

# ASK THE experts

A villa is the ultimate spot to tie the knot, but what should you know when booking? **Katie McGonagle** finds out



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## 1 'Villa weddings have soared in popularity since Covid'

Inspired by their own wedding in the Greek islands, Ionian Weddings was founded in 2007 by husband-and-wife team, Jane and Andreas Palikira. Since then they have organised more than 3,500 weddings in the Mediterranean.



**Jane Stuart-Palikira,**  
founder  
**Ionian Weddings**

We have definitely seen an increase in couples wanting to get married abroad. Many are finding UK venues completely booked up, and we also have couples who had to postpone their UK wedding so many times they decided to do something different and are opting for a destination wedding.

Villa weddings have soared in popularity since Covid as many couples feel safer staying in a villa with close family and friends than in a hotel. They offer complete privacy and a wonderful opportunity to have an intimate holiday with family and friends. Normally a wedding party would be 40 to 60, but since Covid we are seeing more intimate weddings.

The most important factor to consider is closeness to accommodation for other wedding guests, assuming they are not all staying in the same villa. Is the villa next to other properties that can be booked and how far away is other accommodation? Our new partnership with CV Villas has given us access to many adjacent villas for the other guests. It's also important to consider back-up options in case of inclement weather.

The Greek islands and Italy are the most popular destinations. Greece was more popular than ever in 2021 due to having more-relaxed Covid restrictions than other destinations. I'd recommend couples book as far in advance as possible – so many venues are getting booked up for 2022.

## 2 'Agents can make commission on extras'

Planet Weddings is part of Planet Holidays, and offers wedding and honeymoon services in Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Italy, Malta, Croatia and France. Robert has been managing director since 2000.



**Mathilde Robert,**  
managing director  
**Planet Weddings**

We are seeing a lot of interest from couples whose plans have been disrupted in the UK – bookings are rolling in up to 2024!

Villa weddings offer maximum flexibility for the couple and their family. This works well with couples who are looking for a big house party abroad, as well as those with young families or older couples on their second marriage who have grown-up children too. A villa is a home from home and allows couples all the flexibility and options they may wish for. And, if budget allows, there are villas which include a chef to do all the cooking too.

The key is picking a villa in the vicinity of other villas, especially if the wedding party is larger than six to eight people. There are many such examples in Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal's Algarve.

With our weddings, we supply all the local staff such as caterers, photographers, hair and make-up, florists and entertainment, and agents can make commission on these extras too. The key is knowing the clients' wishes, as it is for all weddings. All couples have an idea in their head and the job of a travel agent is to extract this and work with a specialist to turn that vision into a reality.

Weddings in 2020-21 were generally smaller than in previous years, but we are seeing numbers creeping back up.

## 3 'Our villas come with spectacular backdrops'

Larkin has been with James Villas for seven years, and helps manage a team of travel experts. The villa rental company has a portfolio of 3,000 properties across the Mediterranean, Caribbean and Florida.



**Ellicia Larkin,**  
travel team supervisor  
**James Villa Holidays**

Villa weddings are fantastic for the ultimate in private experiences for the wedding party – no sharing the venue with guests other than those the couple have invited. It's also lovely to be able to host the main wedding party under one roof – it means the celebrations can be relaxed and easily extended across a couple of days.

Many of our villas come with spectacular backdrops, including gardens and sea views, so there's no shortage of fantastic photo opportunities. Somewhere like Villa Masia Pairal on Spain's Costa Dorada, for example, sleeps up to 22 people in a traditional Catalan-style manor house with lush gardens and a huge private swimming pool.

A great tip for agents is to look at villas within holiday resorts, as they offer the best of both worlds – privacy for the wedding party, and everyone is close to the venue so there are no worries about getting to and from the ceremony. Many resorts also have wedding planners on site in addition to fantastic food, leisure facilities and activities, all of which save on stress in the planning stages.

While travel agents have all become experts in the changing rules and regulations around travel during Covid times, it's essential not to overlook the legalities of getting married abroad. We can offer the perfect property to tie the knot at, but it's crucial that agents can also guide their customers through the paperwork process.