

BEHIND THE SCENES: **DREAM WEDDING**

SO THE BIG QUESTION'S BEEN POPPED AND THE RING'S ON THE FINGER, BUT THE WEDDING JOURNEY IS ONLY JUST BEGINNING. WE TURN TO EXPERIENCED WEDDING PLANNERS AND EXPAT COUPLES WHO'VE HAD THEIR WALK DOWN THE AISLE FOR SOME PLANNING ADVICE.

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Now that the Instagram pictures of the engagement ring have been shared, the congratulations and 'likes' have piled up, both your Facebook relationship statuses now read 'engaged' and the post-proposal glow is just beginning to fade, it's time to get your head out of the clouds and get down to work. Weddings don't plan themselves, you know – unless you have a fairy godmother on hand!

With everything from the date and venue down to the flowers and cakes waiting for you on your mile-long to-do list, organising your wedding day is an epic juggling act that's enough to give anyone pause. Never fear, however; we did some of the legwork for you and sought out the advice of couples and wedding planners who have seen and done it all to give you a head start on arranging your marriage.

LAWFULLY WEDDED

First things first: find out how to go about getting legally married or the whole thing is moot. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs, the standard procedure if one or both parties are foreign nationals involves a submission (in person) of the relevant application to a National Registration Department counter, which is usually in Putrajaya. Forms, documents and time requirements may vary according to your nationality, so make sure to get that clarified quickly.

"We had to visit the registration office in Putrajaya, then needed a letter from the British High Commission before we could submit the forms – and then we were told we had to get it officially translated as the forms were in Malay before Chris could sign it! So we had to walk around and find the legal office to do this for us as well," says Anusha Segaren, who married her English beau here in 2012.

Of course, it's extremely handy to have an experienced local guide you through the procedure if possible, as Marjan Sipsma did: "It was near impossible to get the right person on the phone and we were directed from Putrajaya to PJ to Shah Alam for weeks without answers. So when I was recommended Adam Malik from Langkawi, who would arrange everything for us within Malaysia, I was very happy!"

"Adam advised what paperwork we needed to organise from our countries such as birth certificates and proof we were not already married, which we did online and had the originals sent. He arranged everything in Putrajaya and Langkawi, including doing the registration at the resort on our wedding day and being the celebrant, which saved a lot of time," says the Dutch national.

An alternative might be to get your marriage license in your birth country, which is what Australian Damien Mark did in his wife Elizabeth's hometown of Singapore. "Going to Putrajaya seemed very impersonal – they decide the date and time, plus it's done in a nondescript room. So we decided to get legally married in Singapore and we had a smaller event there at the place we met," he says.

DON'T BREAK THE BANK

This might seem like a no-brainer, but it's very important to set a budget so that you don't get carried away by the excitement and end up overspending. Even though it's meant to be 'the best day of your life', one perfect day is simply not worth putting you and your other half in debt and starting your marriage on the wrong foot. Plus, your budget will be your guide for all other aspects of your planning.

"Plan out your budget in the very beginning so that you have a 'want' and a 'need' list. Keep updating this budget to see if you have overspent on something so that you know where you need to tighten the belt on another item," suggests Leticia Hsu of Elysium Weddings.

"By doing so, it will help you determine the size of your guest list and assist you in shortlisting potential wedding vendors based on what you can afford. It will also guide you towards the venues that fall into your price bracket depending on the percentage of the total budget that you wish to spend on your wedding banquet," says Kris Wong of wedding portal WeddingsMalaysia.com.

While you should aim to stick to your budget, make sure you have some emergency funds set aside for unexpected costs as well. "We put aside an initial budget but the costs did keep increasing due to add-ons here and there. There were a lot of extra things that were chargeable and it's important to keep aside some extra just for these," says Anusha.



AUSPICIOUS OCCASIONS

The next step is to decide the date that you'll be having your ceremony on as everything else will depend on that special number to get ready. Depending on your culture, however, choosing the date might be a rather tricky endeavour.

