

Planning the Perfect Function



Party plan like a pro!

Brought to you by James Thorogood – Owner of [Seafood Cruise Mooloolaba](#) & [Once Upon A Time Events QLD](#)

What type of event are you planning?

Planning for a function all depends on what the function is for, for example if you're holding or planning a Hens or Bucks night well that is very different to planning a Wedding or Corporate style event, once you know what you or your client are holding then you can move forward in your mind where to go from here.

It is necessary to ask many questions about what sort of venue is needed. Here are just a few of the questions that should be considered.

Do we need an indoor or outdoor venue?

What audience capacity does the event require?

How long do we need the venue for, including setup and takedown?

How many Guests are likely to be attending?

You will need to know an approximate number of how many guests will be invited to your function and how many of those are likely to attend, most venues will require or ask you for an estimate in numbers to see if they can cater and all venues will require a final number at least a week before your event so make sure you have a strict RSVP deadline on your invites.

Know your Budget and your guest's tastes (more on this in choosing a menu)

If you have a ballpark budget in your mind before you start this will help you narrow out a lot of venues, menus and other event specifications or putting ideas into categories' of must haves and wish list. Knowing your guests taste believe it or not these days is very important with more and more people with allergies and intolerances this can ruin an event on the day. For example you've decided on a BBQ menu with pig on the spit and then you find out on the day that nearly half your guests are vegetarian or vegan, perhaps you chose a venue that has a large staircase on entry and a lot of your attendees are elderly and are not happy as soon as they get there. These are things to consider and find out prior.

Choosing a Venue to suit

Whether it's an informal meeting or an extravagant black tie gala, you've found yourself in charge of coordinating an event that must be flawlessly spectacular and quintessentially memorable. And it all starts with the venue! One of the most critical aspects of event planning is venue selection. Location, location, location.

The venue you choose for your event sets the mood and tone before your audience even steps inside. Its geographical location and reputation convey meaning to your invited guests before they RSVP.

First step is to find a venue suitable for the event type, a lot of venue for instance will not touch 18th, 21st birthdays or buck and hens nights because of past bad experiences or noise restrictions in their venue.

When choosing a venue ask a lot of questions for example "What are the exact charges in total" a lot of venues I have found have hidden charges or what they call extras that are not included in the venue hire but are a necessity for your function, these may include tablecloths, chairs, plating and cutlery, use of their sound system, security guards etc.

Some venues have even been known to charge clients for cutlery polishing and pack down charges to clean up after your function so be sure to ask exactly what you are getting and paying for when you make your initial enquiry.

Ask the venue if they have an information kit they can send to you or that you can download from their website as this can be very useful if your not the only one helping to plan the event, this kit can then be emailed and shared so everyone planning is on the same page and is equally informed.

Your venue contact should also be clear on what items it needs to have ready for your event (tables, chairs, décor, etc) and what type of crowd will be attending. Scheduling an in-person meeting with a venue representative is important to do, and after the meeting, send a follow-up email to recap everything that was discussed

Planning an event can be exciting and watching all of your guests enjoy themselves at your function is the ultimate reward. Selecting a venue can and should be fun. And always remember: “When it meets the parameters of the event, such as capacity and budget, and you get excited about visualizing your event at that location,” there should always be that feeling of “yes this is it”.

Choosing the best seating style for your audience

So you have found the perfect venue for your next event, now you need to start to think about the room layout and in particular the seating style for your audience.

1. U Shape

As the name suggests this style is in the shape of the letter U, with the tables & chairs arranged in an open ended configuration with the audience facing inwards.

