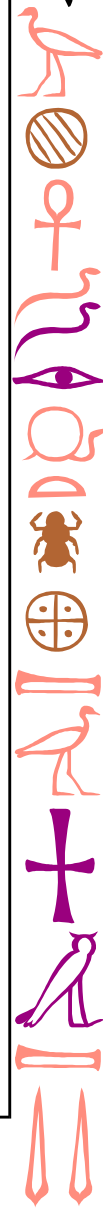
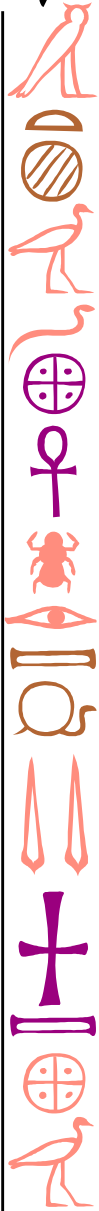


# “Theme Party Planning Made Easy”

by Jana Beeman

## A Guide to Creating a Magical Evening



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Enchantment Unlimited Entertainment  
445 Godfrey Drive, Windsor, CA 95492  
707/837-1793 800/440-4276  
enchantmentunlimited@prodigy.net

[www.enchantmentunlimited.com](http://www.enchantmentunlimited.com)

## Introduction

Through my work as an entertainer, entertainment company owner and dance company director, I've learned a thing or two about putting on theme parties. If you're not prepared, they can be a lot of work. But with a little help from your friends and some good vendor sources, they can be absolutely delightful.

This article walks you through some of the idea planning for an eastern or middle eastern themed event, but you can take the same thought process and easily focus instead on "tropical", "spanish", "carribbean", whatever you can dream up. Get a committee of friends together and brainstorm ideas. Look at movies featuring your theme, look at historical costuming books, research the era on the internet. You'll find tons of ideas and resources online that will help make it easy. Just be sure and allow enough time to really do it right.

You don't need to use outside vendors – you can do it yourself, but keep in mind you may not be able to enjoy your party that way. Decide what's important to you and stick with it.

The most important part is to have fun with it. Relax – it's not rocket science, and it will all work out fine.

Jana

# “Theme Party Planning Made Easy”

by Jana Beeman

Why is setting the scene, selecting the right food and finding the perfect entertainment so important to your theme event?

Every theme event needs its own unique signature, and sometimes it can be difficult to come up with new and different ideas. There are three basic things to consider when planning a theme event:

- Setting the scene: décor, ambiance, environment
- Food and service to complement your theme
- Entertainment to make your event different, exotic and memorable

Let’s take a look at one example... First, decide on the feel of the event you want to create.... let’s say we decide to do a theme party over the holidays to make your guests feel they are in a warm and exotic place. So the perfect theme might be Arabian Spice. Middle Eastern culture is so rich and diverse, uncovering ideas for an Arabian Spice event can be quite an adventure. So, we start with setting the scene...

Think about how you want your guests to feel. If you’re looking for a relaxed and comfortable evening with a sense of class, then my suggestion is to go with the classic old Arab look and feel. Floor seating, rounded tables, brass tableware, lanterns, rich colors, incense. Arabian Spice requires a feeling of mystery, it creates an aura of another age, the feel of a foreign culture. Floor seating is comfortable to invite intimacy, but also gives the

feeling of slight disorientation... Americans aren't used to sitting on the floor to eat, so it creates that feeling of another time and place. Add color with richly hued fabrics in shades of red, gold and blue, draped artistically from walls or from the ceiling to look tent-like. Light braziers of subtle incense, have your caterer's servers use spice-scented colognes and wear theme attire, use candlelight instead of or in addition to incandescent lighting. Have great background music playing softly with the sound of Arabic darbukka (drum), oud (stringed guitar-style instrument), ney (Arabic flute) floating on the air, and you're halfway to Morocco.

I strongly suggest saving the party supply store for last when you're looking for your décor items. They will be more expensive, less creative and feel much less real than the other things you'll be able to find elsewhere.

You'll want to decide on a theme budget for décor before you go out looking – there's so much out there, and you can really break the bank if you're not careful. Ask your friends who sew if they have any yardage in warm colors you could borrow and drape around, or raid the \$1/yard bins at the local fabric store. Keeping your lighting subdued will allow cheap plastic replicas of eastern art treasures to shine like King Tut's tomb. Many stores now carry inexpensive types of mirrored or sequined floor pillows or cassocks to sit on.

Get some inexpensive finger cymbals and put them around on the tables. You'll be surprised how many people will try them.

