

Your quick guide to:

A PA's guide to planning your Christmas party early

When the days are long and hot, the last thing on your mind is Christmas. But planning your Christmas party as early as June or July can be hugely advantageous for a number of reasons. This guide looks at why it makes sense, and provides some handy planning tips

Why think about Christmas in June?

Well you certainly don't need to start playing Christmas songs in the office. But there are several reasons that make early planning a good idea:

- The earlier you confirm a date for your party, the easier it will be to get everyone to come – and therefore, to keep everyone happy
- Booking venues and catering early gives you choice – the most popular venues can get booked up by September
- Some venues offer discounts for early bookings, or added extras
- Other companies are booking earlier, so you need to act quickly to avoid disappointment. In fact, venue booking specialists ITA say that they get a lot of Christmas party enquiries as early as January

Planning tips

Location comes first

You need to find somewhere that suits the majority of your guests. Remote locations may be beautiful, but transporting everyone can be extremely expensive.

Visit all potential venues

Organising your party early gives you the time to visit the venues on your shortlist, and this is a must.

Not only can you establish a rapport with the venue's co-ordinators, but you'll also be able to find any quirks or issues that aren't reflected online.

Clarify your budget

Don't do anything until you know exactly what your budget is. Not knowing your budget when you're looking at venues is a recipe for disaster.

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Create a list of priorities

Try to work out what matters most to your business.

Is it all about the venue? Is food your biggest priority? Do you need a city centre location? Try to set a hierarchy of the things you're aiming for, and work backwards. Unless your budget is huge, there's a good chance that you'll need to make the occasional compromise – and knowing what you're willing to sacrifice will make this much easier.

Taste the food

All good venues or catering companies should be able to offer you a taster menu, or there will be a tasting event you can attend.

As we've all found out before, the way food looks on a menu can be very different in reality. This will also give you a good opportunity to see the range of choices on offer, and how adaptable they are for different dietary requirements.

Try to find time for a sit-down meal

Time and budget permitting, a formal dinner is the perfect way to begin your party.

It ensures your colleagues can line their stomachs, but it also sets a nice tone for the rest of the evening – some calm before the storm.

Choose the right menu

You may want a canapé reception in addition to a three-course meal. Or your budget may force you to keep things simple. There may even be a buffet-style option.

Again, think about your priorities. Canapés are not especially cost-effective, and a buffet is ideal if your colleagues want to concentrate on drinking and dancing.

And if there isn't a menu option to suit exactly what you want, ask for it – good venues and caterers will always find a way to accommodate your needs.

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