

JN SIMCHA SUPPLEMENT

Pictures: Susannah Fields (www.flashfields.com)



Naomi Sklar pictured with friends at her batmitzvah party at Whipsnade Zoo, reflecting her love of animals... particularly large cats

Rooms With an Unusual view

If you're looking for a venue with a difference, forget synagogue halls, West End hotels and marquees, says **Alex Galbinski**

The world's your smoked salmon bridge roll when it comes to selecting a venue in which to hold your son or daughter's bar- or batmitzvah party. No longer are you constrained to an anonymous-looking hotel or a hall for the celebration that heralds the coming of age of your child.

The hunt is on for more unusual places to separate each party from the rest, to make them that bit more special and ensure they remain the topic of conversation.

Indeed, people hold parties on boats – including aboard the *HMS President 1918* – and at luxurious or spectacular venues such as the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel, the Saatchi Gallery and Vinopolis, a venue dedicated to wine, that is set beneath the arches of a Victorian viaduct – or even at the O2!

Anywhere that has a function room can suffice, but first you must consider your wish-list. What's your budget? What type of venue do you want? How many people can it accommodate? Do you want to serve kosher food and can you bring in an outside caterer? Do you need parking or to be near public transport?

Kati Pauk set up events management company KP Events in 1998, and has plenty of experience in finding venues that are off the beaten track.

"Many of my clients are going to so many barmitzvah parties and they all want to do something that stands out," she says. "To a certain extent, these events are fairly formulaic – everybody wants some entertainment, they

generally want a disco and they want to eat, so the reason I like to suggest more unusual venues is to differentiate that way."

Kati has organised parties at venues around London that she says have the 'wow' factor. One such venue was Happenstance bar and restaurant in St Paul's. "It's a gorgeous restaurant and bar, a lovely location and the food is fabulous," she explains. "My clients tend to want something that is really appropriate for the occasion because, ultimately, it is for the child."

She also cites the Drift bar and restaurant in Bishopsgate, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Forge and Foundry in Camden, and bowling alleys – such as the Bloomsbury Lanes, which has the private Kingpin Suite available for exclusive hire – as more unusual venues. She adds: "I've done a batmitzvah at London Zoo, where they did a whole display of the penguins for the reception. The batmitzvah girl is a huge animal lover, so it was totally in keeping with what she is interested in."

Similarly, Nick and Vicky Sklar, who live on the edge of Buckinghamshire, held their daughter Naomi's batmitzvah two years ago at Whipsnade Zoo.

"Naomi is very much into animals and we tried to find a venue that fitted in with that," Nick explains about the Bedfordshire zoo. "We're a fairly theatrical family and we decorated everything ourselves and created a whole ambience to pretend people were going on a journey." The theme included invitations in the form of passports, airport and jungle sound-



Twins Daniel and Erin Coyle had their b'nei mitzvah at Gilgamesh, a Pan-Asian restaurant in Camden

scapes, menus in the shape of a big lion's paw (aged just 12, Naomi set up a charity called the Big Paw to raise money for tracking collars) and large animal stage props.

"It was a fabulous party centred around the children," Nick adds.

Jason Blair, a chazan and glass-maker who also works with 9 Events, agrees that clients are on the lookout for more interesting venues: "Pretty much anything you can think of has been done. The Royal Gunpowder Mills in Waltham Abbey, where they used to make all the explosives, is also an unusual venue and a bit off the beaten track. There's plenty of parking and you can make as much noise as you like as there are no neighbours. The exhibits are open, so you can have a look around."

Edward Poland, co-founder and chief operating officer of hirespace.com, says the company works with around 1,800 venues in London and gains around 20 each week. "We're known for unusual spaces – boats, basements, rooftops, arches. We tend to hear about brand new

places before they open, which clients love."

Asked to recommend some specific venues, Poland says: "I'd say Altitude 360 for the views, 41 Portland Place for the service or Auto Vivendi [a 'supercar' club in St Johns Wood whose venue you can hire, complete with 'supercars' if you desire] for the wow factor."

Cindy Goldberg, 45, chose to have her son Sam's barmitzvah party three years ago at Aqua Splash in Hemel Hempstead as he loves swimming. "He was not into dancing and my experience of barmitzvahs is that most boys are awkward at that age and dancing is for the parents. The children sit around being bored."

Wanting the focus to be on Sam, she heard about the council-run indoor water park (which is now closed for complete renovation). The cost to hire it out for four hours was reasonable and included lifeguards, and the family could invite everyone they wanted.

"He loved it – everyone did," Cindy says.

Another couple who took the cue from their

Continued on Page 16

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Pictures: Mummy Loves You



Above: Joel Ucko celebrated his coming of age with a party at his beloved club, Watford

child's interests were Rachel and Gavin Ucko, who held their son Joel's barmitzvah at Watford Football Club 18 months ago, bringing in a kosher caterer. Says Rachel: "My son and husband are massive Watford fans. It was their first kosher event and it was at the lower end of the price range as well."

The party overlooked the football pitch. "If you imagine his friends, a group of football fans, they were all in heaven," laughs Rachel, who lives in Edgware. "We made the hall look good with the décor, using the club colours of yellow, red and black for the balloons, tablecloths and napkins. Everybody

loved it because it was so different and relevant."

Caryn and Simon Coyle held a b'nei mitzvah for their twins, Daniel and Erin, in a function room at Gilgamesh, a Pan-Asian restaurant in Camden.

"We've eaten there many times and have loved the food and thought it would be nice to have it for a function. I liked the location and I loved the décor," Caryn says.

"We had about 120 people and had three large tables – with the



kids in one section. I decorated the room using Japanese lanterns with LED lights and it looked amazing.

"The children absolutely loved it – it really was spectacular. There was a chocolate fountain, a photo booth and lots of dancing. There was space for the kids to run around and dance."

A key factor is catering for large groups of 12 and 13-year-olds. As Blair says: "The venue doesn't matter as much as you might think. What matters more is that the adults are relaxed and involved in the party, then the kids will relax and be involved."

So that's the venue sorted. Now it's time to start thinking about the entertainment!



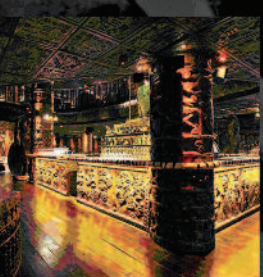
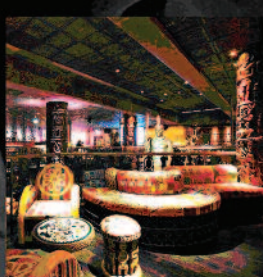
Above: Sam Goldberg and his family especially enjoyed his barmitzvah party, which was held at Aqua Splash water park

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