Spend some time thinking about the ‘path of progress’ your guests will encounter as they arrive. Decorating walkways with rush mats and lots of windchimes, maybe lining the walk with votive candles, will create a feeling of “tonight is special” before they even get in the door. Cover your doorway with draped fabric or hanging bead curtains. Make sure there are warmers with spicy scents filling the area with fragrance. Sprinkle flower petals on the path to the main party area – orange marigolds are used a lot for symbolizing a special occasion in the east, and create a really festive look.

You might want to get some turbans or fez’s for the men to don and some scarves to decorate the ladies. With an eastern or middle eastern theme, bindi dots can be a lot of fun, and guests enjoy decorating each other with them.

Theme parties can easily be handled by an event coordinator or you can do it yourself. They are perfect for a corporate holiday event or a small party in your home. You can decide how much of the planning you want to outsource and how much you want to handle yourself. Any vendors you work with on your event should bring more than their products and services to the table in the way of offering advice and suggestions that will add to your theme. When you start researching your vendors, (such as caterers, event coordinators, party rental houses, entertainment companies) consider the following:

- Will they provide a free theme consultation?
- Do they have ideas to offer and resources to share with you?

- Are they familiar with the venue and theme and have solutions to offer?
- Do they give you more than you paid for?

When you select the right sources for your caterer and your entertainment, much of the 'setting the scene' issues should be taken care of by those vendors, at least from the aspect of ideas, advice and suggestions. Your caterer should be able to provide great menu items that seduce the senses with spices and strange but lovely textures and flavors. For the Arabian Spice theme, I'd suggest going with a variety of finger foods and appetizers rather than a heavy meal, and keep the dishes coming over a longer period of time than your typical sit-down dinner.

Ask your caterer to set any buffet areas or tables with appropriate décor, and use lots of rich color in table linens. Flat platters of brass or wood are appropriate to a Middle Eastern venue - and these are easily gotten at your local Pier 1 or Cost Plus store - as are lots of decorative fruit displays. The Middle East is also known for amazingly tasty fruit drinks that you can buy in any corner stall at the Khan el Khalili, made from fresh mango, papaya, berries and other fruits, which would be a very refreshing addition to your wine selections, and mint tea is a must. The mint tea should be served in clear glasses rather than cups, with plenty of honey for sweetening.

Provide entertainment that can be pursued at leisure, such as a fortuneteller or two. Make sure there are private areas set aside, tent-like if possible, for private readings. Let your guests know they are free to stop in for a reading throughout the evening. You might want to assign numbers so they don't

have to wait in line, or assign a staff person to go get the next person who would like a reading. That way they can relax rather than waiting in line, and they will have something to talk about for months to come. Fortunetellers are extremely popular and most people attending your event will want to try a reading.

In addition to your background entertainment of fortunetellers, you'll want to have a great show-stopping stage show to get your guests talking for years to come. What better to set off your event than a great Egyptian, Moroccan or East Indian dance show? Tasteful, elegant, energetic, enticing, spicy... the perfect accompaniment to your desserts of Turkish Delight, baklava and other elegant delicacies and of course, Turkish Coffee. You may want to discuss dishes and table décor with your caterer as well, as Eastern events would be filled with color – orange, burgundy, blue, and lots of brass. Mixing your table linen colors can give a great feeling of the exotic east. With the right setting, a great dance show can be fun yet subtle and be the perfect finish to a lovely and exotic evening, and if your guests are the lively type, you can ask the performers to teach a little and get your guests up and participating as well.

Your entertainment company director should be willing to suggest costuming, attitude, etc. to help any staff working the party really focus your event on the theme. Local costume shops are a great resource for inexpensive costuming, but give your helpers a chance to come up with their own costumes if they like – their ideas will likely be much more dramatic than a rental. There are hundreds of great resources for inexpensive décor items as well, so you can make your budget go much further and have the



items on hand for next time. You might also consider buying some brass lanterns or other décor items that you will give out as door prizes at the end of the evening, or create centerpieces that can go home with your guests.

So this holiday season, give them something to remember for years to come: a voyage to the mysterious east, a night at the casbah, or dream up something entirely new. Express yourself and delight your friends with an evening they'll never forget.

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Theme parties are a great place to really exercise your imagination and get creative, but if you need more direction, ways to stretch your budget and time, please give us a call at (707) 837-1793. Enchantment Unlimited Entertainment is the sole representative for the Essence of Egypt Dance Company in the Bay Area, has 25 years theme entertainment experience and plenty of resources and ideas to share to create an event that's truly memorable.

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Jana E. Beeman

Enchantment Unlimited Entertainment & Essence of Egypt Dance School

[www.HowToBellyDance.com](http://www.HowToBellyDance.com) [enchantmentunlimited@prodigy.net](mailto:enchantmentunlimited@prodigy.net)

707 / 837-1793