

Without a hitch

Clients will remember their wedding day forever, so get advice from the experts on how to make it perfect, writes India-Jayne Trainor



As the sun set over the hilly Tuscan countryside, a guest was stoking the flames of the pizza oven while other members of our wedding party kneaded dough in the kitchen. Hiring a beautiful venue complete with an outdoor oven, pool and accommodation for up to 35 people wouldn't have been affordable for my husband and me if we'd chosen to get married in the UK – plus, there was the draw of Italy's fabulous food, wine and weather.

Cost and climate are key factors leading many British couples to look abroad for their nuptials, giving agents an opportunity to nab a high-value booking – often including friends and extended family. But when the pressure is on to make it perfect, it helps to tap into the wealth of expertise from a specialist destination wedding operator. From someone who has been there and done that this summer, here are some things to consider when booking a wedding abroad.

SAVE OR SPLURGE?

Establish a budget early on, to explore what's realistic and to find a good-value package. For those

looking to save money, Charlotte Rose, wedding specialist at Perfect Weddings Abroad, recommends all-inclusive packages. "Our lead-in package in Greece starts from just £3,999 for 20 people. These packages allow couples to plan ahead for their wedding day, with a clear cost from the start to avoid any hidden fees," she says.

For couples looking for even more intimate gatherings or who prefer to keep it to just the two of them, operators can often arrange a simple ceremony in a hotel setting or at a local town hall.

The sky is the limit for couples with cash to splash, whether they want to get married in a chateau or palazzo, have a string quartet and mirrored aisles or tie the knot on a beach in the Caribbean.

CHOOSE A DESTINATION

Although we'd initially dreamt of a woody, lakeside wedding, we changed our minds when we fell in love with venues in the Tuscan countryside. Make sure to fully explore the clients' vision – do they want an island wedding with white-sand beaches, rolling vineyards or a hilltop escape? ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Caribbean wedding; Sandals Royal Bahamian; writer India-Jayne Trainor with husband Chris and mayor's representative Antonelli Antonello; wedding party in Malta by Planet Weddings

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Irina Montero; Planet Weddings

ASK THE expert



Jane Palikira
co-founder,
Ionian Weddings

"The first question I ask couples is what their budget is, as this will determine the destination and venue they can consider. At Ionian Weddings, our wedding packages range in price from £5,000 to £35,000. However, couples should consider the destination carefully; friends and family may be more likely to attend if it is a straightforward journey or there is a short transfer time, as some may only come out for a few days. I would ask the size of the guest list, as this also determines the venue – many venues have minimum guest counts and some can only hold a certain number of people."

According to Mathilde Robert, managing director of Planet Weddings, Malta and Croatia are sublime selling opportunities. She says: "One is an island and the other sits on the Adriatic coast, but both offer fabulous venues, stunning beaches and are a classy option for short-haul weddings abroad."

Southern European countries have longer high seasons, with warm weather stretching from May to September, so couples may be able to secure cheaper flights and accommodation if they book outside the traditional summer months. Alternatively, long-haul destinations might seem more expensive at first, but if couples are keen to stay on and enjoy a honeymoon, they can offer better value overall.

BOOK EARLY

Just like the UK, in-demand venues are reserved two to three years ahead, so if couples have a specific time of year in mind, book sooner rather than later. If the date isn't a deal-breaker, look for savings in the off-season or on a weekday.

Jane Palikira, owner of Ionian Weddings, says: "Agents should be advising couples to book at least 18

Resorts are also good for guest lists that include children, as they're often family-friendly

months in advance. This is because many venues are extremely popular and suppliers get booked up quickly. It also gives family and friends plenty of time to plan and book a holiday around their wedding.

"If clients or their guests have children or work in a school, they'll most likely be restricted to school holidays, in which case May half-term is often better than August. If they are free to choose, we recommend June and September, which offer quieter resorts and the best weather."

ROOM FOR TWO

Depending on the venue, couples will need to decide if they want to include (or at least have access to) accommodation for guests. This is where hotel weddings come into their own, with popular options

such as Sandals Resorts offering beachfront venues in the Caribbean along with on-site wedding planners, who will meet with couples when they arrive to decide everything from venue decor to their favourite type of cake. Sandals' new wedding programme, Aisle to Isle, can cater to wedding parties of almost any size, though one of the most popular options is the Sweetheart Wedding Package for up to 10 people, costing from \$1,000 (excluding accommodation).

Resorts are also good for guest lists that include children, as they're often family-friendly and may have choices for guests with disabilities.

PRACTICAL MAKES PERFECT

In general, weddings abroad are valid in the UK if they meet the legal requirements of the country clients are getting married in – however, it's not always that straightforward. Couples will still need to have an official ceremony and complete the correct paperwork (including a Certificate of No Impediment, plus ensuring their marriage certificate is translated if in another language). Certain countries also require residency before you can marry:

in the Bahamas, you only need to be there 24 hours before, Thailand and the Seychelles stipulate three days, whereas in Spain you must have been a resident for two years.

Planet Weddings' Mathilde Roberts adds: "We advise on how and when to obtain the legal documentation required to process the wedding and take the couple through any requirements. We'll even send them reminders all the way up to the time the papers are issued, and deal with translations."

Destination wedding specialists also have knowledge of and connections to local suppliers – such as photographers, florists, musicians and cake makers, which can make the day run more smoothly and feel extra special. **FW**