

Information Leaflet for the Marrying Parties



Foreword

Congratulations on your decision to enter a new stage of your life.

This information leaflet is issued by the Registrar of Marriages¹ (“Registrar”) for free. It tells you what you have to do and note if you decide to have your marriage celebrated by a civil celebrant of marriages (“civil celebrant”). You are advised to read through the contents to ensure smooth arrangements for your marriage ceremony.

Fixing time and venue

- A marriage can be celebrated by a civil celebrant at any time of the day.
- The venue must be in Hong Kong. It must not be a place of worship licensed under the Marriage Ordinance or a marriage registry. It must be a place where marriages can be lawfully celebrated. If you are in doubt, please contact the owner or the responsible person / organisation of the venue.
- The stipulated procedures in the Ordinance shall form part of the ceremony. The form of the ceremony must not prejudice the solemnity of marriage. It must allow parties to make clear, audible statement when required to do so under the Ordinance.

Engaging a civil celebrant

- Only practising solicitors and notaries public who meet certain statutory criteria may be appointed as civil celebrants. A validly appointed civil celebrant will be able to show you proof of his appointment.
- For information on the up-dated list of civil celebrants, please visit the following websites:

Hong Kong Immigration Department
The Law Society of Hong Kong
Hong Kong Society of Notaries

<http://www.immd.gov.hk>
<http://www.hklawsoc.org.hk>
<http://www.notaries.org.hk>

You may also call the Information and Liaison Section of the Hong Kong Immigration Department at (852) 2824 6111, by fax at (852) 2877 7711 or by E-mail: enquiry@immd.gov.hk.

Giving of notice of intended marriage to a civil celebrant

You should inform your chosen civil celebrant of your plans for the marriage within the 3 months before the proposed date of marriage. You should discuss with your civil celebrant the appropriate time to give notice, bearing in mind that sufficient time should be allowed for the civil celebrant to handle and transmit the

¹ The Director of Immigration has been appointed by the Chief Executive as the Registrar of Marriages.

notice and other documents to the Registrar and for the Registrar to process and exhibit the notice in his office for at least 15 clear days and to issue the Certificate of Registrar of Marriages.

Step-by-step guide

Before wedding

- Step 1 : Meet the civil celebrant to provide information required by him.
- Step 2 : Agree on the fee to be charged by the civil celebrant for his service. Under the Code of Practice for Civil Celebrants of Marriages, the civil celebrant must provide you with a written notice of the fees to be charged. Charging more than the agreed fee is prohibited by the said Code.
- Step 3 : Complete a notice of intended marriage and present your Hong Kong identity cards or travel documents and other supporting documents with copies of these documents to the civil celebrant. If a party is under the age of 21 and a consent to the marriage is required under the Marriage Ordinance, the person giving the consent must also meet the civil celebrant.
- Step 4 : You or your future spouse has to make an affidavit stating that you know of no legal reason why you cannot marry before the civil celebrant.
- Step 5 : You will have to pay to the Government a fee for filing and exhibition of the notice of intended marriage. The fee will be collected by the civil celebrant on behalf of the Government. An official receipt will be issued by the Government after the civil celebrant has transmitted the fee to the Registrar. You may choose to file the notice of intended marriage directly to the Registrar or through the civil celebrant.
- Step 6 : Before the wedding date, you will receive the Certificate of Registrar of Marriages from the civil celebrant indicating that the marriage is allowed to proceed.
- Step 7 : Arrange for an interpreter to attend the marriage ceremony if any party to the marriage speaks neither Chinese nor English.

On the day before the wedding

- Step 8 : Arrange with the civil celebrant to check the accuracy of the information on the marriage certificate and reconfirm the details of the ceremony. Make sure he can turn up.

- Step 9** : Make sure 2 witnesses who have attained the age of 18 will attend the wedding ceremony. If an interpreter is needed (see Step 7), remind him to attend.

On the wedding day

- Step 10** : Bring your Hong Kong identity cards or travel documents and the Certificate of Registrar of Marriages.
- Step 11** : Make and sign a declaration in front of the civil celebrant before the ceremony begins.
- Step 12** : Ceremony begins. Make the statement of willingness to marry at the instruction of the civil celebrant.
- Step 13** : The parties, witnesses and civil celebrant sign the marriage certificate.
- Step 14** : Receive the marriage certificate from the civil celebrant.

Commonly Asked Questions

- Q.** Should I engage a civil celebrant before the 3 months preceding the date of marriage?
- A.** You can. But as the notice of intended marriage must be filed during the 3 months preceding the date of marriage, engaging a civil celebrant too early means you have to attend his office one more time.
- Q.** Can I change the venue after giving the notice of intended marriage?
- A.** Yes, but see the part on “Fixing time and venue”.
- Q.** Can I change the date of marriage after filing the notice of intended marriage?
- A.** Yes, but the new date must not be within the 15 days after the date of the notice. It must also be not later than the 3 months after the date of the notice. If you cannot get married within the 3 months after the date of the notice and have to fix a later date of marriage, you must file another notice of intended marriage and start the procedure afresh. Please ensure that a certificate of Registrar of Marriages is issued by the Registrar before the marriage ceremony.
- Q.** Can I change the civil celebrant?
- A.** Yes. You can engage one civil celebrant to handle the pre-celebration procedure and another to conduct the ceremony. That is why you have to keep the Certificate of Registrar of Marriages in safe custody. The new civil celebrant needs to check the Certificate to ensure that the Registrar has allowed the marriage to proceed.

Your civil celebrant may be prevented from conducting the ceremony for reasons beyond his control. Discuss with your civil celebrant beforehand on whether a back-up is required.

- Q. What if the standard of service of the civil celebrant is not satisfactory?
- A. Your civil celebrant is obliged to let you have a copy of the Code of Practice for Civil Celebrants of Marriages free of charge. The Code provides practical guidance in respect of professional conduct of civil celebrants. If you are not satisfied with the performance of your civil celebrant, you may complain to the Registrar and, depending on the profession of the civil celebrant, The Law Society of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Society of Notaries.

If you wish to lodge a complaint against the civil celebrant to the Registrar, you should write to the Chief Immigration Officer (Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration) Support, at Room 1501, Immigration Tower, 7 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

In case a complaint is lodged to either of the professional bodies, you should:

- > Write to The Law Society of Hong Kong at 3rd Floor, Wing On House, 71 Des Voeux Road, Central, Hong Kong; or
- > Write to the Hong Kong Society of Notaries at Room 2604, Bank of America Tower, 12 Harcourt Road, Central, Hong Kong.

- Q. How much should I pay the civil celebrant?
- A. The law makes no provision as regards the fee charged by civil celebrants. It is entirely for you and your civil celebrant to agree how and when you pay. Under the Code of Practice for Civil Celebrants of Marriages, he must let you have a written notice of how much he is going to charge before agreeing to act for you.

Further enquiries

For further enquiries, please contact the Information and Liaison Section of the Hong Kong Immigration Department at (852) 2824 6111; by fax at (852) 2877 7711 or by E-mail: enquiry@immd.gov.hk.

Registrar of Marriages
Hong Kong