

GETTING MARRIED ABROAD

More and more British couples are tying the knot in *faraway* places. Our five-page guide will help you decide whether to follow suit – *and how*



ADVICE FOR JET-SETTING COUPLES

Early warning!

Once you've decided on the 'where' and 'when', send out 'save the date' cards so that your friends and family can start budgeting for, and planning, their trips. A year's notice is good!

Don't be a travel agent

Book your flights and hotel as a package or you might be in for an expensive surprise when it comes to separate airfares and hotel availability.

Always have back-up

Make sure you pack all the original copies of your legal documents – you can't get married without them.

Pack smart

You can't carry your dress in hand luggage, so invest in a hard case and seal your gown in plastic. Pack a steam iron and, on arrival, hang your dress in a steamy bathroom to reduce creasing.

Get covered!

Take out an insurance policy. AXA (axa.co.uk) covers everything from your wedding outfits and rings to wedding gifts. ►



THE VOW FACTOR

Picking a *country* is just the start. Organising a WEDDING ABROAD is *all about the paperwork*, says Leo Bear (who married in France)

Getting married abroad is no longer the domain of celebrities. ‘Destination weddings’ are becoming more and more popular with UK couples for many reasons, most importantly good weather and relatively low costs. The average cost of a wedding here is approaching the £20,000 mark, but marry in Greece, say, and you’re looking at £700 for a simple ceremony and around £7,000 for a bells-and-whistles do for 80 guests.

However, be warned: you should think very carefully before trying to organise a foreign wedding yourself, as Jane Stuart-Palikira discovered

“We needed a certificate from the village doctor proving we didn’t have a rare cats’ disease”

when she married in Greece some years ago. ‘Even having a Greek fiancé didn’t help,’ she says. ‘It was a nightmare. You never get good rates negotiating for yourself and the stress is huge. I kept wishing I had someone to do it for me.’ Jane’s experiences inspired her to set up a wedding planning firm, Ionian Weddings, with husband Andreas.

‘You have to look out for so much,’ agrees Clare Raynor, a wedding specialist at Thomas Cook. ‘The weather, the documentation, the difference between what’s included

in various hotel packages. There’s much less stress if so much is being looked after by a specialist.’

If you have the right back-up, the only drawback to tying the knot overseas is the extra paperwork. You will need to provide numerous documents to the authorities in the country of your choice. Make sure you allow plenty of time, as you’ll need the originals, and often these will need translating. For my marriage in France, we even needed a signed paper from the village doctor stating that neither of us were carrying toxoplasmosis – a rare disease transferred by cats. There is

also more than likely to be a minimum residency period that you need to be in the country for before the marriage can take place.

If you choose to marry in a hotel or resort, wedding advisors will be able to tell you what documentation is necessary and how long you need to be in the country beforehand, but always check with the consulate or embassy of your chosen country in the UK, to make sure that everything is legal. You wouldn’t want to fly home blissfully relaxed to find out that you’re not actually married...



Georgina Reason & Rob Smart



Nicola Brown & Simon Vaughan



Leo Bear & Charlie Campbell

REAL LIFE WEDDINGS ABROAD

Leo Bear & Charlie Campbell

‘We got married in a tiny village in central France last December. Before the big day, we needed to take several trips over to France to go over paperwork with a French lawyer and to make arrangements at the village mairie (town hall). The British Embassy in Paris was really helpful although costs did add up because we had to pay translation fees (around €500 in total). The ceremony took place in the mairie, then for our reception we used local caterers for a four-course meal for 90 at my parents’ home. We served warm potato pie, wild boar with stuffed artichoke hearts and, of course, wonderful French cheeses. Instead of a traditional tiered wedding cake, we chose the classic French *croquembouche* – towers of delicious caramelised profiteroles. They were prepared by a local pâtisserie and delivered refrigerated on the dot of 9pm. Our caterers charged about 15 euros per head for three courses! The candle-lit ceremony was in French so we had a friend translating, which was great fun – and the party rocked till dawn because we had no licensing or noise restrictions to adhere to. The only

surprise was, we didn’t anticipate Christian Lacroix being in town for an exhibition the same weekend! Luckily there was plenty of room as it was low season. Some of our guests even ended up partying with him in their hotel lobby.’

Georgina Reason & Rob Smart

Georgina and Rob got married in August 2007 in Castillo del Buen Amor, outside Madrid (buenamor.net). ‘We didn’t want to “compete” with all our friends getting married in England,’ says Georgina. ‘We wanted the day to be about us, not about people comparing brands of champagne. We both love Spain and speak a bit of Spanish, so it was an obvious choice. Unfortunately, the management at the castle changed half way through the planning stage and we had to start from scratch, which was quite stressful, but worth it in the end.’ Georgina and Rob added traditional Spanish touches to their big day, including Jamón Ibérico – delicious local ham. They even chose their own pig. ‘We felt like we saw a bit of the real Spain, and we ended up paying about half of what we would have in England for the food and

wine. But the very best thing about marrying in Spain was the weather!’

Nicola Brown & Simon Vaughan

Nicola and Simon married in South Africa in February 2008. ‘The venue was Bontevlei Farm, on the Cape near Stellenbosch (roulou@mhws.co.za), but you won’t find it on the net,’ says Nicola. ‘It was left to us to organise as the owner proved tricky to track down! I was lucky to have family in nearby Somerset West who helped pull the day together – none of the tablecloths and napkins matched so we had to hire the day before, and at 2pm on the day of the wedding my father and Simon were polishing the wine glasses! But it was a stunning venue, and very good value. We went shopping in the winelands for booze, and had amazing food by a small firm called Lemon Tree Occasions (chris.e@iafrica.com): seafood and game such as warthog, kudu, impala and ostrich. Indigenous flowers gave it a South African touch (paradiso@telkomsa.net) and our photographer and videographer (sarahwood@absamail.co.za and jonty@idodigital.co.za) were stars. The whole thing, for 40 guests and two weeks’ accommodation, came to under £4,000.’ ▶

SIX FOREIGN WEDDING SPECIALISTS

Anatolian Sky
Specialises in Turkey and North Cyprus (0845 365 1011; anatoliansky.co.uk)

Ionian Weddings
Organises weddings in the Greek islands, in partnership with Greek Islands Club (020 8232 9780; ionianweddings.co.uk; greekislandsclub.com)

Kirker
A very strong portfolio of Italian venues (020 7593 2288; kirkerholidays.com)

Kuoni Weddings
Just about anywhere in the world, particularly good on the Far East (01306 747007; kuoni.co.uk/weddings)

Take us to Thailand
Specialises in weddings in Koh Samui, Koh Tao and Phuket (07876 331225; takeustothailand.com)

Thomas Cook
Great value packages across the world (0844 871 0670; thomascok.com)