



The Ins and Outs of Special Events

by Pamela Murray

“Tell me what you'd like to do!” says Parke, a member of the Special Events team. “If you do something fun and think it would make a great event for SEA, take a second to grab a name card or brochure and pass it along. There's so many amazing things to do out there—if you want an event, chances are we can make it happen!”

This was one of the responses I got when I started asking questions of the folks who bring us dozens of diverse events every season. The range and scope of the Special Events' work is as interesting as it is expansive. Here's a little of what I learned.

How are special events found/initiated?

- Requests and recommendations from members
- Initiated by vendors and tour guides
- Committee members brainstorm to develop events
- Past events that were popular get repeated – but only once a year, unless an event has a waiting list.

What are the different kinds of events?

- Walks
- Museum visits
- Talks
(Chinese culture, art, books, travel)

- Shopping
(street corners, outlet trips, market tours)
- Documentary screenings
- Cooking classes
- Tastings (wine, beer, tea, chocolate)
- Art/craft/jewelry classes
- Spa days
- Athletic
(workout classes, sailing, bike tours, Tai Chi, Nia)
- Food tours
- Luncheons

What steps should members take to ensure a successful registration?

- Check your own calendar before registering for an event. Please verify that you are free to attend before you sign up so you don't have to turn around and cancel.
- Your registration needs to be by email. Not a text, and not a WeChat. Send an email to events@seashanghai.org (Luncheons at lunch@seashanghai.org).
- Include your membership number (this is the most important!), your phone number, and your WeChat ID. Our registration coordinator verifies that each membership ID is accurate – without this, we can't register you for an event. Your phone number and WeChat ID are used for any last-minute communications. If an event is cancelled, or has a plan change, we want to be sure you get the message!
- If you are signing up for more than just yourself, please be sure to include the number of additional participants in your registration email. Our guides need exact counts.
- Please be patient after you send that registration email. We WILL get back to you. If it's been more than 2-3 days, then feel free to send a follow-up email, but otherwise, please be patient. The registration coordinator gets hundreds of emails a month—and answers every one of them.
- Be aware, if you cancel after the cancellation date, no matter the reason, you will be charged. This is a necessary policy to keep costs down for all members. Please be respectful and pay for the events you miss by contacting the day-of coordinator listed on the website for that event.
- The procedure on how to handle the waitlist for events is changing end of February. Henceforth, when members send a registration request email for an event that has already reached capacity, they will receive an email telling them that the event is full, and asking if they'd like to be on the waiting list. If cancellations occur, everyone on the waiting list will be notified (at the same time) of the participation opportunity. At that point, vacancies will be filled on a first-come, first-serve basis as members respond to the registration coordinator.

What can participating members do to make their special event proceed smoothly?

- Check the updated information about the event on the SEA website prior to contacting the coordinator with questions
- Bring CASH unless otherwise instructed, and exact change is ALWAYS appreciated.
- Plan your travel ahead. Try hard to be on time. Let the coordinator know if you will be late as we will be waiting for you.
- If you must cancel, do so via email. If you are

cancelling within 24 hours of the event, please ALSO inform the day-of coordinator listed on the website.

- Stay with the group on tours – please don't wander off.
- Pay attention. When a guide or instructor is talking, please don't talk over them. Even if you aren't interested, your fellow participants probably are.



What are the various roles within the Special Events Committee?

- Vendor Coordinator
 - Works with the vendor/tour guide to set up the event. This involves agreeing on all the parameters: content of the event, date, time, cost, minimum and maximum participants, and description of the event (the write-up for the Courier and SEA website), and providing high resolution pictures to the Courier.
 - Works with the chairperson to make sure the event is scheduled properly.
- Registration Coordinator
 - Receives registration requests from members and responds in a timely manner – generally within 48 hours. Compiles event participant list, including each member's SEA membership number, WeChat ID, and phone number.
 - Verifies membership data with the Membership Committee
 - On the cancellation date listed for each event, confirms membership participation with the vendor. Once an event is confirmed, cancellation fees are assessed: this is why we charge for all late cancellations and day-of no-shows.
- Write-up Coordinator
 - Collects event write-ups and ensures they are written consistent with the Courier guidelines. Delivers write-ups and pictures to the Courier editors. Then, ensures the web write-ups conform to the website format, and delivers these to the webmaster on an ongoing basis.