Asians in particular tend to place a strong emphasis on 'auspicious' dates, which are often decided by temple priests of various faiths by using anything from birth dates and numerology to looking at the astrological alignment of the planets and stars. You'll generally be given a few options to choose from – whether you believe in it or not, it's a nice nod to local tradition and a little extra luck on your wedding day can't hurt!

"I think the two dates that were given to us fell in March and December, so we chose the date furthest away to give us some time to arrange things, which was March. I can assure you regardless of the date, I would have started the dress shopping early!" says Elizabeth.

Religious traditions aside, don't forget that your date selection will also depend heavily on your venue availability. Popular venues can get booked out as far out as a year in advance, especially on unique dates such as Valentine's Day, so inquire as early as you can if you have your heart set on a particular location.

Most couples will have the formal ceremony (especially if it's in a place of worship) in the morning, with a reception elsewhere in the evening where everyone can let loose and make merry, containing the whole operation in a single day. However, some may opt for multiple ceremonies and receptions at different locations to be able to share their day of happiness with distant loved ones and pay tribute to different upbringings.

"We decided that since it was a marriage of a mix of cultures, we knew the significance of each type of wedding, especially to our families. So we decided to have both so that we could experience both types of weddings and understand each other's cultures and significance more," says Anusha, who had both a traditional Indian temple ceremony and a Western-style garden wedding.

"Looking back now, it was the best decision ever – and I got to wear both a saree and a wedding gown!"

SHOPPING AROUND

This is where your wedding starts taking shape as you begin the laborious process of narrowing down the details: flowers, cake, dress and everything else besides. There's no shortcut around this – you should expect to spend many, many hours doing research, asking for recommendations from friends and family and visiting vendors.

Naturally, the Internet is resource numero uno for having a wide variety of readily-available choices and information at your fingertips; for instance, it's extremely time-saving to be able to search for your perfect dress by browsing through the online galleries of bridal boutiques like Designer Bridal Room, then saving the designs you like on Pinterest. When you meet your potential vendors, all you have to do is open up your Pinterest and the images are all there to give them a better idea of what you want.

Time-consuming as it may be, Kris advises not to skip the legwork: "Make it a point to meet with each potential vendor personally as it is important that you can get along well with them. They will form the basis of your entire wedding team leading up to the big day and there is only so much a website, social media page and magazine can tell you. Meeting in person will help you narrow down your choices and make a decision – and once you have decided, pay a deposit quickly to secure their services."



ELIZABETH TAO
(MARRIED DAMIEN MARIK)

Family affair: I knew I wanted to do a tea ceremony because though I knew it would mean a lot to my parents, it was actually more for me – I wanted to do it for my parents and my grandma. Don't forget that this is a day your parents have waited for a long time. There were things that we called on our parents' opinions for even if it wasn't going to happen, like sending photos to his mum of the dresses and flowers for the sake of making them feel more involved.

Budget-friendly: Doing it in KL was perfect because we were able to do so much more in terms of value as our budget went a lot further than it would have in Singapore or Australia, where the wedding would have been much smaller. I don't think we would have had the Catholic church wedding; or we wouldn't have done the dinner and just had the church wedding and lunch reception.

Highlights: I went to take singing lessons just to surprise Damien with a song at the dinner – 'I Do' by Lea Salonga. I was petrified and this was the only time no one could boo me off stage! I wrote the lyrics on a card by hand and told the girls to make him read it before the bridesmaids' games started. So when I sang, he knew what I was talking about and I think that's what made him cry!

For Elizabeth, who wasn't working at the time, doing her own research and meeting the vendors was a lot of fun. "I did a lot of things on my own and I'm quite strong-willed, so I know what works for me and I didn't want distractions. Dress shopping was the fun part as it took me to a lot of places that I didn't know existed and wouldn't usually go to, like a half-abandoned wedding mall downtown with lots of wedding shops downstairs!"

While it's common for most wedding vendors to push the sale of package deals, don't get carried away as you may end up paying more for things you don't really want. "I read a lot about how pushy vendors can be by asking you if you want a different dress or hairdo to 'upgrade' your package and I didn't like some that tried to do 'hard sells'. But if you do enough homework and go into enough dress shops to know the going rate, it's not that bad," she says.

