

# Wedding belles



Guru Travel owners Emily and Paul Salisbury invite us behind the scenes of their wedding at Beaches Turks & Caicos. **Katie McGonagle** reports

*WHEN Sandals super-fans and top-selling agents Emily and Paul Salisbury (main picture) – owners of Guru Travel in King's Bromley, near Lichfield in Staffordshire – got engaged, there was only one place they considered for tying the knot. You guessed it, the Caribbean. But what is it really like to plan a wedding abroad and how should agents tackle the weddings and honeymoons market? **EMILY SALISBURY** shares her experiences*



**W**e wanted to get married abroad because travel is our livelihood and our passion. We got engaged in June 2017 in Barbados, and straight away Paul said 'I think we should get married in Turks & Caicos'. He'd been for the Sandals Star Awards the year before and said we would fall in love with it, so we ended up just booking it.

It was no surprise to our friends and family because they knew it was something we'd always wanted to do. My sister and I have always spoken about getting married abroad. She also works in the business, and she got engaged in Turks & Caicos and is getting married at Sandals Royal Barbados this November – the opposite of what we did.

We were quite surprised by how many people were happy to come with us – we had 28 in total. Turks is

quite an exclusive destination, so people saw it as a one-off opportunity to experience it.

We went out with both of our parents the year before the wedding to plan it and see the locations. But you don't have to do that – Sandals and Beaches put you in touch with a wedding planner from home, and they do Skype sessions where they'll set up the wedding table or show you different inspirations as part of the pre-wedding package.

I knew what I wanted, so it was just about choosing a location. We met the wedding planner and did a tour of the resort, and they discussed cake options, floral decorations, table decorations, although we took a lot out with us and just paid a set-up fee. We chose a white gazebo in the gardens overlooking the ocean – it was beautiful. ➤



# DESTINATIONS

## CARIBBEAN | WEDDINGS

DO & DON'T



### EMILY'S TIPS

**DO** keep it simple: many couples choose a private ceremony just for the two of them

**DO** familiarise yourself with optional add-ons: they are commissionable and help clients personalise their day

**DO** suggest brides take their dress in hand luggage and hang it up as soon as they arrive



**DON'T** spend too much on flowers: guests will be too busy looking at the ocean anyway!

**DON'T** expect all members of bigger wedding parties to book on the same day: ask the couple to pass your details to their friends and family, then you can code as a group, and they can still access extras

**DON'T** rush the honeymoon: suggest a split stay with a few nights at another resort once everyone else has gone home, and upgrade the room for that honeymoon experience



**LEFT AND BELOW:** Beaches Turks & Caicos, where Emily and Paul Salisbury got married last year

**PICTURES:** Ochi Weddings/Oliver Coghill; Sandals



### THE WEDDING DAY

The wedding was in May 2019, and we did a mini hen and stag do a couple of days beforehand – the guys played golf off the resort and the girls spent a day by the pool where the butler had set up a cabana with fruit and snacks. We also enjoyed a joint catamaran cruise all together.

On the morning of the wedding, my sister, who was maid of honour, plus my mum, Paul's mum and the bridesmaids were all getting ready together. We had champagne, croissants and fruit delivered to the room, then walked over to the spa and had our hair and make-up done there. It was so nice, with champagne and music in the background, sharing tales about how we met and the other girls' weddings. Then we went back and got dressed, and my dad came in, which is always a very emotional point for any bride.

The room was just a short walk from the gazebo, and we had a guitarist playing our song, Marry

Me by Train, as we walked down the aisle. There was a special moment as my dad passed my hand to Paul's and said "look after her".

After we got married, we had a cocktail reception with our signature Mr and Mrs cocktail – ours was champagne and Chambord and called 'Very Berry Together' – and had our reception meal in a wooden gazebo. We tried to make it as much like a UK wedding as possible.

### THE EXPERIENCE

I know a lot of people are wary of getting married in a resort. Some fear you'll be on a conveyor belt or you'll see other brides in their dresses, but you're so lost in the moment, you almost don't see anything else and you forget you're in a resort. There was another wedding on our date but it didn't affect us – I was so involved in the moment.

Afterwards, we had a few people cheering and saying congratulations, which was really nice – it's your special day, so it's quite sweet to have people looking

at you and congratulating you.

We gave our wedding a travel theme. The guestbook was a map and people signed luggage labels and put them on there. Our cake had all the destinations we'd been to together. And the table names were places that were special to us: the Bahamas, where we'd gone on holiday; Barbados, where we'd got engaged; and Turks & Caicos, where we got married. We had a DJ and saxophonist on the beach and it was a great atmosphere.

I know some agents specialise in destination weddings, while others stay away from it because they think there's a lot more involved.

With Sandals, it's very easy. If you book a seven-night trip, you have a wedding included, and it's all part of the package – the legal fees, ceremony, sit-down meal, breakfast in bed, bouquet and more. It's simply a case of booking the holiday as normal then asking your clients what date and time they would like to get married – the wedding planner does the rest. **TW**