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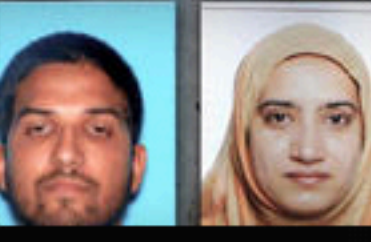
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By VINITA NAIR / CBS NEWS / June 6, 2015, 8:06 PM

U.S. hotels hope to cash in on lavish Indian weddings

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WASHINGTON -- June has long been the most popular month of the year for weddings.

But with the Asian Indian population now one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in America, venues that have the capacity to host Indian weddings are starting to do some big business.

From brides on rickshaws to Vegas-style floor shows, Indian weddings are part celebration, part spectacle -- and very, very big.

"For us, an average Indian wedding is spending \$300,000 to \$400,000," says Ani Sandhu, whose company planned a recent event at the Ritz Carlton Tyson's Corner in Washington, D.C. He says with both sets of parents paying and a minimum of 250 guests, the money adds up fast.

"Any business wants to get a piece of that, especially hotels," Sandhu says.



Hundreds of guests attend a wedding celebration at the Ritz Carlton Tyson's Corner in Washington, D.C. / CBS NEWS

Major Washington hotels, including the Ritz Carlton and Four Seasons, are actively trying to woo Indian couples. The Willard Intercontinental even has a designated path for grooms to arrive by horse.

"As we see the rise in that population and the spending power, it's something you can't ignore," says Apoorva Gandhi, the vice president of multicultural affairs for Marriott International. In the past three years, his D.C. area hotels have hosted 415 Indian weddings, bringing in \$12 million in revenue.

"Everyone wants to keep up with the Joneses, or as we say, the Patels," Gandhi jokes.

Marriott has gone so far as to institute an Indian Culture Day: a crash course on South Asian traditions, food and fashion for hospitality staff.

Neel Patel and Nisha Kumar, say experience was one of the reasons they chose a Marriott property for their upcoming wedding.

"I was surprised there were places here that knew exactly what they were doing," Patel says.

"An Indian wedding the groom has a procession outside," Kumar explains. "Is that allowed? Not allowed? Open flame, you need that permit."

In addition to space for hundreds of guests, hotels need to know what animals are allowed in their jurisdiction. Elephants have been banned in some places but are still allowed in Maryland, D.C. and Virginia.


"Rarely do you have a small Indian wedding," Patel says. "So when you find a venue that is capable of doing this kind of stuff, it actually benefits both sides."

And with the events priced per person, as far the hotels are concerned, the more, the merrier.

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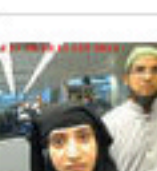
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