WE HAVE A PLAN

Being hands-on is nice, but if time is precious for you, hiring a wedding planner may be a less stressful option if you can afford the expense. "If you're unable to meet timelines for important decisions, then it is time to seriously consider hiring a planner, but it is best to hire one at the onset rather than midway through the process. An established wedding planner would also have established links with vendors and venues, which you can tap into for better services and deals," says Kris.

At Elysium Weddings, a wedding planner will work with a client through five stages:

- **Stage 1 – Discuss, develop and design (12 months away)**
This is where your theme, concept, budget and event programme and timeline will be established, as well as getting recommendations for and quotes from vendors.
- **Stage 2 – Source, compare and build ideas (6-11 months away)**
Booking and arranging the vendors for all aspects of the wedding, as well as the venue.
- **Stage 3 – Coordinate and assist (3-5 months away)**
Religious and traditional ceremony proceedings will be coordinated, as well as the reception layout, out-of-town guest accommodation and final vendor confirmation.
- **Stage 4 – Bridal party coordination (2 months away)**
This is where final fittings, gift registry, family logistics and special helpers will all be coordinated and rehearsals will begin.
- **Stage 5 – D-Day!**
Your planner will be on the floor on the big day making sure everything runs on schedule, distributing final vendor payments and delivering collected gifts to the bridal suite.

If you want to have control over the details of your wedding but don't want to worry about coordination on the day itself, do what Elizabeth did and get a planner just for the day. "I needed someone to help execute the wedding day itself as all my friends were coming to Singapore and I didn't want them to be working. I was quite happy to switch off that day as I hired a good team of wedding planners who ensured people were doing the right things at the right time, so that helped," she says.

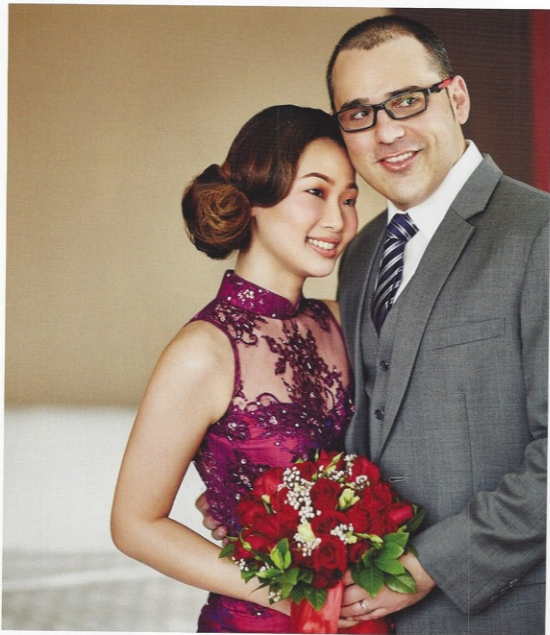


ANUSHA SEGAREN
(MARRIED CHRISTOPHER GAVIN)

Planning process: Lots of research online, magazines, friends and family. I did all the planning myself with the help of my mum and Chris. We made all the decisions together and kept each other in check. For the Indian wedding, my mum helped the most as she was the most familiar with the rules and traditions.

Unforeseen circumstances: The priest I engaged for the temple ceremony had another urgent engagement and had to pull out a couple of weeks before the wedding. Luckily my family priest could do it instead but because of the different traditions, this resulted in a change of procedures on the day itself so the ceremony took longer than planned. Also, our videographers lost our wedding footage due to lightning, which was very upsetting. So always be careful who you pick and remind them to back up!

Top tips: Research and ask around because advice may be conflicting when it comes to processes, keep the unpredictable weather in mind and you may need to do a fair bit of running around to get what you need. Also relax, enjoy and eat more on the day itself and really take everything in – we were so busy and nervous we didn't get to really try our food.



