

The wedding planner

Worried about booking a wedding abroad? Just ask the experts

People have all kinds of reasons for choosing to get married abroad. The weather is definitely a huge one – most of our customers are looking for a sunny destination for a beach or sea-view wedding – plus the average cost of a wedding abroad is a lot lower. You'd be looking at about £8,000 for about 20 guests, which includes the meal, the drinks, the couple's travel and the honeymoon, whereas the average cost for a wedding in the UK is now about £27,000. Plus, it's a good excuse not to feel like you have to invite everyone!

We also get other reasons for why the couple have chosen a particular country – perhaps he proposed there, or it's easy for guests to get to. In fact, people are often as concerned about pleasing their guests as much as themselves, especially if they've got older relatives coming.

In Europe, most people have about 20 to 30 guests on average, but if you go long-haul it would be much more intimate:

often just parents or close family and maybe a couple of friends, or even just the couple themselves if it's a second-time marriage.

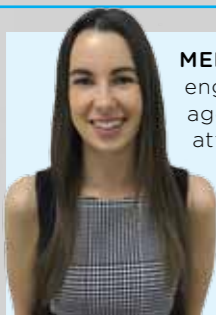
▶ WHERE TO WED

Our number-one destination is Cyprus – it's always been a really popular one for us – followed by Greece. Zante is the biggest, but Santorini is quickly catching up, plus we've seen a big increase in demand for Sorrento and the Amalfi Coast. Even though Italy isn't that cheap when you're there, a lot of guests can get cheap flights so it's quite easy to get to.

Farther afield, it's all about Mexico and the Caribbean. Cancun and the Riviera Maya are very popular, as are Cuba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. That's probably because they're the most reasonably priced – both for the guests and for the couples, as a lot of the hotels offer free wedding packages – whereas if you book somewhere like Barbados or Antigua, it tends

Elias Beach Hotel, Cyprus

AGENT Expert



MELISSA LOWE is marketing and customer engagement manager for specialist travel agency Perfect Weddings Abroad. She attends wedding shows and other events to help demystify the process of getting married overseas. Perfect Weddings Abroad started with a high-street presence then moved online-only. It is owned by US-based Celebration Travel Group and is a member of Hays Travel.



LEFT:
Santorini

RIGHT:
Olympic Lagoon Resort Ayia Napa

BELOW:
Secrets Resorts & Spas



→ to be a much smaller wedding party because it's a bit more expensive.

The other big factor in choice of destination is whether the wedding will be legal. A lot of people want to ensure it's a real wedding – otherwise, what's the point?

▶ WHAT TO AVOID

People often don't realise how many legal requirements there are, and how much they differ for each country. Some are very straightforward, while others are a lot stricter. Cuba, for example, is a great destination, but if you have been divorced or have changed your name, then the legal side of things can get a bit more complicated and costly.

For Mexico, guests have to have a blood test because it's a



Legal requirements differ by country. Some are very straightforward, others a lot stricter

very religious country so they need to be sure you're not pregnant. It's nothing to worry about, but people often wouldn't expect it. Unfortunately, some things you just can't get around.

Another issue is finding the right balance for guests in terms of accommodation. A lot of Caribbean hotels require 80% of

guests to stay in the hotel, so if the couple wants to get married in a five-star hotel, then some of their guests might not be able to afford it.

For Europe, hotels normally ask that the couple stay there and any non-resident guests have to buy a day pass to attend the wedding. At Elias Beach Hotel in Limassol, that's about €50 for the day.

▶ THE RIGHT RESORT

We always find out how many children are in the party, because that will have a huge influence on where we recommend. A lot of parents want entertainment and kids' clubs, and larger rooms or suites.

The Olympic Lagoon Resorts in Ayia Napa and Paphos are some of our most popular options for

a big wedding party: they appeal to everyone because they have really good children's facilities but also adult-oriented areas and dining as well.

We also look for resorts with benefits for group bookings, so if you book a certain number of rooms, you might get a free cocktail reception; at the El Dorado hotels in Mexico, if you book 10 rooms you get a catamaran cruise.

If it's just the couple, we would focus on adult-only options such as Rendezvous Saint Lucia – that's got a very strong focus on honeymoons – or Secrets Resorts & Spas, which are incredibly good for couples.

