



WEDDINGS ABROAD

The average wedding in Britain costs £21,000, so it's no surprise that this year more couples than ever are choosing a foreign setting for their big day, and saving thousands of pounds in the process. **Annabelle Thorpe** and **Nicola Iseard** reveal 20 of the world's most romantic, and affordable, spots to tie the knot

OLD-FASHIONED GLAMOUR

MASSERIA TORRE COCCARO PUGLIA, ITALY

1 To give your nuptials a classic Italian feel, try the southern region of Puglia. It offers all the beauty and atmosphere of Tuscany, with far fewer holidaying Brits. The Masseria Torre Coccaro, on the coast between Bari and Brindisi, is a small hotel with a beautiful 17th-century chapel where a priest can perform the wedding ceremony before you sit down to a traditional Pugliese banquet in the picturesque courtyard. The Coccaro's sister hotel, the Torre Maizza, is an ideal honeymoon spot - just 10 minutes' walk away and close to Puglia's unspoilt beaches.

■ A week's B&B at the Masseria Torre Maizza costs from £835pp, while the wedding package at Torre Coccaro costs £530, covering the priest, flowers, legalities and a translator. Both are bookable through Apulia Collection (00 39 080 482 9310; apuliacollection.com). The feast, with dancing, costs from £90pp for up to 160 guests.

TAORMINA SICILY, ITALY

2 The cobbled streets of the pretty seaside resort of Taormina offer a classically Mediterranean backdrop to a wedding, with the ceremony taking place at the town hall - a historic palazzo in the centre of the old town. After the ceremony, a reception can be held at the Casa Turchetti guest house, starting with champagne on the roof terrace, which boasts amazing views towards Mount Etna.

■ A week at Casa Turchetti costs from £2,478 per couple, including ceremony, interpreter, documents, flights and transfers through Long Travel (01694 722193; long-travel.co.uk). Anything else - reception, flowers, photographer - is extra.

LESIC PALACE KORCULA, CROATIA

3 For a house-party wedding with serious style, book the entire Lesic Palace on the tranquil Croatian island of Korcula. The building is a restored 18th-century Bishop's Palace with a separate apartment on each of the six floors, each with four bedrooms.

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The palace is in the heart of Korcula town, famed for its elegant Venetian architecture and beautiful beaches.

■ Lesic Palace costs from £2,600 per night, including accommodation for up to 26 people on a B&B basis. Book on 00 385 20 715 560; lesic-dimitri.com. Wedding packages start from £2,200, including fees and legal paperwork, through weddingsincroatia.com.

SCHÖNBRUNN PALACE VIENNA, AUSTRIA

4 When it comes to glamour and grandeur, the Schönbrunn Palace takes some beating. Built in the mid-17th century as a summer residence for the Austrian imperial family, the palace is one of Vienna's most famous sights. Wedding ceremonies take place in one of the private rooms of the former Empress Sisi, which have access to the grand park – the perfect spot for a post-ceremony champagne reception.

■ Three nights' B&B at Hotel Bristol in Vienna costs from £787pp including flights through Kuoni Travel (01306 747008; kuoni.co.uk), and the ceremony at the palace costs an additional £2,658 per couple, including limo transfer from your hotel. The registrar's fee, payable locally on arrival, is about €650.

AUBETERRE-SUR-DRONNE FRANCE

5 The monolithic church of Aubeterre-sur-Dronne, in the Charente region of south-west France, has to be one of the most beautiful and unusual churches in the world. Dating from the 12th century, it is carved into a chalk cliff and is the biggest underground church in France. Stay nearby in the centre of the village, which is full of rustic charm with steeply sloping cobbled streets – a perfect backdrop for post-wedding photographs.

■ A week's stay at the Hostellerie Perigord in Aubeterre costs from €304pp through Get Married in France (00 33 9 60 400895; getmarriedinfrance.co.uk), with weddings in the underground church costing from €850. Flights are not included (the nearest airports are Bordeaux and Bergerac).

URBAN CHIC

HAVANA CUBA

6 Break out the Cuban cigars with a colourful wedding on the atmospheric streets of Havana. Stay at the Saratoga – a lavish hotel located in front of the famous Partagas cigar factory, in one of the busiest parts of the Cuban capital – and be transported by vintage car or horse drawn carriage to an 18th-century house in central Havana for the wedding ceremony.

