

Pandemic takes the fizz out of the wedding business

Jason Thomas - May 31, 2020 10:35 PM

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At a recent virtual wedding in Malaysia, the bride performing a song for the groom. (We Wedding and Tagbooth Photobooth pic)

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian wedding business is not popping champagne despite efforts to promote online weddings. Restrictions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic have put a blight on the business.

In a letter to cabinet minister Mustapa Mohamed, five wedding associations said couples had either postponed or abandoned their plans because of the protocols on mass gatherings, and uncertainties over when movement control order restrictions would end.

Leticia Hsu, president of the Association of Wedding Professionals, told FMT that wedding professionals feared the eventual demise of the many micro-entrepreneurs in the wedding business.

About 80% of people in the wedding business had found no work since February, she said.

Weddings provide employment for planners, photographers and videographers, gown designers, tailors and makeup artists, florists, decorators, caterers, cake designers, stationers, printers, entertainers and masters of ceremonies.

They have seen their income dwindle as a result of Covid-19.

She said the professionals had been trying to find innovative ways to survive, and virtual weddings were the only solution for those wanting to tie the knot under current conditions.

In April, a Muslim couple made headlines with an akad nikah ceremony held through video conferencing. The event, the first in Malaysia, was broadcast on Facebook Live. But Hsu said she did not consider the ceremony to be a virtual wedding as the couple, witnesses and kadi were not in the same room.



A recent virtual wedding featured a Q&A session with the married couple and a live stream of guests receiving door gifts. (We Wedding and Tagbooth Photobooth pic)

She describes a virtual wedding as being one that is attended by the couple, their parents, a small bridal party and religious officials, which is telecast live for guests to view.

However, couples were not exactly in love with the idea, despite marketing and promotion campaigns for the idea.

“It’s more of an intimate celebration. Not many people are interested. We’ve maybe had 10 virtual weddings since the MCO. Normally, there would have been a few hundred at least,” she said.

“Couples want big weddings with friends attending from overseas.”

In the letter to Mustapa, who is a minister in the Prime Minister’s Department, the associations urged the government to clarify its position on mass gatherings, particularly on the number of people allowed to be present at wedding celebrations.

They suggested that certain operating procedures be put in place and monitored during weddings.

Bookings of event spaces in hotels, restaurants and convention centres have also been badly affected by the pandemic, but Hsu said most vendors had been gracious enough to allow clients to postpone their bookings.

Hsu, who is the author of the Malaysian Wedding Handbook, said the industry’s stakeholders were exploring different ways to collaborate with one another to remain relevant during the pandemic.

Instead of wedding invitations, stationery companies could issue online cards for virtual weddings and videographers could help set up online platforms for people to view virtual weddings, she said.