George Clooney, Amal Alamuddin and Famous Guests Kick Off Wedding Festivities in Venice

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Here come the bride and groom!

George Clooney and Amal Alamuddin made a splash upon their arrival in Venice on Friday. The couple hopped aboard one of the city's water taxis – fittingly named Amore – to arrive at the famed Belmond Hotel Cipriani, where they were hosting a small welcome gathering for friends attending their upcoming wedding.

Also taking water taxis for the glamorous festivities: Cindy Crawford and her husband Rande Gerber (the latter of whom has already made sure the celebrations will be well-stocked with tequila) and Matt Damon and his wife, Luciana.

A bar hall at the Cipriani was set aside for the welcome celebration, where Alamuddin, in a striped silk Dolce & Gabbana dress, and Clooney mingled with guests as they sipped Champagne and Bellinis. On Thursday gardeners at the hotel planted hundreds of white and pink Cyclamen blooms.

Other guests spotted arriving in Venice for the wedding include Clooney's close friends, actors John Krasinski, Emily Blunt, Richard Kind and Ellen Barkin; his producing partner, Grant Heslov; and his cousin, NCIS: Los Angeles actor Miguel Ferrer, who RSVP'd very early.

Some family members started celebrating even earlier: Amal's sister, Tala, was spotted dining with a small group of fellow wedding revelers at local restaurant Da Ivo, a longtime Clooney favorite, on Thursday night, followed by drinks at the Cipriani.

The wedding is already the talk of the town in Venice, a city used to famous visitors (Clooney is a regular at the annual film festival). "Ever since he admitted he would be marrying in Venice a few weeks ago, everyone wants to be in on it," says local Liliana Sermonetta. "Where are they staying, what are they eating, will they take a gondola ride? It'll be difficult for Clooney to outdo Salma Hayek and François-Henri Pinault's wedding. The whole of Hollywood moved here for three days!"

The local government announced that the streets near the foot of the famous Rialto Bridge, in front of Ca'Farsetti, the town hall, are closed on Monday between 12 and 2 p.m. for Clooney's wedding – likely for a civil ceremony following the weekend celebrations.

But potential gondola gridlock aside, Venetians are happy to host the famous couple. "We are glad that George chose our beautiful city to finally tie the knot," says waiter Giorgio Valli. "We wish him a long and happy marriage to his beautiful wife."