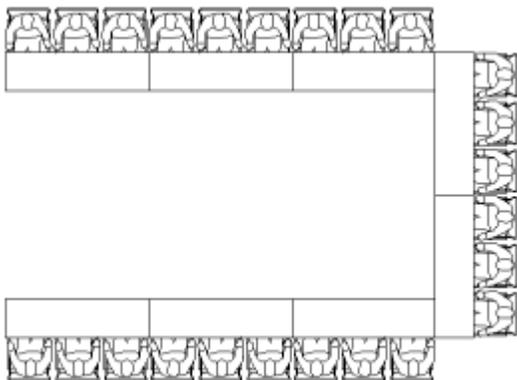
Positives:

- The open end allows for a focal point or presentation area.
- Allows presenter to approach and engage with each audience members.
- Audience interaction is enhanced, with audience members facing each other.

Negatives:

- Inefficient use of floor space, with seating capacity reduced...
- A large proportion of the audience are seated side-on to the presentation area.

Popular for training, conferences, workshops, meetings



2. Horse Shoe

This style is very similar to U Shape; however there are no tables, only chairs arranged in an open ended configuration with the audience facing inwards.

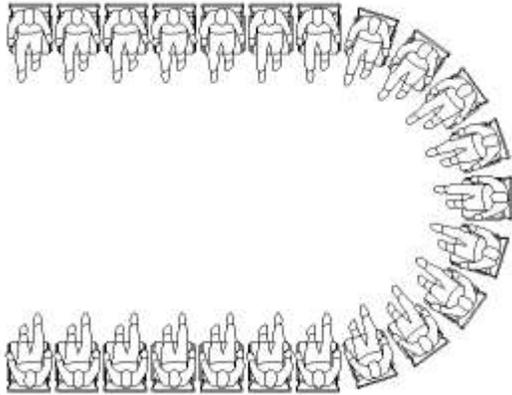
Positives:

- The open end provides a focal point and allows for a presentation area.
- Allows presenter to approach and engage with each audience member.

Negatives:

- Inefficient use of floor space, with seating capacity reduced.
- Aisles are required to ensure sufficient access and egress to seating area.
- There is no provision for note taking or consumption of plated food and beverage.

Popular for large meetings, presentations, team briefings



3. Hollow Square

This style is similar to U Shape; however there are four sides and no open end, with the audience all facing inwards.

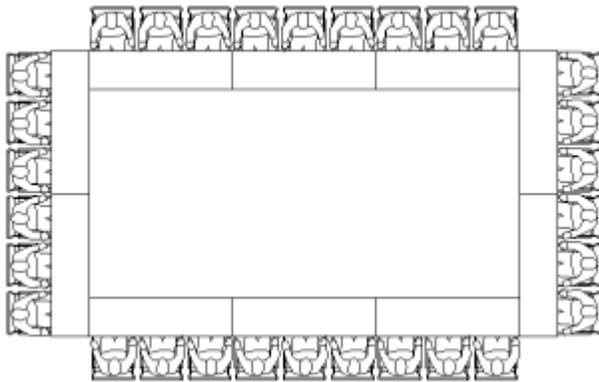
Positives:

- Audience interaction fully enhanced, with audience members all facing each other
- Allows audience to consume plated food and beverage easily

Negatives:

- Seating capacity is reduced
- Does not allow for a main presentation area or focal point.

Popular for discussions



4. Boardroom

This style is a smaller version of the Hollow Square or U Shape, however there is a large elongated table, with the audience all facing inwards.

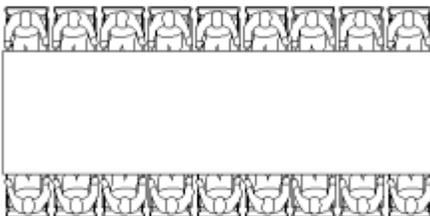
Positives:

- Encourages audience interaction as they all face inwards

Negatives:

- Restricts the position of a presentation area or focal point, typically to the end of the table

Popular for small meetings, one on one interviews, small presentations, team briefings.



5. Banquet

This style is similar to a round dinner table, with the audience seated around the circumference facing inwards.

