



SOUTH'S GUIDE TO Being the *Perfect Guest*

WINTER IN SAVANNAH BRINGS CHARITY GALAS, MUSIC FESTIVALS AND OTHER AFFAIRS. WHILE SAVANNAHANS DESERVEDLY OWN THE TITLE OF THE HOSTESS CITY, EVEN THE MOST WELL-MANNERED GUEST CAN USE A REFRESHER COURSE NOW AND THEN. SOUTH EXAMINES THE ESSENTIALS IN PARTY-GOING ETIQUETTE FROM RECEIVING AN INVITATION TO CRASHING INTO YOUR MATTRESS AT THE END OF THE EVENING.

GRACE BARKLEY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN GIBSON

Before the Party

R.S.V.P.

You open your mailbox to find an invitation to the Georgia Historical Society's Gala. At the bottom is a polite reminder to R.S.V.P. From the French *répondez s'il vous plaît*, or please respond, R.S.V.P. means just that. It's important to follow the directive of the hostess so you won't be without a dinner or a seat come the gala. Most importantly, respond in the time frame and method noted on the invitation. If the hostess leaves a phone number, call. Do not text or e-mail her personally if you are only acquaintances. This keeps it simple for the hostess, channeling all replies into one spot.

Savannah-based etiquette coach Lydia Ramsey says the biggest problem that we face today is that people are simply not R.S.V.P.'ing for events.

"Be sure to do what you say you are going to do," she says. "We live in a time when people have trouble committing to anything, and we are constantly bombarded with invitations via Facebook and other social media outlets. People think, 'Maybe something better will come along,'" says Ramsey. "So make life easier for the hostess," and be honest in your reply.

WHAT (NOT) TO WEAR

You're primping to the nines, and you've set out a few dress options from a local boutique. Choose a conservative yet fun garment when headed to a party. A simple rule of thumb: Match your dress to the invitation. It's likely that if the invitation has come via text message, you're just meeting up with friends—jeans and a colorful top are usually appropriate. However, if your invitation arrives in the mail, with gilded words on buttery paper, it's best to think twice. The educated hostess will include dress requirements on her invitation. If there is no dress code provided, however, don't fret. Just ask yourself: Would your mother approve of this outfit for church?

DANCE ETIQUETTE 101

- » Men should always ask their partner to dance with their left hand.
- » Always offer the lady the floor first, just like opening the door.
- » More advanced dancers should stay to the outside of the floor; beginners stay in the inside.
- » Learn about Salón de Baile at their website, SALONDEBAILEBALLROOMDANCESTUDIO.COM



TO BE INVITED BACK NEXT YEAR,
PARTICIPATE IN GROUP ACTIVITIES,
SUCH AS DANCING. RACHAEL
MOORE OF SALON DE BAILE
SPORTS A DRESS FROM ATLANTA'S
DANCE IMAGE BOUTIQUE, WHICH
SPONSORS MOORE AND HER
PARTNER, JEFF TRENT.



COUTURE CLUE

Fabrik owner Bree Thomas has attended a gala or two in her day, and has picked up some insider information along the way. "Elegant is always in!" she says. "If you can't afford to buy designer, rent. Consider your budget and try websites like RENT-THERUNWAY.COM." For accessories and more, visit fabrikstyle.com.



Make sure the essentials are covered, décolletage and rear, but incorporate color, texture and pattern—and always remain tasteful.

Boutique owner and fashionista Bree Thomas shares three easy-to-follow guidelines to help select an ensemble for a special occasion.

1. "Mind Your Manners."

I suggest always going with a floor-length

gown for any gala or black tie affair. However, there are many "formal" occasions when you can get away with a nice cocktail dress (and have the ability to get more wear out of the piece). Whatever you decide, educate yourself on who typically attends the event you're attending. Young adults are more open to a "flexible" look. If you're joining older adults,

keep in mind they're more traditional and will appreciate a clean look.

