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Horniman Conservatory Frequently asked questions



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What does it cost to hire the Horniman Conservatory?

Costs vary according to the duration of hire and the specific requirements of your event. Please contact us to discuss the costs your event.

Email amanda@suzannejames.co.uk

All Conservatory bookings of 6 hours or more include use of the Bandstand for photographs or your drinks reception for up to 2 hours free of charge.

In addition to the above rates, a facilities deposit of £500 is payable each time the venue is hired. This is refunded approximately 7 days after the event, provided the terms of the contract have been adhered to.

What is the maximum number of guests allowed?

Fire regulations stipulate a maximum of 120 guests, including children and babies inside the Conservatory for your ceremony or seated reception. It is possible to erect a guest marquee on the terrace directly adjoining the Conservatory, which will allow you to increase your numbers for an evening reception to 150.

Is the venue licenced for Civil Ceremonies?

Yes, the venue has three spaces that are licenced to hold Civil Ceremonies – the Conservatory for up to 120, the Bandstand for up to 50 and the Pavilion for up to 80 this includes the Bride and Groom and all children, even babies.

When can the Horniman Conservatory be hired?

The venue has under floor heating and Victorian style radiators for the winter months, and roof ventilation for the summer, making it suitable for hire throughout the year. Please contact Amanda at Suzanne James Ltd to check availability.

What does the venue hire fee include?

The venue hire fee covers the following;

- Exclusive use of the Conservatory & surrounding terrace on the day of your booking
- Permission for deliveries by car/van between 9am and 10am on the day of your booking
- Set up time for all suppliers
- Heating & lighting
- Cleaning
- On site security

Plus a few little extras that make a BIG difference.....

At Suzanne James we know that it is the little things that can make a really big difference on this, the most important of days.

With over 8 years experience as the sole caterer at the Horniman Conservatory, and over 25 years in the events industry, we have a wealth of experience and knowledge we are happy to share with you.

Whilst some couples choose to use a wedding planner, we want you to be aware that we are much more than just your caterer, and offer many of the benefits of an event planner without the additional costs. We take great pride in helping you plan your wedding day, from providing a running order to liaising with your suppliers....it is our intention to remove the stress, and allow you to relax and enjoy the run up to your big day, as well as the day itself.

Because of this, here are some of the extras that we provide as part of our service;

Bespoke Wedding Planning Service – because that's what we do!

Toiletries Pack for ladies and gents (bookings of 6 hours or more)

After members of the public have left the museum at 5.30pm a selection of 'goodies' will be placed in each of the toilets to ensure guests will feel pampered and fully refreshed, ready to go on into the evening celebrations.

'Pashminas' for later in the evening (bookings of 6 hours or more)

There is nothing worse than feeling chilly, so we keep a selection of Pashminas to hand in assorted colours. If we notice a guest (or even a baby) who may be in need these will be offered free of charge.

Heel Protectors (bookings of 6 hours or more)

We keep a set of heel protectors at the ready for each bride so that, should she wish to venture into the gardens for photos there is no risk of her getting 'landlocked'!!

White Umbrellas (available to hire)

Because, despite our best efforts, even we can't always guarantee the sun will shine. We have a stock of beautiful white or cream wedding umbrellas available for you to hire from us for your day. This ensures you and your guests can get from A to B without getting wet for the duration of the event, and they also look fantastic in photos!

Can we hire the Horniman Conservatory for a Civil Ceremony only?

The minimum booking option is 2 hours, for a ceremony with drinks and canapés and this is offered from Monday to Friday, provided the space is not reserved for internal museum events. A civil ceremony lasts approximately 30 minutes.

What additional costs are there?

There are a number of additional costs to factor in when hiring the Conservatory. These will be shown in your quote from Suzanne James Ltd and will include;

- All tables, chairs, crockery, glassware and cutlery etc.
- All kitchen equipment & a service marquee – used by the catering staff
- An optional guest marquee
- Event & catering staff
- Food & beverages
- There is also a fee payable to the registrars if booking your civil ceremony

With the exclusion of the registrars all the above is organised exclusively by Suzanne James Ltd.

Do you have an outdoor space for hire?