We also do a lot of work with Sandals, especially for couple-only and small-party groups, and Sandals has the advantage of →



➔ offering a free wedding package. There are also a number of boutique properties in the Caribbean that would suit a smaller couple-only wedding, such as Jamaica Inn or East Winds Saint Lucia.

We also offer a lot of venues outside hotels – perhaps beach locations that aren't attached to a particular property, or chapels, especially in somewhere like Greece.

▶ THE PERFECT DAY

Booking a wedding abroad is a lot more laid-back than in the UK because there's a lot less to do – you don't have to spend ages choosing flowers and testing cakes, which can stress people out – so we say just relax and enjoy it.

One thing we do warn customers about is that things tend to be done a lot closer to the wedding date. The couple will usually liaise with their wedding coordinator around three months beforehand, because the hotel has all their regular suppliers and a lot of experience in looking



Booking a wedding abroad is a lot more laid-back than in the UK because there's a lot less to do

after weddings, so they're really well organised.

Customers do sometimes want more input, like seeing examples of the photographer's work, but usually they just want a bit of reassurance that it's all in hand.

We try to focus them on all the benefits of the honeymoon package – usually if you book a wedding, the couple will get a lot of honeymoon extras, so there are a lot of ways to upsell the booking – and help them focus on enjoying their big day. **TW**



PICTURES: LOUCA STUDIOS

ABOVE: Sandals offers free wedding packages

WIN ONE OF TEN PLACES

The search is on... will you be a winner?

The One&Only
luxury FAM trip
with PURE LUXURY
worldwide holidays

How to WIN your place!

Make a booking at a One&Only Resort and/or flights with Emirates with PURE LUXURY or Gold Medal between 28 April – 30 June 2017 and you'll be in with a chance of winning a place on this incredible luxury FAM trip. You'll earn extra Farebank Rewards too – up to £40 Farebank Rewards per booking*.

Plus the ten lucky winners will have the chance to win their own holiday to One&Only Australia resorts too!*

Dubai
The Palace at One&Only Royal Mirage

3 NIGHTS HALF BOARD FROM **£849pp**

Includes reduced rates, complimentary half board & free access to Adventure Waterpark. **SAVING €585pp**

Includes flights with Emirates and transfers. Valid for departures 05 - 12 Jun 2017

CALL OUR PURE LUXURY TRAVEL AMBASSADORS TODAY ON 0800 747 0000

Terms & Conditions: The luxury FAM trip incentive applies to new PURE LUXURY and Gold Medal bookings including One&Only room nights and/or flights with Emirates made between 28 April and 30 June 2017. Two places will be awarded to the agents with the highest One&Only room night sales during the campaign period. Two places will be awarded to the agents with the most increased One&Only room night sales during the campaign period. Two places will be awarded to the agents with the highest Emirates flight sales during the campaign period. Two places will be awarded to the agents with the most increased Emirates flight sales during the campaign period. Two places will be awarded to the agents who make a qualifying booking during the incentive period. All bookings made will be entered into a prize draw to win 10 places. *Each booking made at a One&Only Resort within the campaign period will receive £20 Farebank Rewards, bookings including a One&Only Suite will receive £40 Farebank Rewards. Booking references must be emailed to worldwideholidays@oneandonly.com before the end of the incentive to claim extra Farebank Rewards. FAM trip places will awarded at an agency level, not individual staff member – qualifying agent will be at the discretion of the agency manager. FAM trip dates are yet to be confirmed, agent must be able to travel on a specified date yet to be confirmed which is non-changeable. *The One&Only Australia holiday will be awarded to the agent with the most increased One&Only sales performance upon arrival back from the FAM trip - Dates and booking mechanics to be confirmed at a later date, agent must have attended the One&Only luxury FAM trip to be eligible to win. Australia trip prize-winner's companion passenger must be a married partner or another employee of the travel agency. Prices are non-refundable, there is no cash alternative and PURE LUXURY'S decision is final. PURE LUXURY reserves the right to change/withdraw this incentive at any time. Holiday prices are per person based on twin share in entry level room type including Economy Class return flights with Emirates from London, prepayable taxes and accommodations. Valid for the departure dates specified. Offers are subject to availability, booking restrictions, change and bank by dates, which may be limited. Prices correct at time of going to print.

PURE LUXURY

worldwide holidays