

Just the two of us

With many couples seeing the benefits of a smaller wedding, **Laura French** scouts out standout ceremonies from around the globe

Covid has thrown more than a few spanners in the works, and the weddings sector certainly hasn't gone unscathed, with UK ceremonies on hold for months and travel restrictions putting paid to overseas plans.

Now travel has made a promising restart, couples might be looking to finally tie the knot abroad – but what if they want to keep the crowd at a modest size?

Whether it's for an intimate group of friends and family or just the couple themselves, we've rounded up the best options for those looking to capitalise on the smaller weddings trend – from laid-back ceremonies to all-out resort weddings and plenty in between.

BEST FOR...AMBIENCE

Where: Sorrento Cloisters, Italy

The details: If an intimate, 14th-century courtyard topped with flowered archways and dangling vines sounds like your clients' dream wedding, look to the Sorrento Cloisters, says Jane Palikira, founder of Ionian Weddings. "The Cloisters is known for its romantic architecture and it's especially popular with our smaller parties as there is no minimum guest count," she says. Ceremonies are followed

by photographs in the flower-filled gardens, with receptions held in an Italian restaurant surrounded by lemon trees for an extra dose of romance.

Book it: A wedding for the couple and four guests costs from £4,125, including all documents, wedding coordinator, Mercedes wedding car, bridal bouquet, bridal hair or mandolin musician, three hours' photography, three-course reception with wedding cake and more.

ionianweddings.co.uk

BEST FOR...EXOTIC ESCAPES

Where: Cap Maison, Saint Lucia

The details: Farther afield, the Caribbean isn't short of paradise-worthy wedding venues – but for one of the best small-group options, Elegant Resorts recommends Cap Maison, set on a secluded beach in Saint Lucia and offering complimentary weddings to guests staying seven nights or more. "Packages are tailor-made with the clients' own wedding planner appointed," says product manager Tara Taylor. "They also carefully monitor the number of weddings hosted (only one wedding every two weeks), to retain the exclusivity and intimacy of the day." Wedding ➤

Sandals
Grande
St Lucian



locations for groups of up to 30 include a villa rooftop terrace and Rock Maison, a wooden deck set above the sea, with Classic, Premier and Luxury packages available depending on room category.

Book it: Guests staying in a One Bedroom Courtyard Suite are eligible for a free Premier wedding package, including venue, photographer, private dinner for the couple on Rock Maison, cake for two, Bollinger champagne and couple's massage (legal fees extra). A week costs from £2,750, including flights from Gatwick on December 7. elegantresorts.co.uk

BEST FOR...THE WEDDING ALBUM

Where: The Balcony, Zante

The details: For couples after a backdrop to remember, Olympic Holidays recommends The Balcony, a five-star boutique hotel in Zante located on the Akrotiri peninsula, overlooking the shimmering blues of the Ionian Sea. "The terrace area is used for the private wedding ceremony and the backdrop is truly amazing for the 'wedding wow factor'," says Michael Vinales, Olympic Holidays' managing director. "The hotel boasts spacious, modern and stylish areas and it's perfect for smaller weddings thanks to the intimate feeling and tranquillity of the area."

Book it: Packages cost from £2,900, including ceremony and indoor reception, wedding coordinator, flowers, one-tier wedding cake, photographer, bridal car, marriage licence, translator, two witnesses and more.

olympicholidays.com/weddings



JANE PALIKIRA, Ionian Weddings

"We've had a lot of interest for weddings in 2022 and 2023 and we are now back to pre-Covid enquiry levels. But Covid really impacted the weddings we organised for this summer – they tended to be much smaller, ranging from two to 40 guests, whereas normally we see weddings with up to 120 guests. Italy and the Greek islands are usually our bestselling destinations, and this year Greece has stood out due to having fewer Covid-related restrictions, with Santorini proving especially popular. In terms of selling tips, it's important to know every venue intimately. For example, are they child-friendly? Are there steps? Is the view uninterrupted? A specialist can help with this. Lots of couples haven't even considered a wedding abroad, so I recommend marketing the idea to all of your clients. The best thing about booking a wedding overseas is that agents have the possibility to book all the travel arrangements for both the couple and their guests. Even a small wedding can turn into a big booking once you factor all this in."