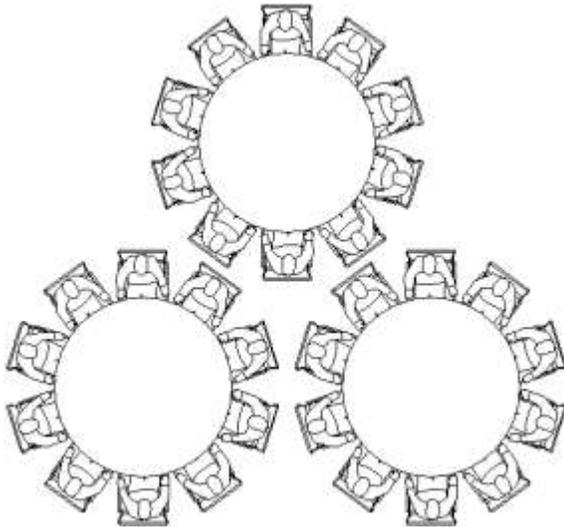
Positives:

- Audience interaction fully enhanced, with audience members all facing each other

Negatives:

- The audience is closed in, needing to push past other audience members to enter/exit the seating area

Popular for breakfast, lunch or dinner events.



6. Cabaret

This style is similar to Banquet style; however there is an open end, with the audience seated in an arc facing forwards.

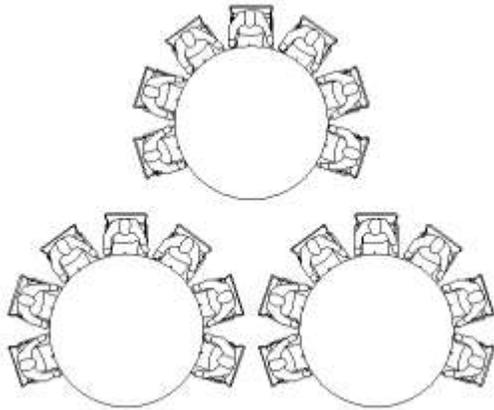
Positives:

- The open end allows for a focal point or presentation area.

Negatives:

- Inefficient use of floor space, with seating capacity reduced.

Popular with training sessions, working lunch or team workshops.



7. Cocktail

This style is unlike any others with no chairs or tables. It is literally standing space.

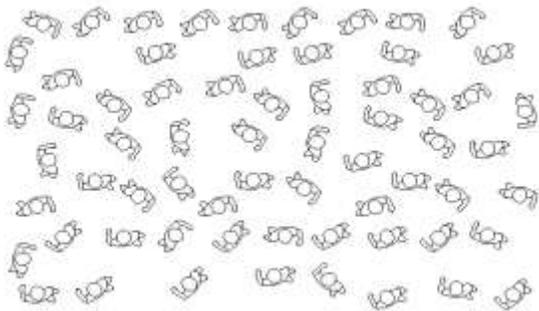
Positives:

- Most efficient use of floor space, with maximum room capacity available.
- Audience interaction greatly enhanced, with audience members able to freely mingle and roam.

Negatives:

- Audience is standing with no opportunity to sit and rest.
- Does not allow for note taking or consumption of plated food and beverage.

Popular for parties, social events.



Choosing the Right Menu

Any good party has a few key ingredients...seating, décor, specialty drinks, etc., and all are important...but the food served is often in the limelight, and thus often causes the most stress.

Food. What to serve? There are really only three main rules to follow; guidelines if you prefer that when adhered to, will help you immensely. Know your party. Know your crowd. Know your budget. And really that's it. Pretty simple right?

Know your party. A black tie 50th Birthday is a little different than a bucks or hens night. Both are awesome in their own right, but caviar and salmon mousse don't generally fit in the back yard, and ribs don't generally court ladies and gents in formalwear. Every party has an identity, and keeping the food on that mark is a very good idea.

