



Choosing the right venue ("Budget " Versus "Premium")

When beginning the long and arduous task of planning an event as complex and involved as a formal, most often the selection of a venue in which to hold the event is the first, and arguably the most important, decision you'll need to make.

There are several factors that need to be considered when choosing the right venue but we'll start by looking at the most basic needs you'll have. Let's begin by thinking of your selection of venues like a trolley or cart. In order to push your formal forward in a straight line, you'll need 4 wheels on your cart. These will be...

- >**Geography** - The location of your venue.
- >**Availability** - Whether the venue has space for you at dates and times that suit you.
- >**Capacity** - Whether the venue has sufficient space for the guests attending.
- >**Economy** - What the venue will cost and what's included in the package.

If any of the wheels on your cart fall off, you'll either steer off course, or grind to a halt.

Let's look at each of these in a little more detail.

Geography.

Choosing a location should include things like whether the venue is centrally located granting easy access for guests, what methods of public transport are nearby for people who may be coming and going using that method, whether main roads are nearby for easy flagging of taxis, parking for people who may be driving themselves, other establishments like clubs or entertainment for any activities guests may have planned after the formal is over, and whether the area or neighbourhood is a safe one as formal guests will be dressed in ways that may attract attention.

Availability.

This is critical because the dates and times the venue is available for you can either conflict with other events, and may affect the price you pay and/or the exclusivity you have over the venue and the attention you have from the banquet staff.

The peak-season dates for formals are the 3 weeks immediately after the conclusion of the Higher School Certificate exams, which generally conclude around the same time in November each year. Because exam timetables aren't "definite" until around April each year, booking your venue for a date the first week after exams is dangerous because you may end up paying a deposit on a date that ends up being in the middle of exam time and you're in trouble. Clever people book for weeks 2 or 3 after exams to leave that buffer of time. The second most popular time of the year for the formal is the final 2 weeks of September (end of term 3).

The other problem you may encounter with availability at peak season time (November) is that it's the beginning of summer and therefore the beginning of wedding season, which means that many of the best venues that are suitable for formals are also popular for weddings and dates become scarce. Of course the other market you'd be competing with is the corporate sector for their office Christmas parties, which again, frequent the same venues. Both weddings and Christmas functions will have vastly higher budgets for spending than formals so the venues will always give them preference over you and that can't be helped.

Most formal committees will automatically assume that the best night for their formal will be a Saturday night, and that's natural. The thing to remember is that venues will often charge more for weekends, and may require higher minimum guaranteed guest numbers also. The other thing to remember is that other features that people will need for their formal experience such as hairdressing, beauticians, limousines, taxis, after-formal nightlife and so on will all be less available on weekends. For these reasons, it's smarter for committees to host Formals on Monday to Thursday nights when everything is more available, and less expensive. After all - once you've finished school for the year, every night is Saturday night as far as you're concerned so there are only advantages to doing this. Statistically 75% of all school formals take place Monday to Thursday.

Continued Next Page..

Tel: 02 9699 9669
prom.com.au



Capacity.

Each venue will have 2 magic numbers that set its "Capacity". One is the **minimum** number of guests, paying a certain price for catering, that the venue needs in order to make a reasonable profit from hosting your event. The other is the **maximum** number of guests that it can hold comfortably with a formal floor plan. It's vitally important that your venue has a capacity to suit your guest list. If you have too few guests to satisfy the minimum, the venue may cancel your booking, move you into a smaller room that wasn't the one you originally chose, or end up charging way more money from you. If it goes the other way and your guest list exceeds the maximum, you'll end up with cramped tables and a tiny dance floor, effectively not enough space to enjoy yourselves OR potentially having to cancel some people's tickets because they can't fit.

To work out whether a venue will suit your guest numbers, it's most important to discover precisely what those numbers will be from the start. Making guesses or assumptions is a dangerous way to do it because you'll rarely guess correctly. For those who want an accurate indication of guest numbers, we've developed a simulation software that we can run in our office during meetings, which will give you a formula for working out fairly accurately what those numbers will be.

Once you've worked out your likely guest numbers, choosing a venue based on capacity is just like kicking a football between goal posts. If you kick the ball too close to either post, you run an increased risk of hitting the post or missing the goal. Kicking through the middle is the safest bet. For instance, if your guest list is likely to be 150 guests, then selecting a venue that has a minimum of 140 is dangerous, and so is selecting a venue with a maximum of 160. To kick that goal safely, you should choose a venue that has a range of say 100 minimum to 200 maximum. This way you can sell less or more tickets than you first anticipated, and still be safe with your venue choice.

Economy.

This is by far the most complex and critical issue because it's where most committees come unstuck, mainly because either **A**: they don't fully understand what they're getting (and not getting) for their money or **B**: this is the place where disreputable venues often hide information in order to capture unsuspecting committees for greater profits.

There are really only 3 types of venues in the formal market. These are...

A: Venues who don't generally know anything about formals but do them as a sideline to other functions they already cater for. These venues rarely have the necessary permits or licenses to conduct formals (yes these exist under the law). They don't follow any of the necessary protocols or legal requirements for the running of formals and as a result, are not very good at it and formals they conduct are often illegal, leaving the organisers exposed to legal liability if anything goes wrong. These venues must be avoided at all cost. They're dangerous.

B: Venues who aggressively pursue the formal market and put on "All Inclusive Packages" for around \$85 - \$99 per guest. Although some of these are OK, if you don't mind the standards and service associated with a "Budget" kind of venue & package. Be very aware though! Many of these packages state what's on offer but not always what's actually "included" so there can be lots of hidden charges like GST, service surcharge, charges for DJ's & Security, Booking Fees and what starts out as an \$85 package soon becomes a \$135 package just for the basics.

C: Venues who operate through reputable Booking Agencies or Event Management Companies. Many of these will be venues that you can't book unless their preferred booking agency handles the booking and all the legal issues are totally covered.

These venues are generally "Premium" properties and have internationally recognised brandings or reputations. They cost a little more but you can be assured that they take care of everything perfectly every time and everything is included, with up-front disclosure on packages and costings. There's nothing hidden or tricky and you always know exactly where you stand.

These are the venues we'd recommend as the best possible choice for an event as important as your formal.

When comparing venues and packages, be sure you look out for the above factors. Notice how there's nothing in there about "PRICE". Price isn't important. The difference between the cheapest and most expensive formals is only a few dollars so it's not worth making price a big factor in your decision.

If you want a more comprehensive checklist of questions to ask, take a look at the other fact sheets on the "Prom Download Centre" for clues.

Select your venue wisely, and you'll have a solid foundation for planning the rest of your formal.

If you want some free advice and assistance, by all means get in touch!

Tel: 02 9699 9669
prom.com.au