2. Decide which look you're going for based on the audience.

Go bold when you can—venture into one of the latest color palettes or trends. To go classic, research your audience. If you've never been to the event before, ask a friend who has been what guests typically wear. When going elegant, wear designer or raid your mother's vintage collection, whatever it takes.

3. Leave your sex kitten at home.

We know you're beautiful, but there's a time and place for your assets. A good rule is not to let more than one sexy part out at a time. Show some leg with a nice elegant slit, but be mindful to cover your other beauties up.

At the Party

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT A GIFT

It's never a bad idea to bring a gift to a house party. In fact, Ramsey regards it as imperative. If you aren't sure about the hostess's taste, you can always bank on something utilitarian. Try decorative paper cocktail napkins that can go right to use, or wine glass charms so guests won't mix up drinks. Personalized gifts are a no-fail, and you can never go wrong with a monogram. Partygoers looking to score with flowers must mind their delivery. Ramsey says, "Flowers are nice, but they are nice only if you take them in a nonreturnable vase." The last thing you want your hostess to have to do is leave to the greeting line at the front door to run around looking for a vase.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

Try centering the conversation on the party's focus—discuss the charity or organization at hand. After all, attendees are attending under the same auspices, so you automatically have something in common. Also, avoid the sob story—guests are at the party to have fun and don't want to be weighed down with heavy conversation. Ramsey even advises to think about conversation topics ahead of time.

"Think about any issues or current events that would be safe and interesting to talk about that are happening in the news," she says. If you are talking with a woman, Ramsey recommends commenting on a piece of jewelry or scarf to start the conversation, using what she calls "free information." Other easy topics include families, children and holiday plans. Stay away from the classic no-no's:



THE MOST THOUGHTFUL
GUESTS SEND A NOTE,
NOT AN E-MAIL. EMILY
MCARTHY DESIGNS
THANK-YOU NOTES WITH
A PERSONAL TOUCH.

religion or politics. In a small city like Savannah, Ramsey advises it is also imperative to stay away from gossip. Participating in such conversation could mean that you soon become the feature of it.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING IS NOT ALWAYS A GOOD THING

At a big celebration, the bubbles and brews will likely be flowing. While it may be tempting to take advantage of gratis libations, it is best to stick to the two-drink rule. Ramsey says the rule of thumb is "to drink the amount you are able to handle." She makes sure to reiterate, "You are liable to say or do things that you wouldn't do in other circumstances." Around bosses and big wigs, be sure to keep your cool. Also, at many galas and fundraising events, organizations hire photographers to document the night. Keep your drink count in mind so you aren't disappointed to see your deer-in-the-headlights face in the quarterly newsletter.

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

Rachael Moore of local dance studio Salón de Baile instructs partygoers to relate dancing to the color wheel. "The three most popular dances—foxtrot, rumba and swing—form the primary colors, and everything else falls in between," she says. At her midtown studio, Moore hosts group classes and "dance parties" where students practice dances, including swing, salsa and tango. These parties have taken on the moniker of

"practice parties," allowing students to tune-up their skills before showcasing them on a public dance floor.

After the Party

THANK THE HOSTESS

When you arrive, the hostess will likely be near the door to greet her guests. If things get choked up in the party's entrance, don't worry—Ramsey suggests finding the hostess at the first opportunity to thank her for her hospitality. Also, even if you are exhausted, it's important to catch the hostess on your way out to express your gratitude. Acknowledging her hard work will earn you a repeat invitation.

SEND A THANK YOU NOTE

In the age of tweets and texts, there is always room for the classic thank-you note. Don't dismiss an old-fashioned card as too analog. When writing your thank-you, let your hostess know how much you enjoyed the party, and mention a specific detail or two to avoid a cookie-cutter approach. "Partygoers send a thank-you note these days," Ramsey says. Many sources, both local and online, provide darling paper products that make the process a little less arduous. Consider personal monogrammed stationery custom-designed by Savannah's own Emma J Design. Ramsey also suggests writing the note immediately and not procrastinating so this important step isn't forgotten.



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