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Thai weddings: the checklist

With modern, western trends creeping in to Thai nuptials, here's a handy rundown of how a traditional Thai wedding is performed, lest we forget.

Modern Thai weddings often incorporate western clothing and traditions. Whereas a bride used to wear a traditional Thai sarong of silk with woven gold accents, nowadays she often wears a white, western-style wedding dress, train and all. Similarly, these days, the groom often wears a dinner suit or, at the very least, a business suit. The evening buffet that once took place at the bride's house has been discarded for the convenience of a hotel cocktail party. We have no objection to the adoption of such modern practices. But just to make sure no one forgets how we used to get married, here's a checklist of things to do for a traditional Thai wedding.

Thai Traditional wedding

1. Morning alms to the monks

The groom will come over to the bride's house for the morning alms ceremony. The bride and groom will share the same ladle and rice bowl as they serve a morning meal to monks as part of the alms.

2. *Hae Khan Maak* (the wedding parade)

The wedding parade or *Hae Khan Maak* is usually carried out during the day of engagement. The parade involves singing and dancing to Thai traditional music. The parade is separated into two – the main parade and the side parade. The main parade usually consists of the main dowry, which includes gold, diamonds, cash, jewellery, bags of peanuts and sesame, boiled pork, spicy fish cakes and rice noodles. The bride's 'price' will be covered with silk. The side parade usually consists of Thai traditional desserts and sweets, which has to be in even numbers. The side parade follows the main parade. Trays with incense and candles, together with a small banana tree, a small sugar cane tree and coconuts are also carried in the parade. Usually, the engagement and wedding happen on the same day.

3. The Door Block

When the wedding parade arrives at the house of the bride, all her relatives and friends will start creating door blocks or gates by using gold necklaces, silver necklaces and Thai silk. Traditionally, there are only just three door blocks or gates – the victory gate, the silver gate and the golden gate. The groom can only pass each gate after he has handed over envelopes filled with money as a toll to the gatekeepers.

4. Counting of bride price

Counting of bride price will be done in front of witnesses from both sides. The entire dowry will be first placed on red, silver or golden cloths and witnesses from the bride's side will be the ones doing the counting. When the counting is finished, elders from both sides will grant well wishes by sprinkling nuts, ข้าวตอก and flowers onto the dowries. The dowries will then be wrapped by the cloth, carried over the shoulders (to show how generous the groom is) and kept in a safe place.

5. Wearing of the engagement ring

When the auspicious moment arrives, the bride and groom will exchange engagement rings. It is not compulsory to exchange rings in the engagement ceremony – necklaces, bracelets, gold bars can be exchanged instead as well.

6. Blessings to the bride and groom with holy water

The bride and groom will start the ceremony by lighting incense and candles to pay respects to Buddha. They will then be moved to be seated at the ตั้งรดน้ำ. The groom will be seated on the right and the bride on the left. Throughout the ceremony, friends of the bride and groom – 2 from each side (who have to be single), have to stand behind. Seniors from both families, normally the parents, will place the small gallant on both the bride's and groom's hands and mark their foreheads as a sign of blessing (เจิมหน้าผาก). The blessing of the bride and groom is done by pouring holy water onto their hands to give them well wishes. This will be done starting from the eldest and then by other family members and friends.

7. Paying respect to the elders

This is the ceremony where the bride and the groom pay respects to each other's parents. They prostrate themselves 3 times in front of their parents and once for elders. Elders will accept the paid respect and will give them money.

8. Consummation ceremony

This is the final ceremony for the wedding. It is carried out by the elders from both sides by placing head pillows for both the bride and groom. They also lay down onto the bed and grant well wishes before leaving the room.

9. Party

This can be up to the bride and groom but generally, there is a celebration open to all members of the community.