

Just like your wedding day, where you would desire everything to be perfect, the birth of your baby also calls for a celebration of sorts and every parent would want their impending journey into parenthood to go according to plan. Especially for first-time mums and dads, there will be no more grappling with the shocking transition into parenthood while juggling the crying baby and living in a constantly emotionally drained state. Now, all this is possible thanks to the existence of baby planners.

Founder, CEO and Co-President of US-based International Academy of Baby Planner Professionals or IABPP (www.iabpp.com), Mary Oscategui, defines a baby planner as “a maternity consultant that meets with expecting or new families to provide support, education and resources to satisfy their needs in a non-biased fashion.”

“Baby planners typically tailor their services to suit their clients’ specific lifestyle needs and help them determine the types of services and products that are

essential throughout their journey into parenthood,” adds Oscategui. Furthermore, a baby planner also has a commitment to empowering their clients by showing them all their many options during pre-conception, pregnancy and beyond, which encompasses the various birthing options, co-sleeping, health, fitness, nutrition, eco living, safety, budgeting, product navigation, baby shower preparation, baby registries and much more, she explains.

Duties and Bounds

Anyone who is passionate about working with pre-conceiving, expecting and new families, and has a love for education, learning and growth have the typical traits that are sought after in a baby planner. Oscategui goes on to share that the IABPP offers a credentialed certification training programme for those interested in embarking on a career as a baby planner. “To date, we have certified baby planners in France, Brazil, Bermuda, Argentina, Peru, Puerto Rico and Luxembourg and are currently working

with students in the UK and Hong Kong," she reveals.

If you are deciding whether or not to hire a baby planner, there are a few things that you should know about their duties and bounds. According to Oscategui, a baby planner does not diagnose, treat, examine or medically advise their clients. "Unless he or she holds an additional license or certification in a specific area of practice, a baby planner does not prescribe or attempt to perform for a client additional services that require advanced training," explain the IABPP's CEO. Some examples of such services that would normally require further training include exercise programmes, diets or nutritional programmes, baby proofing, car seat inspection, therapy, pre/postnatal massage, pre/postnatal yoga, personal training, doula services, midwifery and CPR.

However, Oscategui feels that most expectant parents would benefit from employing baby planners, simply because they will be able to share the load with an experienced professional. "A new parent has many decisions to make and most often they can feel overwhelmed and confused about what is most suitable to meet their unique needs," explains the CEO, adding, "As baby planners, we are able to provide them with all the options, education and support."

Some of the most common decisions that a baby planner might be faced with include: Should an OB-GYN or a midwife deliver my baby? What questions do I need to ask my care provider? Is a homebirth safe? How can I go green with a baby? Which childbirth class is best for me, Bradley, Lamaze or Hypnobirthing? How long should I breastfeed? How do I choose the best childcare? Do I need a doula? Which products are the safest for baby and I? How do I deal with problematic sleeping? Does it matter which car seat or stroller I choose? After some professional guidance from the baby planners, "ultimately, the parents will be able to make these kinds of decisions themselves," assures Oscategui.

The Local Context

Mother-of-three, Anita Salim, 35, wishes that there were such a service available when she was pregnant. "Because we were living in Singapore away from our families, who are all in Indonesia, we were really struggling trying to look after the babies and juggle work commitments at the same time," she recalls. "We really did not know what to expect when our first child was born, and wished so many times that there was someone who would be able to do all the 'thinking' and ease the decision making process for us," she adds.

"All mothers-to-be today are lucky as they are

pampered with all these baby planners," continues the mother-of-three. "So, I definitely recommend them to use one, especially if they are expecting their first child. While I've not experienced the services of a baby planner personally, but from what I've come to know through the media, is that they will definitely make the lives of parents-to-be a whole lot easier to handle," she foresees.

