

# Say 'I do' in Italy

With Italian weddings in demand, three expert operators reveal their selling tips to Laura French

From the vine-carpeted Tuscan hills to the cobbled towns of Lake Garda, the majestic cliffs of the Amalfi Coast to the magical canals of Venice, Italy is a byword for romance.

And whether it's a rural farmhouse hidden in the countryside, a modern beach resort overlooking the sea or a stone-walled abbey tucked beneath the lemon groves, the country isn't short on fairytale venues in which to say "I do".

It's perhaps little surprise that so many celebrities have chosen the destination for their

wedding vows in recent years. Just last year, *Top Gun Maverick* star Jay Ellis and model Nina Senicar tied the knot in Tuscany, Kourtney Kardashian married Travis Barker in Portofino and *EastEnders* star Louisa Lytton married Ben Bhavra in the Tuscan city of Siena. George Clooney, Justin Timberlake, Salma Hayek, Kim Kardashian and Kanye West are just a few of the other A-list names to have wed in Italy in recent years – all feeding into a growing trend for ceremonies with a splash of *la dolce vita*. ➤

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Ladamy



# DESTINATIONS

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Planet Weddings customers Louise and Graham got married in Ravello; Louise with her bouquet; an abbey wedding venue in Tuscany; Villa Fondi, Sorrento

PICTURES: Planet Weddings; Ionian Weddings; Perfect Weddings Abroad



Add in exceptional food and wine, short flight times and plenty to do before and after the wedding, and it's not hard to see the appeal for Brits seeking a sun-filled ceremony.

So how can you get in on the trend, and what are the key things you need to know? We've spoken to three experts to get their key selling tips and advice on paperwork, legalities and the standout venues that will have the happy couple reminiscing for years to come – think historic cloisters, centuries-old abbeys and trendy coastal resorts with the glittering ocean for a backdrop.

### “BOOK WITH A SPECIALIST TO ENSURE THE RIGHT PAPERWORK”



**MATHILDE ROBERT**  
managing director,  
Planet Weddings

Mathilde has been managing director of luxury specialist Planet Weddings for more than three decades. Her first wedding booking was for a travel agent marrying in Cyprus; since then, she's organised weddings in Italy, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta and the Algarve, with the help of her specialist team.

“Weddings in Italy are magical thanks to the stunning locations, exceptional food and wine, and ease of access as a destination for family and friends (and not just by air – for those looking for a sustainable option, there are trains too). We've also seen weddings in the country gain momentum thanks to the string of celebrities who have chosen the destination for their ceremonies.

In terms of specific places, the most popular spots for us are the lakes – especially Lake Garda – and the Amalfi Coast and Sorrento. Regarding venues, Italy has it all, from castles to villas and plenty beyond. We'd struggle to pick one highlight, but from the bookings we've had over the decades, Castello Scaligero in Lake Garda definitely stands out.

When it comes to cost, weddings in Italy can be on the expensive side. For a wedding with around 30 guests, we recommend budgeting around £25,000-£30,000, but smaller weddings are cheaper – we've arranged a couple-only wedding in June at the Cloisters of St Francis in Sorrento for around £5,000, including the ceremony, flowers, photos and documentation.

If you're selling a destination wedding, booking with a specialist can help; at Planet

Weddings, we cover the planning and organising of the wedding from start to finish, ensuring couples have all the right paperwork as well as the wedding venue and additional extras sorted.

### “FIND OUT THE COUPLE'S BUDGET EARLY ON”



**MELISSA LOWE**  
marketing and customer  
engagement manager,  
Perfect Weddings Abroad  
Melissa joined specialist  
travel agency Perfect  
Weddings Abroad

eight years ago as marketing and customer engagement manager. The agency is a member of Hays Travel and organises weddings across the world – from intimate couples' packages to larger weddings for 100-plus guests.

“My top tip for agents planning an Italian wedding for their clients is to find out their budget early on so you know which wedding venues are suitable. Getting married in Italy can be costly depending on the location, so make sure you get an idea of budget first. It's also ➤



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ABOVE: Cloisters of Saint Francis, Sorrento PICTURE: Ionian Weddings

important to help couples choose a location that's within their guests' travel budget too.

Secondly, wise up on the legalities. Couples marrying in Italy are advised to be in the destination at least five days prior to their wedding day.

There are also legal paperwork requirements. They'll need a certificate of non-impediment, apostilled [verified] by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and a statutory declaration, signed by a solicitor.

To have a legal wedding in Italy, couples are required to marry in a town hall-registered building. These are beautiful buildings and very different to town halls in the UK!

Location-wise, one of our most popular locations is the Amalfi Coast, due to its amazing coastline and spectacular sea views. Boutique hotel Relais Blu is a popular wedding venue here; you can legally marry at the venue and it's available for exclusive hire, with 15 bedrooms.

And don't forget the add-ons. A popular request for weddings in Italy is a 'lemon cart'. This serves a lemon sorbet – the perfect sweet delicacy to help guests keep cool on a warm summer's day.

#### “AGREE A VENUE TYPE TO NARROW DOWN THE LOCATION”



**JANE STUART-PALIKIRA**  
founder,  
Ionian Weddings

Jane set up Ionian Weddings with her partner Andreas in 2017, inspired by their own wedding in

Corfu. They specialise in the Greek islands, Italy, Malta, Croatia, Portugal and Cyprus.

“ Short flights from the UK, a huge choice of venues, good weather and high levels of service all make Italy a great choice for weddings – combined with the fact that ceremonies in the country are legally recognised in the UK and the paperwork is relatively simple.

If you're selling a wedding in Italy, ask clients about the type of venue they'd like to marry in, as this will help them decide which region to choose. Tuscany is popular for its beautiful rustic venues and villas with accommodation for all the guests, while Sorrento and the Amalfi Coast have a wider choice of venues and plenty of hotels for the wedding

“ Destination weddings are a lucrative market – some of our couples have 200 guests, so they can mean huge bookings

party to stay in. It's also important for clients to think about whether they'd like a venue exclusive to or non-exclusive to them.

For agents, destination weddings are a lucrative market to tap into. As well as the wedding itself, there are often opportunities to arrange the honeymoon and travel for all of the guests too. Some of our couples have 200 guests, so they can mean huge bookings.

My top tip is to think about all the extras that a couple could want on their special day. We like to add local flavour to our weddings, whether that's an opera singer to wow the guests at the reception, a vintage Fiat 500 or a speciality vintage drinks cart to serve limoncello shots after the ceremony. **TW**