

ASK THE experts

Laura French asks three operators for their top tips on great-value, small-group weddings abroad

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PICTURES: Beyond The Frame Photography; RT Creation; Steve Dunlop

1 The Greek wedding

Rachael worked as a resort rep in Corfu for Olympic Holidays for 10 years, before becoming an island manager in Zante, where she assisted the resort wedding coordinator. She joined Olympic Holidays' weddings team after the pandemic and now oversees the team while assisting travel agents and clients with bookings.



Rachael Marron
project development executive,
Olympic Holidays

Weddings in Greece are more cost-effective than those in the UK, and couples can combine their trip with a honeymoon. Our packages cost from £1,700 to £6,000 depending on the inclusions, which range from flowers and photography to transport and make-up.

To marry legally in Greece, clients will need a few documents; we recommend they budget around £600 for legal costs.

For smaller weddings, I would recommend Rhodes and Zante. Rhodes offers especially good value, with many low-priced venues and plenty of tavernas for the meal or reception. A popular choice in Rhodes is St Paul's Bay, where couples can marry in a chapel or on the jetty, with space for two to 60 people – we can arrange anything from a low-key meal to an all-out party.

I'd also recommend Ammos Beach, a new venue in our portfolio. It offers receptions on the sand, with stunning views of the Acropolis – the perfect backdrop for wedding photos.

Book it: Wedding packages at St Paul's Bay start from £2,900, including an arrangement fee, coordinators in the UK and in-resort, witnesses, wedding licence, translation of documents, bridal and bridesmaid bouquets, buttonhole, luxury car and photographer.
olympicholidays.com

2 The Caribbean getaway

Leah joined Unique Vacations UK – the UK representative for Sandals and Beaches Resorts – as a sales manager 28 years ago. Today she's responsible for growing UK business through the travel trade and educating agents on the Sandals and Beaches Resorts product.



Leah Marshall
director of sales,
Unique Vacations UK

Combining a destination wedding with a honeymoon helps clients cut down on additional expenses – destination weddings often end up being smaller affairs than UK ceremonies, which can rack up enormous costs.

Sandals is soon to launch an Aisle to Isle programme, including free weddings under its Sweetheart package for couples staying seven nights or more in a Club or Butler category suite. Locations range from beach settings to ocean-front gazebos. Exclusive venues are available at selected resorts for an additional cost.

For a smaller destination wedding, I'd recommend Sandals Halcyon Beach resort in Saint Lucia. There are daily flights from the UK, and the resort has an intimate, boutique feel with a beautiful beach and lush gardens.

Book it: Seven nights' all-inclusive in a Crystal Lagoon Walkout Swim-up Club Level room at Sandals Halcyon Beach costs from £2,209 per person, based on two sharing, including flights from Gatwick on June 4, 2024. The complimentary Sweetheart package includes a private one-hour cocktail reception, hors d'oeuvres, premium bar, two \$200 vouchers for photography, wedding cake and more.
sellingsandals.co.uk

3 The Algarve escape

Inspired by their own wedding in Corfu, Jane and her husband Andreas founded Ionian Weddings in 2017. They've since organised more than 3,000 weddings abroad, and now specialise in the Greek islands, Italy, Portugal, Malta, Croatia and Cyprus.



Jane Palikira
managing director,
Ionian Weddings

As well as Greece and Italy, Portugal is a great choice for a small-group destination wedding; Faro airport has a huge number of flights from the UK, most resorts are less than a 45-minute drive away, and there are accommodation options to suit all budgets. There's a wide choice of venues available, and the average cost of a wedding here is about £8,000 for 30 guests.

For an intimate ceremony with a wow factor, I'd recommend Nossa Senhora da Rocha chapel in the Algarve. Overlooking a beautiful sandy beach, it's one of the most picturesque spots in the region, and we can arrange an intimate reception afterwards at a choice of restaurants nearby. The Panoramic Garden is also an excellent option – ceremonies take place on a clifftop overlooking the ocean, surrounded by palm trees.

For add-ons, I would recommend a drone video at the chapel. You also can have fairy lights at the reception, fireworks over the fountain and many different flower options.

Book it: Wedding packages at Nossa Senhora da Rocha start at £4,500, including legal documents, translations, ceremony gazebo, chairs and tables with floral centrepiece, bridal bouquet, wedding photographer for three hours, wedding coordinator in the UK and in-resort, ceremony fees and more.
ionianweddings.co.uk