

## HOW TO THROW A GREAT COSTUME PARTY

The best thing about a costume party is that it allows you and your guests to try on new personalities perhaps step into a secret self, someone you have always wanted to be. Costumes give us permission to be a little more wild and crazy, a temptress or a spinster, a pirate or a prince. After all, there's a Lawrence of Arabia or Snow White in all of us. Trying it on for an evening is much easier than quitting your job and becoming a torch singer.

Another benefit of a costume party verses say, a typical dinner party, is that no matter how long your next door neighbor's talk about hypertensive cats goes on, everyone will forget the boring part and remember his outrageous Cactus Man costume instead. Finally, if your boss decides to bring his girlfriend and his wife, and a huge scene erupts, no one will notice! Everyone will think they're playacting, because they'll be in Captain Hook and Cleopatra costumes!

### GETTING STARTED

Every great costume party begins with great costumes – of course! The good news is you've found the Costume Salon, and your party planning is half over! With unique, elaborate costumes for your guests to wear, your costume party is sure to be a success. Not only are our costumes the most original and of the finest quality, our staff is here to help you, and we love to get phone calls, prefer them actually, so your best party ever is just a phone call away.

#### Choose The Best Source for Costumes

You've already got that one nailed! The Costume Salon. Congratulations, you move to the head of the class. Make sure to give yourself enough time to reserve costumes, and allow extra, extra time if your guests will have to reserve their costumes themselves. With enough notice, the staff at the Costume Salon will be able to give you the attention your party deserves, and you will have a much better chance of renting the costumes you want.

#### Decide on Your Party Date

Do this before you call the Costume Salon!

#### Decide on a Party Theme (or not)

It's always fun to surprise your guests with costumes for them to wear at your party. You browse costumesalon.com and find costumes that will most likely fit your guests, and they simply show up. If you are ordering costumes for your guests to put on when they arrive at your party, it is best to decide on a theme for your party. Browse costumesalon.com for ideas. Some of our categories would make great party themes, and the costumes may inspire you to come up with your own theme. Carmen Miranda, Ancient, Road Warrior, Fairy Tales and Stories,

Drag, Renaissance, French Baroque, Victorian and Edwardian, Animals & Insects, Warrior Princess, Wizards, Gods and Goddesses, Gypsies, Men in Black, Roaring 20's and Wild West are all great party themes.

We also have our one-of-a-kind line of Party In a Box™, which takes the planning out of your hands entirely – all you have to do is invite your guests and open the box. Instant party!

## **BRAINSTORM THEME IDEAS**

Brainstorming is the best part of planning anything, especially a party. Get together with your friend – you know, the one who can keep a secret – and brainstorm theme ideas. Order some margaritas, take out that pencil and paper and get to work. Before you know it, you'll have dozens of ideas for your party.

To test your theme, see how many costumes, decorations, types of food and entertainment you can come up for each idea. If you have a long list, the theme is sure to be a hit, and you will have fun getting ready for the party. If your list is short and you're racking your brain, your party will probably be short on fun.

Here's our brainstorm list to get you started:

### **Arabian Nights Party**

**Costumes** ~ Cleopatra, Lawrence of Arabia and Valentino all belong at this party, as do harem girls, Arabian guards, and snake charmers. Read *Arabian Nights* or watch *Lawrence of Arabia* for further inspiration.

**Decorations** ~ Remove furniture and lay down colorful rugs and pillows. For a low table, take two cinder blocks, a stack of books or a block of wood and put a piece of plywood on top of them. Cover with an oversized tablecloth. Use pillows for seats. Put rubber snakes in baskets, tying their heads with a bit of string so it looks as though they are dancing for the snake charmer. Drape white fabric everywhere, so that it looks like the inside of a tent in the Sahara. Candles and other mood lighting is a must. Spray inexpensive, interesting pitchers (they can be plastic!) with gold paint and use to hold flowers, or serve water or wine. Sprinkle some sand and gold glitter on the table for added decoration.

**Food** ~ Middle Eastern food is easy to get "to go" from most restaurants. Call in advance, advise them of the number of people in your party and any special food requirements (vegetarians, allergies, etc.) and let the chef do what he does best. This is more fun than working with a caterer, because you can do a taste test at the restaurant!

If you plan to make the food yourself, keep it simple. Make falafel earlier in the day, and set it out with bowls of lettuce, diced tomatoes and onions, tahini and hummus. Big platters of pita and/or Arabic bread are a must, as are Greek olives and feta cheese. Make a large bowl of tabouleh and for desert – baklava! This is one dish you may want to order from a bakery.

**Entertainment** ~ Belly dancers, what else? Finding belly dancers to hire for the evening is usually pretty easy, even in small towns. If you're having trouble, contact your local dance teacher or dance school for resources. A Middle Eastern cooking demonstration is always fun. Contact your local restaurant and hire them to come teach your guests how to make baklava. Go to the library and look up Middle Eastern cultural books for ideas for games. We had all the men in our party dance the Dance of the Seven Veils, while the women judged and decided on a winner. Whatever you decide to do for added fun, make sure to have Middle Eastern music playing at your party. Most music stores can help you find a compilation CD or two. The library is also a good source for world music, and it's free!

