

Inside the big, fat Indian wedding

Given the grand scale of weddings of the ultra-rich, the planning process begins about 10-12 months in advance

Ashna Ambre



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Jenny was in our block. American singer and actor Jennifer Lopez made her first trip to India in February this year. J.Lo, as she is famously known, performed in Udaipur at the wedding of Sanjay Hinduja, son of London-based billionaire Gopichand Hinduja, with fashion designer Anusuya Mahtani.

The Hinduja wedding is one of the many lavish Indian weddings that cost around `10 crore on an average. These are usually destination based (mostly outside of India), with an average guest list of 500-600. Jewellery, clothes, food and invites are specially designed and customised for such fancy gatherings.

“Nowadays it’s not the Indian movie stars that perform at the weddings. Over the past year, the trend has shifted to getting international performers. It started with Shakira performing at K.P. Singh’s (chairman and chief executive office of DLF) birthday in 2011,” said Badal Jain, from Badal Raja photography, that filmed the Hinduja wedding, as well as similar events in the families of Bharti

Airtel Ltd’s chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal, Yes Bank Ltd’s managing director Rana Kapoor, and actress Shilpa Shetty.

As celebrity wedding photographers, Jain and his team start interacting closely with couples months before the event. While Hinduja married his longtime girlfriend, most of the weddings shot have been an even mix of love and arranged, said Jain.

Anuradha Vinod Gupta, who founded the personalised matchmaking service provider, Vows For Eternity, said she works through an offline closed group network where she has a general and premium memberships. As part of the premium membership, she deals with a group of just 500 people. That includes interactions with them. To cater to premium customers, online matrimonial portals Shaadi.com, jeevansaathi.com and matrimony.com, too, have their own offerings.

For instance, Shaadi.com’s VIP Shaadi is an invitation only matrimonial service and is offered after careful selection of clients. “A consultant curates and handpicks the finest two-three VIP (very important person) proposals for their members every week. The consultant then arranges a meeting based on their customers acceptance to form a VIP match,” says Gourav Rakshit, chief executive officer of Shaadi.com. Their clients include chairmen of major conglomerates, top businessmen, chief executive officers, investment bankers, authors and actors.

Given the grand scale of such weddings, the planning process begins about 10-12 months in advance. Guest lists are decided by the families involved and hotel arrangements and venues are booked. Guests are given the invitations three-four months in advance, giving them ample time to decide on travel options. Some even arrange for private charters for travel for the guests.

“Couples have to contact us four to five months in advance. After they give their complete details, we approach them with the cost and details of how they would like the wedding to be shot,” said Jain. Most weddings have one photography team of 8-10 people that shoot the three-four day event comprising of four-five main functions.

For the big fat Indian wedding, a simple demur wedding card will not do. Invitations are sent out with gifts that could range from Indian sweets to silverware. Paintings are commissioned from well known artists and are created as the cover for the invite. “One of M.F. Hussain’s paintings was used as a cover,” said Jai Raj Gupta of Shaadionline Pvt. Ltd, a wedding planning agency.

With regards to jewellery for the wedding, Gupta said that families don’t go for brands. “The family jeweller who has been dealing with the family makes special pieces. Polki jewellery is still a favourite trend among brides,” he said.

As far as decorations and ambience go, look alikes of fortress and palaces are passe. Venues are now set up in more contemporary styles

with hues of pink, Moroccan colours and softer shades. Over the past one year, students from National Institute of Design have helped create sets.

Food is still a very important aspect and mostly 4-5 cuisines are served, with Indian, Chinese and Italian being favourites. At international destinations, sourcing such cuisine specially for vegetarians becomes difficult, hence special catering companies with cooks (8-10) are hired on contract basis and flown in.

Every wedding party is, however, incomplete without entertainment and alcohol. While the event may start with a saxophone performance, it quickly moves to guests dancing to Bollywood music and later youngsters partying to electronic dance music. And favourite alcohol includes single malts aged over 15 years and French wines.

“Be it haldi, bhaat or the smallest ceremony, the entire family will be present for it, even if they partied till 4 am the previous night. By the evening the whole decor and set looks completely different,” says Jain who is gearing up for the wedding season and is looking to shoot at least 20 weddings until February.

These weddings are a big party of about four days and are a perfect combination of tradition and modernity.