

ASK THE experts

As Amsterdam marks 25 years since the first gay wedding, **Alice Barnes-Brown** gets selling tips for same-sex ceremonies

fast fact

Pride Month runs from June 1-30. WorldPride takes place July 25-August 8 in Amsterdam, where the first same-sex weddings were held in 2001



PICTURES: Perfect Weddings Abroad; Peerapong Thinhanwong; Beachcomber Mauritius

1 Same-sex weddings aren't set in tradition

Dave has worked in the travel industry for more than 20 years, with roles at several travel agencies and tour operators. As trade manager for Perfect Weddings Abroad, Dave supports travel agents in enhancing their social media and developing their knowledge.



Dave Osborne
trade manager, Perfect Weddings Abroad

We started selling same-sex weddings in 2005. One of the founders of Perfect Weddings Abroad, Danny Waine, is a gay man, so it was a market we felt could grow quickly as no one else was doing it.

The first question to ask is: do clients want a legal or symbolic ceremony? Although we now have a lot more choice for legal weddings, if they only want a symbolic [not legally binding] ceremony, it opens up more destinations. The most reassuring thing to know is that we won't recommend somewhere if we don't think it'll be inclusive.

Same-sex weddings aren't set in tradition, so don't assume that because the couple are two women, they're going to want two bouquets. When I married my husband in Malta, we didn't have bridesmaids or best men, and we walked down the aisle one after the other. Listen to what the couple are saying and see how they identify, because somebody might identify as they/them, not he or she, so be mindful of wording.

Find out what they're interested in – you are trying to make a sale, but it's also the most important day of their lives. We have an online training academy to help agents. A wedding enquiry could include a big group, so you can turn them into some of your biggest bookings of the year.

2 Look at where it's legal for gay couples to get married

Ashley is co-owner of Travel Chaps with his business partner Matt. An award-winning agency for both weddings and honeymoons – winning the Hitched Wedding Award for Honeymoons three years in a row – Travel Chaps has an open and inclusive approach.



Ashley Phillips
co-owner, Travel Chaps

We travel as a same-sex couple. Our clients tend to be 35 and up, and LGBTQ+ clients want to be treated the same as everyone else, but it's about providing reassurance about what is safe. Where am I going to have issues? Where am I not going to feel like a marginalised, second-class citizen? Where am I going to be treated with respect?

Look at where it's legal for gay couples to get married, because it reassures the customer that you know what you're talking about. Italy, Greece and Mexico are our go-tos. Once you have a shortlist, pick three or four favourite places you've sent clients to before, and speak to suppliers and business development managers about whether they've arranged same-sex weddings previously. You don't need to reinvent the wheel. If I have a supplier that's tried and trusted – for example, I know Victoria Beachcomber Resort in Mauritius does a great job and pulls out all the stops – then the pressure's off a little bit.

They are a couple in love and want to get married abroad, so don't forget to ask clients the usual questions: Where do you want to go? What do you picture? What kind of weather do you want? How many people do you want there, and do you want us to book that?

3 Our most popular destination for weddings is Greece

Sandra is a travel consultant at independent agency Destination Rainbow, which specialises in creating destination weddings, honeymoons and family holidays for LGBTQ+ couples. Outside work, she can be found in her garden, hiking up a mountain, underwater or experiencing the world.



Sandra Doyle
travel consultant, Destination Rainbow

Most of our couples who have gay weddings are in their mid-20s to mid-30s. The biggest reason they come to Destination Rainbow is because we are an LGBTQ+-owned company; I had an LGBTQ+ destination wedding myself.

You must consider all key items such as finding a venue, booking caterers, florists, photographers, musicians etc. Each has to be an LGBTQ+ friendly provider who will respect people's genders and identities. Even small things matter, such as how the client's room is set up – for example, if it's two women, not to have a female and male dressing gown and slippers.

Our most popular destination for same-sex weddings is Greece, especially since they legalised same-sex marriage in 2024, and we are now seeing enquiries for Thailand since they did the same last year. For a marriage to be legal in the UK, it must be legal in the destination, so there may be places where the ceremony can only be symbolic. We also inform clients of the laws around public displays of affection in destinations where same-sex marriage is illegal.

Ask a client their pronouns at the start, and look at the imagery and advertising your company is using – is it inclusive? If you make a mistake with somebody's identity or pronouns, apologise and move on. And, above all, don't sell something as LGBTQ+ safe if you don't know it is.