

BodyRaq

Belly Dance with Anna

Finding and Preparing Your First Belly Dance Costume

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Buying Guide

First Thing - Take Your Measurements

Using a tailor's measuring tape (available at any fabric store) with your outer clothes off, measure around your rib cage under your breasts, upper hip (just above your hip bones), lower hip (around the fullest part of your bottom), and length (from upper hip to top of toes). Write these down and keep them handy when you are shopping. Include your bra cup size too. Many belly dance costume stores will give you the measurement ranges of the costumes they have for sale. Use your measurements as a guide to help you find a costume that, with a little alteration, will fit you.

Do Some Research and Find The Style You Want

Belly dance costumes are investments. See what the going rates are for various costumes. Google "belly dance costumes" and you will find lots of places that sell costumes. Visit lots of websites and see what's out there:

Most costumes come in three basic styles:

- 1) Bra & Belt with a skirt and/or pants
- 2) Bra/Top with a skirt or pants
- 3) Dress (This is a good option if you want more coverage than the other styles or your audience is more conservative)

Accessories are an important part of the costume. Some manufactured costumes come with one or more of the following items: neck bands, gauntlet style arms bands, wrist bands, upper/lower arm cuffs, ankle cuffs, and head bands. Glamorous or tribal jewelry, like necklaces, rings, and bracelet, may also be worn.

You Get What You Pay For

Beware of Cheap Costumes! Online auctions like EBay and local "world goods" shops have a lot of "harem girl", cheap tops/hip scarves, Indian clothing they call belly dancing costumes that are not designed or made to hold up to dance performance. These items are frequently, but not always, made and shipped from China or India. These items usually consist of cheap fabric, poor workmanship, and come one-size-fits-most. As a general guideline, lower-end or used costumes typically start at around \$100. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Better costumes start around \$200. Higher quality costumes start around \$400. Top designer costumes start around \$600.

Be Safe - Buy In The US

Today, using the internet, dancers can buy costumes from anywhere in the world. This is wonderful for those of us that are familiar with belly dance costuming, but it can be a pit of snakes for newer dancers that do not know what to look for. Since you are probably new to costuming, I would recommend buying costumes from retailers located within the US until you have more experience buying costumes. This lessens the chances of you buying poorly made stuff from overseas. It is also easier to inquire about a costume you are thinking about purchasing. Shipping won't take as long and returns will be much easier.

Here are a few links of US-based dealers where reasonably priced costumes may be purchased. They also give you an idea of what is out there:

<http://www.moondancebellydance.com/>
<http://www.bellydancestore.biz>
<http://www.lrosedesigns.com>

Expect To Modify Your Costume Purchases

Most ready-made costumes will need to be altered in some way to fit you. Most alterations consist of moving or adding hooks on bra strap or bra, adding or releasing elastic on skirts, or hemming. Order early and alter ASAP to prevent the frustration of last minute costume fittings. Most costume alterations are simple and can be done by you or by a wedding dress specialist. A good pair of fabric scissors, needle, thread, and little creativity will work most of the time.

Know the Vendors Return/Exchange Policy

Many places take returns, as long as the item is in its original condition. Some retailers don't take returns or exchanges. Know their policies, return deadlines, seller/buyer expectations before you buy.

Miscellaneous Costume Tips:

- 1) Make sure the costume you buy is not see-through and has enough structural integrity to hold up to the demands of dancing. Newer dancers are often surprised that real belly dance costume are built like tanks. Everything is strong, firm, and often heavy. These are signs of quality in the belly dance world. Check every seam, strap, hook, and zipper - that they are all in good shape, are strong, and work properly.
- 2) Test every costume by dancing in it. Check that your skirt is not flaring up too high, you may need to wear harem pants or something under it to avoid someone seeing something they should not. See that any slits on your costume do not reveal too much. Make sure you feel comfortable in it and that your body (and body parts) are staying in place within the costume. Sometimes costume parts or accessories shift while you wear them. Be aware of this, so you can secure/pin, alter to better fit, or fix "shifty" items before you go on stage.
- 3) What you wear under your costume is just as important. Invest in a pair of opaque low-rise flesh toned (or in a color to match your costume) boy short underwear that do not rise up. Thongs tend to find a way of peeking out and should you fall or show this area by accident, you would rather the audience know you have on something, than nothing. NEVER GO WITHOUT UNDERWEAR.
- 4) Use safety pins to insure everything stays in place. To hold your underwear or skirt in place and to secure your belt or hip scarf to your skirt.
- 5) It is strongly recommended that you sew in an extra eye and hook on the bottom bra strap to add extra "security". You don't want your bra and/or belt to pop off during a show. Also check that your bra straps are securely sown or reinforced by stronger hooks, than are provided with some costumes. Be safe, not sorry. Eyes & hooks and similar items may be purchased at any fabric store.
- 6) Use fashion (double-sided) tape to keep your "girls" in your costume (if you are worried about them)
- 7) Be sure your skirt, pants, dress, or costume "cut-outs" are not too sheer or too revealing, to the point of distracting your audience. If it is, wear another more opaque skirt or pants under it. You can sew-opaque fabric into cut-outs to cover them up. If people think they may catch a glimpse of "you", they will not be paying attention to your beautiful dancing!
- 8) When buying other than perfectly fitting costumes, go a little bigger and longer, rather than smaller and shorter. You can always stuff your bra. Boob spillage is much harder to fix. You can always overlap or shorten. It's much harder to extend or lengthen. Buy tops that are your size or bigger, NEVER smaller.

9) Worried about your tummy hanging or uneven tummy skin while wearing two piece costumes? Consider wearing a body stocking. Not because there is anything wrong with you, but because it prevents distracting your audience with your tummy -- people can be kind of weird about that stuff. A cheap way to make them is to get tights or panty hose (Sheer Energy and most exercise/dance tights don't run if you simply cut them), cut the top off right at the crotch so you have a legless tube (throw away the legs) and sew the leg edge of the panty hose tube to a pair of bikini underwear with a zigzag stitch so it stretches. When you want to wear it just pull it on like it is extra tall underwear and pin it through the waistband to the inside of your top/costume bra. There are lots of colors and patterns available to try, including fishnet and specialty stockings, but some of the specialty ones are more prone to running. (Tip provided by Saqra. She has lots more tips on www.saqra.net)

3 Performance Must-Haves:

a) A cover-up - Usually a robe or outer garment you wear over your costume while you are in costume, but not performing. A veil may also be used as a "cover-up". You want to maintain your mystic by concealing your costume until you reveal it on stage. Go to Ross, they always have great, fun robes for under \$10.

b) Make-up - Stage-appropriate make-up must be worn for every performance to enhance your onstage persona and to ensure your audience can see your facial features under various performance lighting conditions. Search YouTube for "Arabic eye makeup" and you can see tons of great tutorials of looks that will work for performance.

c) Hair - Your hair should always look "made-up" for every performance. This could mean flat ironing, curling, rolling, teasing or applying a hair piece, like a long pony tail or wig.

For more information visit www.BodyRaq.net or www.RaqsAnna.com