■ A week at the Saratoga, room-only, costs from £957pp including flights, through Virgin Holidays (0844 557 3860; virginholidays.co.uk). The Deluxe Wedding package costs an additional £899, including flowers, formalities, transfer to the church and a city tour.

NEW YORK CITY US

7 Quickie weddings got a glamorous overhaul at the beginning of the year, when the Manhattan Marriage Bureau opened at 141 Worth Street. The 20s building has an art-deco feel, and the elegant wedding chapels feature artwork on loan from the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The wedding licence costs just \$25, leaving you plenty of spare bucks for cocktails and horse-drawn carriage rides round Central Park.

■ Virgin Holidays (0844 573 2451; vhiphotels.co.uk) has a four-night break at the Hotel on Rivington from £839pp including flights and transfers. The company can also arrange the wedding.

MIAMI US

8 The slick art-deco streets of South Beach are about as far away from a traditional English wedding as it's possible to be and at the Hilton Bentley Miami you can marry on the sands, or in the lush gardens that surround the hotel before celebrating with cocktails on the Skyline Terrace, which has great views of the city. The hotel can organise a wedding breakfast, or just stroll along the promenade for a celebratory dinner at one of the city's hip shorefront eateries.

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■ A week at the Hilton Bentley costs from £1,095 per couple, while the basic wedding package costs from £1,250 for a beachfront ceremony, champagne and chocolates. Book on 00 1 305 938 4600; hilton.com. Flights from £385pp with British Airways (0844 493 0787; ba.com).

SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

9 One of the most beautiful cities in the world, Sydney makes a spectacular destination for a wedding, particularly against the backdrop of the Opera House and Harbour Bridge. Tie the knot on the elegant lawns at the Royal Botanic Gardens, and then move to Mrs Macquarie's Point for pictures; spend a night or two in the city before heading off for a honeymoon discovering Oz.

■ From £3,775 per couple, including five nights in an Opera House room at the Park Hyatt, fees for the minister, photos, flowers and transport between hotel and venue, through Bridge & Wickers (020 7483 6555; bridgeandwickers.co.uk), who can also book flights, from £765pp.

ESCAPIST ADVENTURES

MASAI MARA KENYA

10 If you want lions, giraffes and wildebeest as witnesses at your wedding, then the Mara Intrepids Camp may be the perfect location. Situated on the banks of the

Talek River, the camp is luxurious with an elevated game-viewing platform and swimming pool and 30 elegant tents with four-poster beds and modern en suite bathrooms.

■ A week in Kenya, combining the Mara with the exotic island of Lamu, costs from £2,429pp through Somak Holidays (020 8423 3000; somak.com). The standard wedding package costs an additional £980, including all formalities and a decorated wedding location.

ARIZONA US

11 A western-style wedding may sound an unusual choice, but Arizona is the perfect location

for a real away-from-it-all day. Stay in Vegas and board a helicopter for an eagle-eye view of the Grand Canyon as you descend the rim into the valley below, before being transported by a horse-drawn wagon to the Ranch House to exchange vows.

■ A week costs from £1,049pp through Virgin Holidays (0844 557 3860; virginholidays.co.uk), including flights and room-only accommodation at the Stratosphere. The Ranch Deluxe wedding package costs an additional £1,369, including the minister's fees, helicopter transfers from Vegas, cake, sparkling wine, but not the marriage licence (payable locally, \$55).

STELLENBOSCH SOUTH AFRICA

12 Most people who marry in Cape Town opt for Table Mountain, but head out into the Stellenbosch – South Africa's wine region – and you get something far more unusual. The Zorgvliet Wine Estate has an elegant 17th-century chapel, and can host wedding receptions for up to 100 people, surrounded by lush countryside and spectacular

mountains - and with an impressive selection of vintages literally to hand.

■ A week's accommodation and flights costs from £2,066 per couple; book through St Andrews Travel on 01204 397367. The wedding package costs from £454, including the minister, flowers and hire of the chapel, book direct with Zorgvliet Estate (00 27 861 967485; zorgvliet.co.za).

BANFF CANADA

13 If it's a mountain setting you're after, head to the Canadian Rockies, where you can say your vows in the beautiful wilderness of Banff National Park. It is open year round and you can choose from several outdoor locations, including Hoodoos Lookout, Two Jack Lake, Bow Falls and Cascade Ponds, all of which will make for a dramatic place to tie the knot.