### **Speakeasy Party**

**Costumes** ~ Gangsters, Flappers, Flappers and more Flappers. Al Capone could surely show up for the night, with a lovely jazz singer on his arm. The dress is glamorous 1920's for this party. Watch the *Cotton Club* for ideas, but read *The Great Gatsby* for true inspiration.

**Decorations** ~ Turn your living room into a cocktail lounge. First and foremost, turn the lights down low. Pick up some of the small table lights you see at nightclubs. These can be found for very little money at any discount store, or simply put candles on each end table, coffee table, etc. Add as many tables as you can to the room, moving furniture if possible. Cover with a white tablecloth that goes to the floor – this way you can use old beat up tables or card tables. Even if you don't allow smoking at your party, put a silver or crystal (does not have to be real!) ashtray at every table. Offer your guests candy cigarettes with long cigarette holders, and chocolate cigars.

Section off an area for a dance floor, and set up a special bar area. Whether serving the real thing or nonalcoholic drinks, you will need great martini glasses for sure, and other fun glasses for mixed drinks. Take larger shot glasses and put one flower blossom (some usually fall off when you're arranging a flower display anyway) and line them up in a row on the bar. Find old martini pitchers and mixers, black and white table linens and bottles (full or empty) of liquor for the bar area.

Prepare a short note-card-size info sheet for your guests and leave them on each table. Include interesting facts about prohibition, the mafia, fashions and other political and artistic events of the day. You can find copies of old newspaper headlines and buy them for not too much money. Having them around will definitely start some conversations.

**Food** ~ Serve cocktail finger food such as nuts and olives. Prepare hors d'oeuvres and serve them on silver trays. Preparing a meal may not be necessary if you make enough finger food for your guests. Serve old-fashioned cocktails such as martinis and cosmopolitans. For a twist, try a chocolate martini, or a cosmo made with pomegranate juice.

**Entertainment** ~ Consider hiring a jazz piano player, or if you have money to spend, hire a jazz singer with her own piano player to serenade your guests and take requests. A ragtime band is also a great idea. If these ideas do not fit into your price range, simply find some jazz and ragtime music and play it in the background for your guests.

If money is no object, hire a bartender and a cigarette girl for ambience and convenience – you won't have to serve so you can concentrate on your guests.

### **Deserted Island Party**

**Costumes** ~ Check out our Marooned Couple for ideas. Have your guests come as marooned people from different time periods.

**Decorations** ~ Plastic or painted cardboard palm trees, tiki lights (for backyard parties), plastic and/or real fruit in bowls and strewn about, palm tree, pineapple or pink flamingo light strings and fake or real rocks, sticks or logs.

Use inexpensive table linens and cut jagged pieces out of the bottom, so they looked battered by the elements. A plastic tablecloth would work for this as well. Straw placemats, coasters made out of sticks glued together and coconut cups for drinks. Glue plastic seaweed or sticks to plastic silverware. Hang plastic seaweed as garland. If your party is outside, set up a tent to hang decorations from. Paint panels of inexpensive fabric to look like pieces of a tree house from *Swiss Family Robinson* and hang them over the white canvas of the tent. Or, find or create old travel posters, featuring ocean liners or tropical destinations, and hang them near the tent opening.

Give each guest a history of how they were shipwrecked, or have them make up their own shipwreck story. Exchange stories over dinner.

**Food** ~ Serve fresh fruit and tropical drinks. If your party is outside, grill fish over an open flame with fresh limes and lemons. You could use your grill, but hang some seaweed off of it for authenticity. Or poach fish, if you're cooking inside.

If you are having the party catered, ask for a luau. Your caterers can do all of the research for you, and you can sit back and enjoy the exotic food.

**Entertainment** ~ Divide your guests into two teams, a la *Survivor* and give them simple challenges – charades with one hand tied behind your back, taste testing with a blindfold, singing contest – and hold a tribal council to vote guests off the island. Make sure you have a great prize for the winner.

Another idea is to hire some hula dancers for entertainment and/or lessons for your guests. Or hire drummers – tribal or steel drum. Steel drums are very popular, and guests can join in with the music making.

### **Other Ideas:**

**Better Half Party** ~ Chose several famous couples from history, such as Bonnie and Clyde and Samson and Delilah. When sending invitations to your guests, split each couple up, so that they have to come as one half of a couple, and their partner comes as one half of a different couple. For example, invite “Ben” and “Betty” to come as Bonnie and Samson, and then invite “Sue” and “Steven” to come as Clyde and Delilah. Couples find their “mate” and that guest is their teammate for any games or fun events you might have planned. They also must sit together for dinner. This party idea is a great way for guests to get to know each other.

**Love Triangle Party** ~ A twist on the Better Half Party. Brainstorm famous love triangles throughout time, real or fictional. Examples could be Antony, Cleopatra and Caesar, Scarlet, Rhett and Ashley or Jane Eyre, Mr. Rochester and his crazy wife! Or, make up possible triangles using stereotypes, such as a mob boss, his jazz singer mistress and the squeaky-clean newspaper reporter. Queen Elizabeth and two Elizabethan Lords as suitors. The options are limitless. Assign characters to your guests in advance and watch as the natural drama unfolds.