Hire of the Horniman Conservatory includes the surrounding terrace, and the private fenced lawn beside the Conservatory. You are also allowed to take photographs within designated areas of the Horniman Gardens, inside the museum (Bride & Groom only) and for bookings of 6 hours or more, on the Bandstand. The gardens comprise of a unique 16-acre site of award-winning, beautifully maintained formal and natural landscapes, from delightful rose and sunken gardens, herbaceous borders, and ethno-botanical planting, to enchanting wild flower displays and a number of unique sundials. Your guests are welcome to explore the grounds up until 5.30pm, after which time they are required to stay within the Conservatory and terrace area.

What about booking our Civil Ceremony at the Horniman Conservatory?

You need to contact the registry office and paid your registration fee. Once this is done you can tie the knot 15 days later!

Lewisham Registry Office

Email: register.office@lewisham.gov.uk

External Telephone: 020 8690 2128

Fax: 020 8314 1078

Opening hours: Mon - Fri 09.15am - 16.15pm

Address: 368 Lewisham High Street, Lewisham, London SE13

Your ceremony, by law, may not contain any music or additional wording/declarations that are religious in nature. However, with agreement from the registrar you may include non-religious music, readings or poetry as part of your wedding ceremony.

It is best to check with both Amanda at Suzanne James and the registry office to ensure the date and time you want is available.

How do we book the Horniman Conservatory?

Contact Amanda at Suzanne James Ltd and check whether the date you require is available. If it is, we will require some further details from you to allow us to prepare a detailed quotation. You should also check that the registrars are available to perform your ceremony on the date and time required. Once you are happy to proceed we will send you a contract for hire of the venue, along invoices for the two non-refundable booking fees - one is for 50% of the venue hire, the other is to secure us as your caterers, and to cover the initial costs we incur in confirming your event with the suppliers. Six weeks prior to the event you will be required to pay the remainder of the venue hire fee, along with the facilities deposit. Approximately two weeks before your wedding/event once final details are confirmed we will invoice you for the remainder of the catering costs.

Can a marquee or gazebo be erected on site?

Yes, we recommend hiring a guest marquee for events with 70 or more guests, which we will organise for you. This is usually a 6m x 12m marquee with a white satin lining, a chandelier light on a dimmer switch and black carpet. All marquees are booked and supplied through Suzanne James Ltd. The marquee provides an alternative covered area for you and your guests during the drinks reception whilst we 'turn the Conservatory around' for your meal. As an alternative, for events of up to 80 guests you could book the Horniman Pavilion for your drinks reception.

What about privacy when the museum is open to the general public?

We have measures in place to provide as much privacy as possible and to ensure that only invited guests enter the private Conservatory and terrace area. We surround the terrace with 5ft high, mobile trellis screens, and event stewards are on duty to direct the public away from the area.

Can we bring in our own caterers?

The Horniman Conservatory is a Grade II Listed building of high importance. Suzanne James Ltd manages the venue and they are the only catering company approved to operate on site.

Can we 'dry hire' the venue?

The Horniman Conservatory is a Grade II Listed building of high importance. It has no facilities on site at all, and it cannot be hired other than as part of a Suzanne James event, whereby Suzanne James are able to ensure the correct equipment is hired in to allow each event to take place.

Are there any other catering restrictions I should be aware of?

There is no refrigeration at the Horniman Conservatory, with food being brought along at the last minute in a refrigerated van. This means that cream wedding cakes are not suitable. Please also note that Suzanne James Ltd will not take responsibility for delivery or set up of wedding cakes – the company providing the cake must be able to deliver and set it up, we do not accept wedding cakes delivered by courier.

BBQs are not allowed at the Horniman Conservatory, but it is possible to have a hog roast. Please speak to Suzanne James Ltd about any catering queries you may have.

Can we bring in our own photographer, florist, DJ, band or other supplier?

Suzanne James Ltd will supply you with a list of pre-approved, recommended suppliers who are familiar with the Horniman Conservatory and have agreed to pay 6% commission to the venue on all bookings they receive. This commission funds the development of additional events and exhibition programmes run within the Horniman Museum. Many of the approved suppliers are small, independent companies that we feel have a similar ethos to both the Horniman Museum and ourselves. We would encourage you to support the local economy by considering these suppliers.

Should you wish to bring in your own supplier to work at the venue on the day of the wedding an administration fee of £100 plus VAT per supplier will be added to your final invoice which is payable prior to your event. Each of these suppliers will be required to provide a copy of their public liability insurance certificate to the value of £5 million, and PAT certificates for any electrical items that they will be using on site during your event. It is important to ensure the company can provide these, as they will not be allowed to work on site without them.