- Webmaster
 - While not officially a member of the Special Events committee, the webmaster is integral to its success. In addition to posting new events in the online Events Calendar, the webmaster updates existing posts to keep all the information current.
- Day-of Coordinator
 - Prior to the event, the day-of coordinator may create a WeChat group of participating members for communication purposes – such as to clear up any questions before the event, to share pictures during and after the event, and for follow-up questions and comments. Some guides will also share bonus information in the WeChat groups.

The WeChat group is **NOT** to be used for cancelling your participation. Send an email to events@seashanghai.org, and if you need to cancel on the day of an event, **ALSO** contact the day-of coordinator, whose cell phone number is listed in the event write-up on the website.

- On the day of the event, the day-of coordinator arrives early, manages the participation list and CASH payment by the members. We ask that members pay with exact change if possible, but day-of coordinators try to have change available just in case.
- Pays tour guide/venue
- Takes pictures at the event and forwards these to the webmaster
- Pays for no-shows and late cancellations out of their own pocket. They are later reimbursed by SEA, and ideally by the member who cancelled late. After the event, the day-of coordinator collects from those who owe for events they missed.
- The day-of coordinator assists the guide and members in myriad ways. This may mean guiding lost members to the meeting point, walking at the back of the pack to keep straggling tour members together, and trying to keep active participation going during an event. Other tasks include buying tickets, assisting in cooking, supplying first aid items (Band-Aids, Tylenol, hand sanitizer, extra umbrellas), and whatever else is needed.
- Provides feedback to the committee such as no-shows, issues with guides, etc.
- Chairperson
 - Calendaring – One of the most important tasks of the chairperson is to fill the master event calendar following the “rules”. Events are spaced out (walks a few days apart, tastings a few days apart, crafting a few days apart), for the sake of members interested in that category. Events are also scheduled so they don’t overlap—one morning event, one afternoon event and possibly one evening event per day at most. Sometimes events do overlap,

like newcomer receptions or small events that can accommodate only a few people, but in general, events are scheduled so that members can attend multiple events. The Special Events calendar is also coordinated with the Day Trip and Travel committees for maximum participation. Events are only repeated once a year, unless there’s a waiting list.

- Budget issues – the chairperson makes sure that guides are paid for members who miss an event. This usually means reimbursing the day-of coordinators, and helping to track and collect money from members who missed events. Other responsibilities include dealing with deposits for large events, and tracking for pre-pay events.
- Supports the committee members and leads committee meetings.
- Fields questions from the members, collects and responds to feedback.
- Responds to potential vendors who solicit information.
- Currently, working to redesign and streamline the processes used internally.

What are the rewards of being a special events coordinator?

- From Jenn
 - You get a built-in friend group. This goes for attending events as well as volunteering on the team. You’ll find people who like what you like, and you’ll enjoy the camaraderie as you learn and experience together.
 - A sense of team work and accomplishment. It’s really rewarding when an event you plan is well received. It’s like having a successful party!
- From Beth
 - I really love the events when we get to talk to the local people and the best way is via the guided walks and day trips. We learn about the city and we get to see behind the curtain, venturing into neighborhoods and even homes. It hits me every time that we are really all the same and want the same things for our families and our countries. When our guides chat with the people, they are always so welcoming and lovely, even though most of them have so very little.
- From Parke
 - Being on the Special Events committee has been an amazing way to connect with this dynamic city. I learn so much from my co-committee members who have interests and passions that are different from mine. I love getting to know the city through their eyes and discovering things that I never would have done on my own.
- From Jade
 - Since 2002 when I joined the SEA Special Events team, my expat life has changed forever! We have explored so much together, from creating new

themes such as talks and lectures about all kinds of Chinese culture (tea ceremony, art, opera, food, and traditional fashion), to exploring current fashion by inviting experts and designer brands to tell their stories, and sharing wonderful salon shows and cat walks with our gorgeous members.