LEARNING THE ROPES

Every wedding is a ritual and there are certain procedures to follow on the big day, whether it's a Catholic church wedding or a Muslim bersanding ceremony. Just like finding the right vendors, it's also important to do your homework and make sure you know what to say, where to go and what to do at the right moments, particularly if your other half comes from a different background to yours and you're not familiar with their traditions.

"It is best to approach the wedding and let the local spouse take the lead," advises Henning Nassler, an Austrian who married a local Malay Muslim woman in Pahang. "Do not try to take over the wedding preparations even if you find some things 'weird' – always remember that as the expat in a local wedding, you are technically a guest even if it is your wedding."

"Feel free to ask questions during the preparation. Locals love to explain what they do and what it means – they also understand that you don't know everything and need help. If you are polite and honest with the Kadhi or Imam during preparation, they will help you through the ceremony with subtle hints on when to nod and when to pray," he says.

It can be a nervewrecking process trying not to mess up foreign traditions on an already extremely busy day, but don't forget to have fun with it as well as you are learning and embracing a different culture into your life.

"Chris was an absolute sport and enjoyed shopping for his 'traditionals', as he calls them, more than I did!" says Anusha of her husband. "He tried on lots of different outfits and when we finally found something, it was unfortunately slightly tight but he had his heart set on it. He

DAMIEN AND
ELIZABETH
FOUND LOVE
IN THE HEART
OF SOUTHEAST
ASIA

WHO TO CALL

APPAREL

Burlington Tailor

F108, Bangsar Shopping Centre,
285, Jalan Maarof, Bukit Bandaraya,
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03-2093 9455
burlingtontailor.com

Designer Bridal Room

Lot 9.10.00, Level 9,
Pavilion Kuala Lumpur,
168 Jalan Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03-2141 6003
designerbridalroom.my

Cuffz

Lot 1F-6, First Floor,
Bangsar Village 2, 2, Jalan Telawi Satu,
Bangsar Baru, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03-2282 8898
www.cuffz.com

Ido Jewellery

Jalan Jalil Perkasia 1, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 016-497 6292
www.idojewellery.com

DECORATIONS

BLOOM2U

LG17, Empire Shopping Gallery,
Jalan SS16/1, Subang Jaya,
Selangor
Tel: 03-7887 6262
www.bloom2u.com

Country Victoria

Tel: 012-687 3555
www.countryvictoria.com.my

Nook Flowers

M-5, Lower Ground Floor,
Village, Bangsar South,
Off Jln Kerinchi, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 014-368 1044
www.nookflowers.com

VENUES

Intercontinental Kuala Lumpur

165 Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03-2782 6000
kualalumpurintercontinental.com

Pulai Springs Resort

20km, Jalan Pontian Lama,
Pulai, Johor
Tel: 07-521 2121
www.pulasprings.com

WEIL Hotel

292, Jalan Sultan Idris Shah,
Ipoh, Perak
Tel: 05-208 2228
www.weilhotel.com

PLANNERS

Elysium Weddings

No 7, Jalan 3/115A,
Taman Pagar Ruyong,
Off Jalan Kuchai Lama, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03-7987 7188
www.elysiumweddings.net

Moments

16, Jalan SS15/2B,
Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya,
Selangor
Tel: 03-5887 6359
www.moments.my

Tie The Knot

Tel: 012-327 0556
www.tietheknot.my

PORTALS

WeddingsMalaysia.com

Suite 186, MBE Desa Sri Hartamas,
30 Jalan 25/70A,
Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 012-373 0823
www.weddingsmalaysia.com



HENNING NASSLER

(MARRIED NORDIANA B/T YUSOF)

Location choice: My wife's entire family is in Pahang and it seemed easier to see the mountain instead of bringing it here. For me, it was also a way to say 'thank you' to my wife's family – they are very close-knit and rural and loved organising the feast and showing around the Mat Salleh for a day.

New culture: Malays value three things above all else: politeness/respect, humility and honesty. Keep this in mind and you will be respected and welcomed. Learn the right words and gestures for greeting people properly. Try all the food you are offered at neighbours' or friends' houses and be very generous with your praise. You can refuse durian if you are a good sport but you do gain quite a lot of respect for at least trying. I was most dumbfounded when I was sent to pick up several hundred eggs and had no idea why since I didn't see any egg salad on the menu!