While it is not yet a common concept here in Singapore to hire baby planners, parents can now look forward to the island's first baby concierge service, courtesy of Thomson Medical Centre (TMC). Launched last year, the Thomson Baby Planner is a one-stop shop for your parenthood journey, says Amy Leong, General Manager at TMC's Thomson ParentCraft Centre. "By this definition, our service entails providing the solutions to help first-time parents-to-be navigate through the many choices and decisions they are confronted with as they embark on the journey to parenthood," she highlights.

The objective of the baby concierge service at TMC is to minimise the stress of parents by providing them with specially selected and tested mother and baby products and services, as well as to medically advise them on the care of mother and baby before and after delivery.

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As each family's needs are different, the solutions provided by the Thomson Baby Planner are specially tailored, which is very much in line with the virtues extolled by Oscategui. As Leong explains, "We conduct a Needs Assessment on the parents before recommending them any products or services. And we work according to their needs and their budget commitment."

Leong continues by saying that in today's modern society, with many couples living on their own and not in an extended family framework, they may lack the support and practical knowledge of what to do with the arrival of a newborn.

"With our Baby Planner service, all parents can get to know about how we can help them, as first-time parenthood can be stressful. We facilitate and offer much-needed advice to ensure their journey is a smooth one," she adds.

Based on the Needs Assessments conducted at the initial stage, the Thomson Baby Planners are then able to customise their products and services according to the individual couple's budget. A typical package can start from \$499. But Leong reveals that on average, its clients will spend around \$1800 on average due to the apparent value shown in the baby concierge's other services, on top of its startup ones.



The Wish List

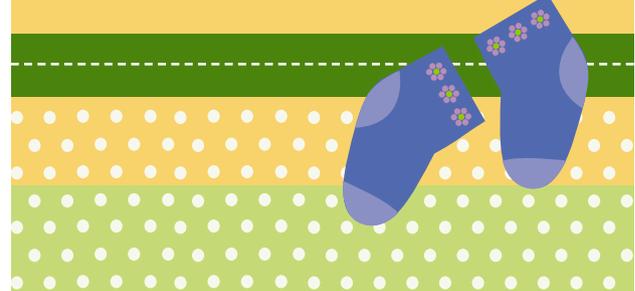
For Oscategui, some of her most recent jobs have included preparing expecting families to go green through her green-proofing services, which educate and prepare preconceiving, expecting mothers and their babies from unsafe exposure to potentially harmful substances in their home, body and environment.

On our shores, the Thomson Baby Planner's top list of requests from expectant parents includes the planning for the full-month birthday parties and mother and baby products. Next come the home visits, confinement nanny service, confinement food catering and photography. "Our infant care training is also popular. Here, we train the domestic helpers or grandparents on how to take care of the infant during confinement and when the mum needs to go back to work, as well as our weaning and baby

Top Planning Tips

Thomson Parentcraft Centre's General Manager, Leong, gives us five top tips on how parents can successfully plan for their baby's arrival.

- ❁ Parents are recommended to attend prenatal classes to learn what to expect and how to manage labour and the newborn.
- ❁ Plan and organise the nursery with all the essential baby products, such as baby cot, strollers, baby care products, etc, without overspending and ensuring the products are safe for the baby.
- ❁ Engage a confinement nanny early or ensure your caregivers are trained well on the care of newborn, such as bathing, feeding and burping.
- ❁ Mothers should pamper themselves with the latest maternity and nursing wear so they can look good and feel radiant while expecting and after the delivery.
- ❁ Last but not least, do not be afraid to ask for help and to engage professional services to ease the transition into parenthood.



massage workshops for after delivery," shares Leong.

While the majority of clients for both Oscategui and the Thomson Baby Planner is first-time parents, they do get some clients who are having their second or third babies, "especially when there is a gap between the first and the second or subsequent ones," says Leong, adding that in these cases, "the parents usually need a refresher course on how to breastfeed and care for a newborn all over again. They will also need advice on the latest mother and baby products as well."

However, Leong reveals that the main driving force behind the Thomson Baby Planner remain first-time parents-to-be as she believes the baby concierge service is able to "help them with its medical-based education courses and programmes, as well as strategic tie-ups with its partners, providing clients with the most suitable, value-for-money services." **m**