Know your crowd, the second thing to consider is "who" will be attending. What sort of things do they like? Try to match your offerings to what sort of people will be there. If your party consists of a large vegetarian contingent, it's probably a good idea to leave the bacon at home. Sometimes it's difficult to gauge who will be there, sometimes you just don't know. But, more often than not, you have at least an idea, especially of who the function is primarily for, and that alone can help guide you in your decisions greatly.

No matter what you will want a decent range of items, some warm, some cold, some savory some sweet, and knowing early which things are a "must" and which would simply be nice to have is important. It saves time, it saves aggravation, it is really just a good idea.

There is beautiful flexibility in food, and any caterer worth their salt will gladly work with you to make your function a reality, and work within your budget.

Choosing a Theme

Choosing a theme for your next event can be an exciting process for some and for others perhaps a little overwhelming. So where does one start? You may be throwing a party for an end-of-year work celebration, a Christmas or New Year's Eve party, special birthday, baby shower for a friend or children's birthday party and want to add some fun and atmosphere into the event by having a theme.

It's almost like creating your own brand. A party should be fun and full of spirit so don't be afraid to add a little spunk into your event! There's nothing more visually appealing than walking into a room full of colour, glitz and glamour, and there's nothing more rewarding to hear than all the oohs and aahs from your guests in appreciation of your efforts.

Create a shortlist of theme ideas for your event taking into consideration who and what the event is for. Themes can be chosen by latest trends, colours and patterns or traditional favorites or seasons. If it's a work-related event you may wish to brainstorm with a small team of colleagues. If it's for a personal event listen to the likes and ideas of whom the event is for. You want them to not just like what you create for them but to love it, and if it's for your child you want them to think you are the best Mum or Dad in the world! Deciding on that perfect theme from your shortlist comes down to your style, budget and availability of decor to suit your theme. One of my biggest tips is to get organized early – give yourself at least 4-6 weeks before the celebration.

Once you have decided on your theme all your planning will simply follow and fall into place. For example it makes it much easier to choose a cake and decorations if you have already decided that your

theme for your 40th birthday is gold, glitter and sparkle. It even makes your wardrobe choices that little bit simpler – go on, wear that gorgeous gold cocktail dress full of bling!

ON TREND THEMES – often lead by a blockbuster movie, latest fashion runway collection, or new product that takes the world by storm. Googling or following Pinterest is a great way to keep up with the latest trends.

- Gatsby
- Geometric prints
- Neon brights
- Ombré tones
- Pink and gold
- Colours of the rainbow children's parties
- Romantic and vintage themed weddings and tea parties
- Whimsical and hand crafted decorations

COLOUR AND PATTERN THEMES

- Style by one or more colours, e.g. classic black and white, glitzy metallic's, pretty pastels like peach and mint, neon brights, Ombré tones, bold primary colours.
- Style by patterns, e.g. chevron, stripes, geometric print, dots, scallop print, vintage floral, animal print.

TRADITIONAL AND SEASONAL THEMES

- Timeless favorites such as Hollywood, circus, superheroes, casino, masquerade, 007 Bond, fiesta, rock'n'roll, popstars, eras – 1920s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s.
- Seasonal themes such as Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Australia Day, Melbourne Cup.

Put Together a Run Sheet

A run sheet is basically a lean canvas or one page easy to follow plan of your functions flow, from when the guests arrive, when meals are served, any toasts and or speeches and rough time frames, remember you have most likely booked the venue for specific times so going over those times may incur additional charges so it's important that you give yourself an idea of when everything is going to happen and how long it is all most likely to take.

This run sheet may also be given to the Venue's manager, kitchen staff and MC/DJ that way everyone is on the same page on the day and there are no excuses if the venue or suppliers don't follow your directions that they have been given in writing. Sounds silly I know but trust me it makes the world of difference.

Music Choice

This is a critical decision in the way your event runs and feels, you need to consider the age groups of those attending and what style of music best fits your event or theme. You need to have music that is suitable for the dining side of your function and then music that is suitable for the dancing and mingling side as well.