Top tips: Never bring up the topic of alcohol during the preparations, not even jokingly. Learn your akad nikah words and practice them until you know them in your sleep! Try to convert to Islam in your home country and make sure you get a certificate of your conversion in Arabic. What not many expats seem to know is that for a local marriage, you have to go to a hospital and get a mandatory HIV test.

really enjoyed wearing it and is still looking for another occasion to dress up like an Indian Maharaja!”

Some faiths may require you to undergo a pre-wedding course, which can be a good way to gauge if the pair of you are really ready for the trials of marriage. It's best to get this done early as some can take anywhere upwards of six weeks – and once you're finished, you can focus on the important task of preparing for your big day!

VISITORS FROM ABROAD

If you have visitors flying in from abroad to attend your wedding, you'll most likely need to think about arranging or at least suggesting accommodation and transport options for them around the wedding venue. Some couples opted to rent units in condominiums for their foreign guests, while others simply booked rooms at the resort they were having their ceremony at so that everyone was concentrated in one easy location – and could have a great holiday at the same time.

“We got married in Langkawi as it is a nice holiday destination for everybody coming from overseas as well as our KL friends. We rented over 40 rooms for three nights at the Four Seasons so they gave us a very good deal and they also allowed us to bring our own alcohol with a fixed corkage fee for the three days. Afterwards, we stayed for another week in Langkawi with 30 friends and family members and rented a few vans to explore Langkawi,” says Marjan.

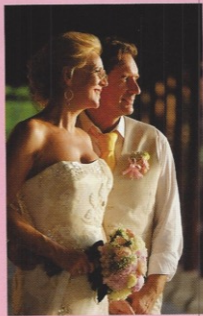
To save yourself the pain of repetition, both Damien and Marjan recommend setting up a website with all the details of your wedding as well as some tourism information on places to go and things to do for those who might want to stay and have an extended holiday here after the wedding.

“As we had about 150 invited guests who were travelling from all over the globe, I set up a web page with all the information like menu choices and airport transfer on arrival, which made questions like ‘who is coming’, ‘what are they eating’ and a million more from the guests much easier to deal with. People can also reply with their RSVP and you can then download it to Excel,” says Marjan.

When all is said and done, though, planning your wedding is just as important as the actual day itself, so you should think of it as less of a stressful experience and more as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to arrange a rockin’ party to celebrate your happiness with your nearest and dearest.

“I think for people who want to get married here, they have to have the time to look just a bit harder. Start with research to benchmark the going rate for everything that you want to use. Don't be afraid to ask for more and enjoy it,” says Elizabeth.

“They say enjoy the wedding day; I enjoyed the whole process of planning the day from the makeup trial and photoshoot to the food tasting. At the end, I remember standing by the window as I washed my hair, staring at the Twin Towers for a good two minutes and saying ‘that's it, the day's gone and six to nine months of planning are over and done with!’”



MARJAN SIPSMA
(MARRIED REECE KURTA)

Why Malaysia? We are a Dutch-New Zealand couple who have lived in Malaysia for 18 years. We looked at several locations from Istanbul to Greece, but as Malaysia was more or less in the middle between the Netherlands and New Zealand and we have a lot of friends in KL, we decided to get married in Malaysia.

Stories to tell: The wedding was on the beach. Reece walked to the ceremony place first with music, then I had chosen the most horrible ‘here comes the bride’ song I could find to be stopped a minute into my walk and replaced with ‘Dear Future Husband’, where I would then dance over the beach to the ceremony with five little bridesmaids. The DJ didn't stop the first song and started the second song halfway, so we had to start again!

Top tips: Get somebody to do all the paperwork for the wedding if you're not getting married in KL. It was lovely to do the wedding registration at our hotel and you only have to remember one date! The Internet is a great source of information and with a bit of effort, you can have a great wedding without having to pay mega bucks for a wedding planner.