**Hollywood Movie Party** ~ Ask each guest to come as a character from a movie, and you assign the movie. For instance, if you assign the movie *Beetlejuice*, your guests could chose to come as the monster himself, or as Lydia the Goth girl, or any number of dead people in the afterlife waiting room. Have your guests guess which movie the other guests are representing. If you decide to go potluck, have each guest bring a dish that can be associated with the movie.

**Come as Your Favorite Reincarnation Party** ~ Each guest comes as a person they might have been in a past life. This could be a person straight out of the history books, or a nameless soul who walked the streets of Jerusalem, or was that Paris? Guessing games are fun with this party, as are games involving staying in character. It's fun when a Renaissance Monk meets Unsinkable Molly Brown!

**Come as Your Suppressed Desire Party** ~ We think this one is self-explanatory. Guaranteed, you will learn more about your guests at this party than you probably want to know! A great game for this party is two truths and a lie. If you haven't already played, guests take turns telling two truths and one lie about themselves, and the rest of the party guesses to see which of the three is a lie.

**Mythological Party** ~ Come as your favorite mythological character. Drape your party in gold, white and silver fabric complimented with celestial decorations. Incorporate this with an evening of stargazing. Rent a telescope and take turns finding costume namesakes.

**Camelot Party** ~ Center your party around one large round table, preferably outside. Paint inexpensive fabric to look like the design of the original Round Table, or improvise using jeweled tones and by adding a crest painted in gold. Drape the fabric over the table. Drape gold fabric over each chair, making one chair higher for King Arthur. Have your guests come as Knights, priestesses from Avalon, even Gueneviere herself. Drink from chalices and serve game on large platters. Hire a storyteller (bard) to entertain your guests with heroic tales.

**Charity Party** ~ Costume parties do not always have to be indulgent fun; they can also do some good. Round up a group of your friends and dress up as characters from famous fairy tales: Snow White, Cinderella, Mr. Rabbit, Mermaids and the Mad Hatter, for example. Visit a children's cancer ward or group home. Bring a small boom box to play fun circus-type music, plan a few fun and games in advance, and bring along some small trinkets or balloons to give to the kids. A good source for small trinkets that cost virtually nothing is Oriental Trading Company. Call the hospital in advance to arrange the play date. We at the Costume Salon believe that costumes can change lives by shifting our focus and perspective, even if just for a few hours. What better way to prove us right, than by bringing some laughs and fun to children who need it.

Another twist on this idea is to rent costumes for your volunteers from [costumesalon.com](http://costumesalon.com) for your next benefit or charity event. Contact Julie Anderson for information on discounts for charity events.

If you already have a theme chosen, fantastic! Call the Costume Salon with your plan, even if you don't see a costume that would fit your theme on the site.

If you simply want to throw a costume party, with no specific theme, that's fine too. Direct your guests to [www.costumesalon.com](http://www.costumesalon.com) and make sure to give them enough time to rent through us. Your guests are welcome to come to us individually, theme or no theme, and with enough notice everyone will be looking fabulous!

### Send out Invitations

Whether you are surprising your guests with the costumes in a separate room, or if they are to come dressed from head to toe, sending your invitations out early is always a good idea. Chose invites that fit your theme, perhaps in colors that match your decorations. Make sure to request RSVP, especially if you are arranging costumes for a certain number of guests.

### Food and Drink

A costume party is not like other parties – it's a little more frisky, promises a few more surprises and a lot more fun. The costumes are the main event at a costume party, so we recommend that you keep the food and drink simple, and if possible, theme oriented. Why spend hours in the kitchen and lots of dollars when everyone is focused on your Marie Antoinette?

You may want to consider pushing the time of your party back to allow guests to eat dinner before they arrive, and simply serve snacks and drinks. Or, you may choose to serve cocktails, and then go out to a restaurant for dinner. However you chose to serve food and drink, keep it simple and not too messy. No chili or tacos.

### Decorations

If you have chosen a theme for your party, incorporate decorations that fit the theme. For instance, if you were to throw a Carmen Miranda party, you may want to put out bowls of fruit, maracas, piñatas, colorful table linens and Carmen Miranda music and images. If your costume party does not have a theme, choose other mood enhancing décor, but keep it simple, so as not to upstage your guests in their costumes. Black and white is perfect and candles add a feeling of mystery.

### Entertainment

Entertaining your guests is not difficult when they're in costume. In fact, you may not even need anything more than music playing in the background and for dancing. If your party has a theme, incorporating entertainment is much easier. See some of our brainstorm ideas for inspiration. Some not mentioned are renting a karaoke machine,

hiring a dance teacher for the evening (Samba, Tango, Swing, whatever fits) or having a costume contest.

### Pictures, Pictures, Pictures

Remember to take tons of pictures. This will surely be a memorable party, and your guests will love to receive their note from you in the mail, along with a few carefully chosen photos of them in costume. You may prefer to give each guest a disposable camera for a party favor.

### Hire a Maid Service

You have worked your tush off, so why not indulge in a little cleaning help?