

Cost Concerns

By Izzy Brown

As you plan your child's bar or bat mitzvah, you'll be making decisions that will affect your bottom line. Here are some choices you'll have to make, from a financial perspective.

AT THE SYNAGOGUE

- **Shabbat dinner:** Traditionally, you should invite your out-of-town guests for dinner on the Friday night before the event. You may also be expected to participate in the Friday night service at the synagogue, lighting candles or saying other prayers. You can plan a catered dinner at the temple, or dine at a restaurant or at your home, as time and budget allow. If you are having a winter affair, the dinner will have to be very early.
- **Photography in the synagogue:** If your synagogue doesn't allow photography on the day of the bar/bat mitzvah, you may have to pay extra for a session in advance, on the *bimah* and with the Torah.
- **Kiddush:** After the service, many synagogues regularly offer a simple *kiddush* of *challah* and wine. If you want to make this more elaborate, talk to your synagogue director, who may be in charge of ordering food. But if you are going straight to an afternoon party, you don't want guests to fill up.
- **Flowers:** If you want flowers on the *bimah*, the synagogue often arranges this for a donation.
- **Chorus:** If your synagogue has a chorus or choir and you want them to sing at the service, you may be required to make a donation.
- **Kippot:** Not a lot of money, unless you get handmade ones. They are usually imprinted with the name of your child and the date of ceremony.
- **Tallis:** Even if your synagogue dress code doesn't require a *tallis*, many *b'nai mitzvah* want to wear one.

THE PARTY

What kind of party will you throw?

- **Kids only:** Some people have an evening party for kids only, in addition to an afternoon party for everyone, with a sit-down meal.
- **Afternoon:** Afternoon parties can be up to 50 percent less expensive in terms of catering, party space and liquor costs. Fixed costs, such as invitations, photographer and DJ, are the same whether you have the party in the afternoon or at night. And not every caterer charges less for the afternoon, so make sure to ask.
- **Evening:** Generally the most expensive option, with higher alcohol and food costs. Also, you usually serve lunch at the *kiddush*, so don't forget to add that to the cost.
- **Buffet or sit-down meal:** Many people think a buffet is a lot less expensive than a sit-down meal, but that is not necessarily the case. Ellen Berson, an owner of The Movable Feast (www.movablefeast.net), said the main savings is in terms of staff; for a sit-down meal, she figures one waiter for every 10 guests, resulting in an additional \$7 to \$10 per person.
- **Alcohol selections:** If you serve just beer and wine instead of a full bar, you can save money. And guests drink less in the afternoon.
- **Guest count:** One way to save money is to limit the size of the guest list, but be sure to check with your party venue as to whether there is a minimum count.



Photo Credit: Beth Capuano

INVITATIONS

- **DIY or printed:** You can go to a custom printer, or you can opt for d-i-y and print your own using a software program like Mountaincow. If you have your heart set on engraved invitations, design your own save-the-date cards and thank you notes, and splurge on the invites themselves.

ENTERTAINMENT

- **Pick and choose:** You can have a DJ, a band, dancers, motivators, performers from Broadway shows, or a sound system with an iPod. Every addition adds to your budget.

DECORATIONS

- **Pick and choose:** Decorations for your party space can be simple or quite elaborate. If you want a particular color scheme, you may have to rent tablecloths, napkins and overlays. At some party places, you have to rent tables, chairs, dishes, silverware, glasses. Centerpieces and specialty lighting are places where you can spend a lot of money. In a recent sky's-the-limit party, Diana Gould, Ltd., in Elmsford, created a special atmosphere at a *bat mitzvah* that featured an appearance by the Jonas Brothers, with coordinated original theme centerpieces, flowers and special linens.

GIVEAWAYS

- **Favors:** DJs usually handle trinket giveaways, but party favors, from t-shirts to personalized bags and more, can cost \$10-\$30 each.

GUESTS

OUT OF TOWN GUESTS

- **Hotel accommodations:** Some people pay for hotel rooms for their out-of-town guests, but even if you just reserve a block of rooms, remember that if someone cancels, you may be on the hook to pay for the room.
- **Welcome gifts:** These are customary, along with suggestions for what to do during free time.
- **Transportation:** Many people hire buses to take kids, who may be attending the ceremony without their parents, to the party afterwards. And some people provide vans or buses for out-of-town guests, too.
- **Sunday brunch:** This can be a simple at home affair with family and out-of-town guests.

WHAT TO WEAR

- **Shopping:** Your entire family will want separate outfits for the Friday night service, *bar/bat mitzvah* service, party (even when there is an afternoon party directly following the ceremony, many kids, especially girls, want a different outfit), and Sunday brunch. Shop early and leave time (and money) for any necessary tailoring. And don't forget jewelry, shoes, hair, and make-up.

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