- Being the first to discover a new and interesting venue can be challenging, but I love finding unique sites for our SEA luncheons. This mega city of thousands of well-run restaurants offers a wide variety of international cuisines, and SEA has an excellent reputation everywhere in Shanghai. We are well received and welcomed at many stellar venues on the Bund and Lujiazui with our special “members only” request. It is also an enrichment to me to get to know the intricacies of the fine dining business in Shanghai. Keeping the SEA Luncheons extravagant and special for our SEA members is my mission.

Do coordinators have their specialties?

- Some do! Beth handles most of our craft-related classes, and she’s our adventurous planner. She’s always willing to find a new thing to do and to make it work. Parke does most of the wine events. Christa handles a lot of the beer events. Besides being chairperson and registration coordinator, Jenn does most of the cooking classes and spa days. Besides being our write-up coordinator, Natalie is becoming our Chinese culture expert. Vicki and Kateryna do most of the health and wellness events. Jade is our secret asset—queen of luncheons, fashion, and all things posh.



Please see the expanded website article for the answers to these burning questions:

- Why can't I pay for events with WeChat Pay?
- Can I register for an event after the last registration date?
- I have visitors coming from out of town; can I sign them up for SEA events?
- How about my friends who live in Shanghai?
- Are any events listed on the website that are not printed in the Courier?
- What's this new initiative involving WeChat special interest groups?

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Q. Why can't I pay for events with WeChat Pay?

- The biggest reason we can only accept cash for our events is that Special Event coordinators would need to use their personal WeChat accounts to accept the funds, and there are monetary limitations on WeChat. This can be the monthly limitation, or the annual limitation (20,000 RMB a month and 200,000 RMB annually). Additionally, banks have further imitations. Another reason is that a lot of our vendors only accept cash payments, so that means Day-of Coordinators would need to bring a lot of personal cash to the event to cover for anyone paying with WeChat.
- A few vendors do accept WeChat, and if that's the case, we will definitely let you know. Otherwise, bring CASH—exact change—if possible.

Q. Can I register for an event after the last registration date?

- Yes, you can. Sometimes there is space and a guide is flexible. Other times it's not possible. Be aware that if you send an email inquiring about an event after the registration date, if there is room, you will be registered and you WILL be responsible for the cancellation fee. Please monitor your email, as it's problematic to communicate to the vendor coordinator, day-of coordinator, and vendor to ensure a member can be added, only to have the member fail to attend because they didn't check their email or something else came up. We love to help members attend events, but please be respectful of the time that is put into the process (especially for last minute additions).

Q. I have visitors coming from out of town. Can I sign them up for SEA events?

- We love out-of-town guests. Just let us know when you send your registration email.

Q. How about my friends who live in Shanghai?

- Your friends who live in Shanghai are welcome to join SEA and attend events as members.

Q. Are any Special Events listed on the website that are not printed in the Courier?

- Yes! There are always a lot of events on the website that are not in the Courier. We'd like to display all events in both locations, but when timelines don't allow, these items are posted directly to the website.

Q. What's this new initiative involving WeChat special interest groups?

- One thing we're trying is SEA special interest groups in WeChat. If you love cooking classes, we have a group for that. You like doing tastings? We have a group for that! We've been working to add new groups as people show interest. The main goal is to communicate upcoming events that we have in those categories, or last minute openings in an event. If you'd like to be added, mention it to the Day-of coordinator at an event you attend, or send an email to events@seashanghai.org.