Please ensure you discuss the museum's delivery restrictions with any non-approved suppliers you approach as you may find they are unable or unwilling to work to the required rules – vehicular delivery can only be from 9am to 10am on the day of the event, so for example, bands need to deliver and set up, then return later on foot to perform.

Can we supply our own beverages?

Suzanne James have a fantastic wine list which we are happy to share with you. It contains a selection of outstanding wines and the majority of our beverages can be provided on a sale or return by the bottle.

Should you decide to provide your own drinks then we would levy a handling fee of £12 plus VAT per head for all guests aged 18 and over. This includes the cost of us taking delivery at the venue between 8.30am and 10am on the morning of your event, chilling and serving throughout and removing and recycling all empty bottles. Unused beverages are taken back to our professional kitchen on Barry Road in East Dulwich for you to collect within 48 hours.

Can our photographer and guests take photographs anywhere within the Horniman Gardens?

There are few restrictions as to where photographs are taken, although we do ask that care is taken not walk on the flowerbeds or damage the gardens in any way. The Bride & Groom may also have photos taken inside the museum if required, please let us know in advance so we can make the museum aware of this. You may like to visit the Horniman Gardens with your photographer in the run up to your wedding/party to select your preferred locations. On the day of your wedding an Event Steward will accompany you into the grounds to assist with any queries and to help with directing guests, or members of the public as necessary.

Is confetti allowed?

Suzanne James has obtained approval from the Museum for one particular type of natural petal confetti to be thrown on site. This must be ordered through Suzanne James Ltd as we have responsibility for managing where it is thrown.

Are there any restrictions regarding decorations?

Due to the Grade II listing nothing can be fixed to internal or external surfaces of the Conservatory glass. Freestanding decorations or stands are advised but please consult Suzanne James Ltd to discuss your requirements. Please also note that helium balloons are not allowed, and candles must be placed inside a glass votive, with the flame 1" below the top of the glass.

When do our chosen suppliers have access to the site?

The Suzanne James Event Manager will be on site from 8am on the day of your wedding/party. All vehicular deliveries must take place between 9am and 10am. From 10am onwards deliveries can only be made on foot. Vehicles will be allowed back on site at the end of your event to remove any equipment. Please note that all vehicles must adhere to the strict 5mph speed limit, with hazard lights on at all times, and closing any gates behind them.

Can we deliver or set up the day before an event?

All set up, breakdown and deliveries must be on the day of your event with prior consent and according to the times laid out by Suzanne James Ltd.

Please note the restricted times for vehicular deliveries as stated within the previous answer.

Can my event go on later than 11pm?

The venue is allowed to extend its licence to midnight for a limited number of events each year. Please note that this is subject to an additional hire fee plus additional staffing costs. Because the venue is in a residential area there is no option of extending the licence beyond midnight.

Can we arrange to leave items overnight?

No, the Horniman Conservatory must be left clean and empty at the end of your hire period. Neither the Horniman Museum nor Suzanne James Ltd can take any responsibility for items left at the venue. It is particularly important that you put plans in place to remove any wedding presents, which may be of high value and/or fragile.

Can we smoke inside the venue?

No, smoking is only permitted outside the Conservatory, on the terrace.

Is there any parking at the Horniman Conservatory?

On the day, there is 1 parking space available for the hirers of the venue plus 1 blue badge parking space if required. Registration numbers for vehicles coming on site must be submitted 7 days prior to your event, and there is a very strict speed limit of 5mph within the grounds. Please also note that all vehicles must leave the site at the end of the hire period, and cannot be left for collection the following day. For guests there is free parking on Wood Vale and Sydenham Rise, which is a walk of 10 minutes or less to the conservatory. There is also parking on Horniman Drive, but as the Horniman Drive Entrance Gate is locked from 5.30pm/dusk guests returning to their cars would have a long walk via the London Road entrance after this time.

Where does the money raised from hire of the Conservatory go?

The hire of the Horniman Conservatory is an extremely important part of the Horniman Museum Trusts income. All proceeds go towards the conservation and upkeep of both the Conservatory and the Museum, and the development of the ongoing education, events and exhibition programmes.

What is the history of the Horniman Conservatory?

The Grade II listed Victorian cast iron Conservatory was originally built at the Horniman family house at Coombe Cliff, Croydon in 1894. By 1982 it had fallen into disrepair and the structure was totally dismantled and moved to its current site where it was beautifully restored with the help of English Heritage. It was re-opened in 1988 and is now used for performances and workshops in addition to being available to hire for weddings and private parties.