



A Caribbean beach theme tells your guests what to bring and how to dress.

Sensational Summer Soirées

A creative, imaginative theme sets your party apart, links everything from the mood to the food and dress code and tells your guests what to expect and how to dress.

BY KARA KURLYLOWICZ

Hot summer days and sultry nights are more than enough reason to throw a party, but the most memorable celebrations stick with us well beyond the morning after, because somehow, they were extraordinary.

A creative, imaginative theme is a vital party ingredient because it sets your party apart, gives it purpose and direction, helps you get organized, links everything from the music to the mood to the food to dress code and shows guests that you made a real effort. It also tells guests what to expect, how to dress and what to bring.

While flights of fancy certainly play a role in theme-dreaming, these practical tips will help get your party process off the ground.

Ask yourself: Why have a party? What's the occasion?

Write a list: Location, optimum number of guests, time of day/evening, local weather, lead time and budget.

What matters to your family and friends? It is as important as what matters to you.

Match the theme to the demographic – it could make or break your party logistically and emotionally. For instance, many people

will happily perch atop cushions while enjoying a sumptuous Moroccan feast, but others could find it overly casual or merely woefully uncomfortable.

Be inspired by current events, local history, regional uniqueness and cultural diversity as well as the arts (literature, music, film, theatre) and more. ⇨



Afternoon tea can be simple, yet demurely elegant.

Consistently engage all five senses (see, hear, taste, touch, smell) to make a long-lasting impression, whether your theme is as simple as colour (e.g. black and white) or as whimsical as the Mad Hatter's Tea Party.

SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS

Stir It Up - Caribbean Beach Party:

Invites: Mail beach scene postcards or deliver invites-in-a-bottle.

Attire: Sarongs, sundresses, shorts, bikini tops, sandals.

Décor: Centerpieces (pineapples, bananas, coconut and other exotic fruits), flowers (fresh ginger, birds-of-paradise), colourful beach towels, surfboards, windsurfers, wetsuits, seashells and palm fronds, hammocks and West Indian flags.

Food: Jerk chicken, curried goat, grilled seafood, peas-n-rice, akee and saltfish, conch chowder, coconut ice cream.

Drink: Caribbean beers (e.g. Red Stripe, Carib, Cristal) and rums, fresh mint for mojitos, local nonalcoholic drinks (e.g. Ting).

Music: Reggae, calypso, soca, dancehall and reggaeton.

Make it Memorable: Rent reggae music videos and West Indian movies to play on your big TV screen.

Wax Nostalgic at Summer Camp:

Invites: Create your own Summer Camp registration brochure, asking guests to fill it in, then send it back to RSVP.

Attire: Sweatshirts, fleeces, shorts.

Décor: Canoes/kayaks, paddles, lifejackets, sleeping bags and picnic blankets, mosquito nets, gas lanterns, signage (e.g. tuck shop, lifeguard on duty), a fire pit. Borrow or rent what you don't have.

Food: Gourmet burgers and sausages with high-end fixings. Epicurean coleslaws, potato salads. S'mores with top-notch dark and milk chocolate.

Drink: Pop, juices, sparkling water and a choice of grownup beverages.

Music: Whatever your gang listened to all those years ago plus singalongs (with lyric sheets) to such classic camp songs as "I wish I were a little mosquito...", "Old Lady Leary" and "Little Rabbit Foo Foo..."

Make it Memorable: On the invitations, request a \$10 (or more) donation to jointly send a child to summer camp.

Get Your Demure On at the Ladies-Only English Tea Party:

Invites: Lacy or floral on rich, heavy cardstock.

Attire: Pretty summer dresses and sun hats.

Décor: Parasols, unique teapots with tea cozies, masses of fragrant peonies and daisies, roses and pansies, exquisite china with delicate teacups, antique silver serving trays. Again rent or borrow what you don't have.

Food: Scones with homemade jam, unsalted butter, decadent clotted cream and rich homemade preserves. Bite-size sandwiches (asparagus and prosciutto, goat cheese and watercress, cucumber and mint), a layer cake or trifle.

Drink: A variety of teas and of course, Earl Grey or English breakfast tea, iced tea, kir royales (with cassis or Chambord) or a light rosé, if your friends aren't teetotalers.

Music: Classical with plenty of stringed instruments.

Make it Memorable: Ask guests to bring and share their favorite photos and memories.

Thanks to the experts: Lori Bodkin, owner and managing director, Table Talk; Sharon Bonner, president, Bright Ideas Events Coordinators; Emma Singh, owner and lead consultant, Events by Emma; Mercedes Robertson, owner/director, Positively Posh Party Rentals. [UL](#)



When choosing your menu, make sure the colours and textures in the food itself please the eye.