Do you need an MC (master of ceremonies) this is the person in charge of any speeches or introductions and should be someone that is either well known to all or most of your guests or is a professional that has been given a run sheet by yourself?

I personally would always recommend a DJ who is also an MC, for a little bit extra money their knowledge and experience is worth every cent and not only that but they can take requests and play music that appeals to everyone in your party and also know how to read a crowd, for instance the last thing you want is all of your guests segregated into little comfort zone groups, you want them all dancing together and all having the best night they've had in ages and to talk about your function for weeks or months to come. DJ's specialize in keeping the momentum of a function going and knowing what style of music is working and what is not. There's nothing worse than going to a function and there is a really down beat feel to it and everyone is looking at their watches wondering how much longer they need to be there and in their minds trying to find an excuse to leave. Be sure to keep your function upbeat and fun from start to finish.

Invitations

Be sure to include all the information your guest will require including the obvious to the not so obvious, be sure to include in Bold the Venue, time to arrive and exact location, having a map or full directions is a must as the last thing you want is a handful of guests calling you on the day saying "I can't find it or where are you? "

If your having a Theme then this is a must have on the invites and maybe even have a costume or formal hire suggested supplier (you might even contact that supplier and get them to offer you a discount if most or all of your guests are going to be using their service)

Be sure to include the Menu that way if there is anyone that does have an allergy or specific dietary need then they can contact you to inform you.

Invitations don't need to be fancy or be made by a company, they can be as simple as an email with an attached PDF unless of course you feel the need to really impress and even then there are some great websites with free templates out there that make it very easy to make your own invitations with a very professional look and feel.

On The Day

Since you're the organizer and would be event coordinator its important you arrive at the venue well ahead of your guests to ensure that everything is as you discussed and planned, the last thing you want is to turn up with all your guests and see that the venue have made some critical errors which could have been easily fixed had you seen them an hour or so beforehand.

Make sure you are personally there to greet every guest, try hard not to get sidetracked by any one person and get into a conversation with them while other guests are arriving as this will leave the other guests feeling not as important which instantly puts those guests on the back foot.

Be sure not to be the person that drinks too much either as you're the one everyone is looking at and talking about, there is always one party guest that drinks too much and you need to have a plan of attack for that person or people should that occur, as we all know it only takes one person to ruin a perfectly great function, the venue should be able to help with this on the day but you will need to have a level head in order to deal with the situation and really any problem on the night that may arise so it's my advice to maybe be having the soft drinks or mocktails if your event is to run smoothly, don't completely rely on the venue as they might not see or notice what you do.

Lastly Transportation

It's always a great idea to have pre arranged transportation both to and from the venue for your guests, this should also be included on the invitations this way your guests have the option to have a few drinks and really enjoy themselves rather than having to worry whose driving and how they will get there or home again.

The cheapest option these days is to hire a small charter bus to pick everyone up and then take them home, this on most occasions is far cheaper than everyone paying for Taxi's, get all your guests to put in some money and there you have it, your own personal bus service which in turn can be decorated and themed to your function as well. Why not even get them to lay out Red carpet runways as well while you're at it.

You also may like to think about limousine services as some companies have super stretch limousines that can hold over 20 people and that is always a lot of fine arriving in style or if it's a Fairytale wedding maybe a Cinderella's horse and carriage might be in order. Either way your transportation is still a crucial ingredient to your function.

Well that's all folks.....

Well that's a wrap, hopefully you have found this easy to read and informative, I hope your function is a great success and if you follow these steps I'm sure you'll be hosting perfect functions again and again and may even have your guests asking you to plan theirs for them too.

My name is James Thorogood and I am the Owner and Functions Coordinator for Seafood Cruise Mooloolaba and Once Upon A Time Events Queensland. If I can be of any assistance or you would like to use either of my companies for your event or function then please don't hesitate to give me a call or contact me on the below details. Have a great function and keep smiling,

James Thorogood

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