they provide kosher dishes and flatware? If you are planning a simple luncheon the day of the bar mitzvah and the evening affair is to follow soon after, disposables make for an easy cleanup and save money on the kosher rentals for a shul.

Does the venue have an exclusive contract with a bakery? Most venues will charge a cake cutting fee if you do not use their in-house bakery. Remember, most everything is negotiable...from cake cutting fees, to

cocking and parking. Don't be afraid to ask.

If guests stay at a hotel property, are there any special rates? Many hotels will assist with your destination management and will also reserve a block of rooms at a reduced rate for your out-of-town guests. Choosing an additional property close by affords your guests a choice of room rates and amenities. Don't forget to prepare a nosh bag for every room with goodies, a welcome note and an information sheet about events and directions for the weekend. The hotel may offer you

different flavors so everyone finds something sweet they can enjoy.

Does the caterer have a liquor license and can they provide a bartender? If not, there are professional self-contained bar companies that can completely service your party from lemons to liquors. For a small fee per head, you can raise the "bar" at your party with a fantastic worry free service.

How does the caterer determine quantity for a buffet? Will your guests have enough to choose from? A good rule of thumb for a passed cocktail hour is each guest will eat three to five hours

When planning a bar/bat mitzvah, don't expect the D.J. to entertain 100 kids for the full four hours. Your event planner can make suggestions for qualified vendors and alternative activities, but remember your audience. Cocktail hour is a great place to start with a magician or temporary tattoos. There are vast arrays of interactive entertainment to keep the kids "busy" and away from making trouble in the hotel or synagogue. When you have that many kids away from their parents, no matter how "good" they are, the kids have a tendency to get creative unless they are entertained. These types of entertainment are crafts, games, hand sculpting, jewelry making, food novelties and more. Yes, the D.J. will provide games and giveaways, but not everyone at 13 likes to dance. When selecting entertainment that provides a favor such as airbrush T-shirts, find out how many they can create per hour and compare that to your number of guests. Will everyone have an opportunity to participate?

When selecting a D.J., inquire about dancers or "party pumpers." These young adults are outstanding at helping the kids learn the trendy dances and motivating them to participate. Does the D.J. provide a

lighting package? Think about going to a disco with no moving lights — pretty boring. Take advantage of the "intelligent lights" that move to the beat of the music and help your guests feel less inhibited to boogie!

Will the D.J. or band provide props and prizes? Everyone loves a maraca, and it just wouldn't be a party if the guests didn't get something that lights up like rope necklaces that glow until dawn. Party props are crucial to keep up the fun, so if the performers do not provide them, find a source to buy them.

It's very important to use reputable entertainers with the experience needed to entertain your age group. Don't be afraid to call their references to ask about the quality of their work and their timeliness. The performers should include in their contract what time they plan to arrive, tables and equipment needed, and power requirements. Also plan to provide drinks or a meal if they are working more than an hour.

Many questions can arise when planning a party. So if you're planning a simcha, big or small, it can be a piece of cake when you know the answers!

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free lodging the night of the party. If you would prefer to go home, ask for a gift certificate to use at another time.

When is the most appropriate time to book a venue? You've had 13 years to plan the bar mitzvah. Don't wait until six weeks before to find a hall. The bat mitzvah date is on the calendar 13 years prior with the temple, but most hotels won't accept a deposit until 12 months prior to an event. The best news is that if you can't book the room, neither can the Silverman or Abramovitz families. Keep track of your calendar and submit your contract and a deposit the day the hotel will accept it. Most venues will "pencil you in" but they reserve the right to call you if a convention trumps you out of your salon of choice.

What time is the room available? Find out if there is another party before yours and how long it takes the staff to "turn the room." If elaborate decor and lighting are planned, a few extra hours might cost a few extra dollars.

#### We're Here; Where's The Food?

When choosing a caterer, many of the same questions come up and much more.

Does the caterer provide a tasting to review the menu? We all taste the cake before a wedding, but what about the food? If your caterer provides this service, take advantage of it and try a selection of what you are considering serving. You may like the potato from one plate and the vegetable from another. Ask the chef to make changes to your specifications. Presentation is also a big consideration. Is the plate "pretty?" Your vegetables should be colorful as well as tender. If you can't make a decision for dessert, try a trio of

d'oeuvres per person per hour.

Will the caterer provide a challah? There was once an unfortunate experience with a caterer who provided the five foot challah, but refused to slice and serve it to 400 guests. It may sound silly, but if he provides it, will he serve it? Remember that by the time the guests get their taste, it's usually 20 minutes past the blessing. A great way to avoid this is to place a small challah for every table and a larger one on the dance floor for ceremonial purposes. Using a knife to cut challah is a symbol of war, so traditionally the challah is broken apart by hand. After the meal your guests will pull the challah and pass it around the table. Watch the 13 year olds attack the loaf at bar/bat mitzvah's!

Another recommendation is to visit another event the caterer is servicing. Ask permission to stop by and remember to dress appropriately so you blend with the guests. Are the displays visually stimulating and the buffets functional? Is the wait staff polite and presentable? If the guests are in tuxedo and gowns, the wait staff must be in the appropriate costume as well.

#### Setting It All To Music

Selecting entertainment is a lot of fun, but it must be functional too. Weddings work well with a band, but a DJ is preferred for b'nai mitzvot. Your choice of entertainment may reflect the theme or concept of the party. For example, if you are having a tropical theme, live birds to interact with the guests would be a great choice and a fun photo opportunity.

Will the entertainment be used to set the tone of the party? A pair of vocalists belting show tunes during cocktail hour is a great way to begin a Broadway theme.