BEST FOR...COUPLES ON A BUDGET

Where: Peyia Town Hall, Cyprus

The details: Clients after a simpler affair? Planet Weddings points to Peyia Town Hall, set just outside Paphos and offering civil ceremonies under a quaint wooden gazebo in the courtyard, with an old fountain, stone steps and picturesque gardens among the features. "For couples who don't want to spend a lot of money to have an outdoor wedding in a pretty, nicely decorated setting, this is an ideal venue for a smaller wedding," says Mathilde Robert, managing director at Planet Weddings. "We can add a variety of extras to suit the couple's budget, from extra flowers to photography, transport, music, a reception at a local taverna and more."

Book it: Ceremonies start at £950, including wedding coordinator, paperwork, licence and services in the UK and in-resort.

planetholidays.co.uk



ABOVE: Shandrani Beachcomber Resort & Spa, Mauritius **FACING PAGE:** (clockwise from top left) Sorrento Cloisters, Italy; Cap Maison, Saint Lucia; Porec Town Hall, Croatia; and Peyia Town Hall, Cyprus **PICTURES:** Planet Holidays; Beachcomber Tours; Tui; Ionian Weddings; NDPhoto

BEST FOR...SIMPLE CEREMONIES

Where: Porec Town Hall, Croatia

The details: There's plenty more in the way of traditional, budget-friendly venues ideal for smaller ceremonies – not least in Croatia, where Tui suggests Porec Town Hall. Located in the heart of the old town, it's a short stroll from the Unesco-listed Euphrasian Basilica – a sixth-century masterpiece known for its Byzantine mosaics – and the harbour, which combine to form an idyllic photo backdrop. Beyond that there are white-sand beaches, cobbled streets and quaint villages, making the surrounding Istrian Riviera an ideal spot for the couple to explore on a built-in honeymoon.

Book it: Wedding packages at Porec Town Hall start from £949, including planning and administration, wedding coordinator, venue, ceremony, floral table decoration, local sparkling wine, a cake for 10 and more. tui.co.uk

BEST FOR...OCEAN VIEWS

Where: At sea with Celebrity Cruises

The details: An intimate wedding doesn't have to be on land, of course. For couples with a penchant for the high seas, look to Celebrity Cruises, which offers onboard weddings officiated by the captain as well as shoreside ceremonies taking place in ports of call, either on the ship or in a location of the couple's choice. "Getting married at sea offers all the romance you could imagine – the backdrop of the open ocean, the exotic port locations and the built-in honeymoon, all wrapped up into one," says Jo Rzymowska, vice-president and

managing director, EMEA. "Celebrity Cruises will take care of all the details, so couples won't have to lift a finger."

Book it: A Nautical Nuptials package starts at \$2,500 including onboard location, coordinator, photography, live music, cake, bottle of champagne, bouquet and more. celebritycruises.com

BEST FOR...BEACH SETTINGS

Where: Shandrani Beachcomber Resort & Spa, Mauritius

The details: For a small, barefoot wedding on a white-sand beach, it's hard to beat the Indian Ocean, and Mauritius isn't short on jaw-dropping locations in which to say "I do". But for one of the standouts, look to Shandrani Beachcomber Resort & Spa, where couples can utter their vows against a backdrop of cerulean sea, as emerald palms sway overhead and turquoise waters lap the shore. "All of our resorts have a dedicated wedding planner who takes care of all arrangements, plus we guarantee only one wedding a day," says Gary Bagnall, marketing manager at Beachcomber Tours. "And it's well worth highlighting cost when you're selling – in comparison to the average UK wedding, Mauritius comes at a fraction of the price."

Book it: A Beachcomber Bliss wedding package with all legal fees, documentation, a wedding coordinator, decorated location and music costs from £535. Seven nights' all-inclusive in a Superior Room including the package starts at £1,925 per person, with British Airways flights in June 2022. beachcombertours.uk **TW**

FREE WEDDINGS

Sandals offers complimentary weddings for couples staying three or more nights at any of the brand's resorts, including a wedding planner, ceremony, cocktail reception with hors d'oeuvres, honeymoon dinner, bouquet and buttonhole. Couples booking five rooms get added extras. Over-the-Water Serenity Wedding Chapels can be booked at Sandals Grande St Lucia and several of the brand's Jamaican resorts for \$750. sandals.co.uk

The SoCo Hotel in Saint Lucia has introduced two wedding packages, including a complimentary Simply SoCo option where couples get a ceremony, marriage documents, bouquet, buttonhole, pre-recorded music, cake and photography all included when they stay 14 nights in a SoCo Junior Suite (from £1,845, including flights from Gatwick on November 5). An upgraded Blissfully SoCo package costs \$999. thesocohotel.com