■ A week at the Fox Hotel & Suites in Banff, room-only, costs from £1,304pp including flights through Kuoni Travel (as before). The company offers a wedding package from £1,108 per couple, including location permit, marriage licence and certificate.

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PRASLIN SEYCHELLES

14 For tranquillity and beauty on your wedding day, the Indian Ocean is the ideal scenario.

Weddings in the Seychelles are never a bargain option, but they do offer something utterly unforgettable. Spend a few days at the Coco de Mer resort on Praslin, before spending four days on board a 32-ft catamaran, sailing from Praslin to La Digue. You get married on the pier just before boarding the cruise, under the vast Seychellian skies.

■ A 12-night trip, with eight nights on Praslin and a four-night luxury catamaran cruise, costs from £2,499 through Tropical Sky (0845 543 2185; tropicalsky.co.uk), including flights, the ceremony, cake, champagne and flowers.

HOTEL BUDIR ICELAND

15 Located on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, the Budir offers an awe-inspiring natural backdrop for a wedding ceremony; tumbling glaciers, sweeping fjords, volcanoes and soaring mountains. The beach lies just beyond the rolling sand dunes; perfect for pre- and post-wedding strolls. Little Budir church is a few minutes' walk from the hotel and is picture-perfect, with timber walls and stunning ocean views.

■ A five-day break to Iceland, with two nights at Reykjavik and two nights at the Hotel Budir costs from £594pp, including flights through Discover the World (01737 218800; discover-the-world.co.uk), who can also arrange the wedding package which starts from £250 for ceremony fees and church hire.

BAREFOOT ROMANCE

DOMINICA CARIBBEAN

16 The lush, unspoilt landscapes of Dominica offer something different from the traditional Caribbean beach wedding. The ceremony can take place by dramatic waterfalls or natural volcanic rock pools, or on one of the wild Atlantic

The \$25 licence leaves spare bucks for cocktails and a carriage ride

beaches, and the island is also a perfect honeymoon spot, with diving, snorkelling and whale-watching on offer, along with the more traditional Caribbean pastimes of lazing in glorious sunshine and drinking endless rum punches.

■ A week at the Jungle Bay hotel costs from £1,779pp, including meals, a daily spa treatment and activities, through Harlequin Holidays (0845 277 3397; harlequin-holidays.com). The company can arrange a wedding package from £1,000, including flowers and formalities, cake and a CD-rom of photographs.

KOH PHANGAN THAILAND

17 The island of Koh Phangan is most famous for its full-moon parties, but the palm-backed beaches and lively atmosphere make it a memorable place to get married. The Santhiya resort has a romantic, hideaway feel, with cottages and rooms spread over 18 acres of lush forest, and offers western-style wedding packages, or a Thai ceremony including a blessing by monks and a traditional drum procession.

■ A week at the Santhiya costs from £915pp, including flights, through Tropical Locations (0845 277 3310; tropical-locations.com). A western wedding package, including flowers, formalities, dinner for two and an overnight upgrade to a villa, costs an additional £1,400.

PETER ISLAND BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS, CARIBBEAN

18 Get married on a high bluff, known as the Loop, with sweeping views of the ocean and the neighbouring St John and Norman islands. Five minutes' drive from the nearest villa on Peter Island,

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the Loop offers a real feeling of seclusion – the perfect spot for an intimate ceremony. Time it right and you could be saying your vows in front of a dazzling sunset.

■ A week at the Peter Island resort costs from £2,949pp including flights, full-board accommodation and wedding package – licence fees, flowers, cake and champagne – through ITC Classics (01244 355527; itcclassics.co.uk).

THE COOK ISLANDS SOUTH PACIFIC

19 If you're thinking of heading to a tropical idyll for your wedding, the Cook Islands offer something really different. Tie the knot on the unspoilt island of Rarotonga, and the ceremony will take place against a backdrop of high mountain peaks scattered with lush rainforest. The island is almost completely encircled by a reef, creating a lagoon and stunning beaches. Balmy temperatures mean it is perfect for a wedding at any time of year, and the ceremony can take place on the beach, in a church or in a garden setting.

■ 12 nights' B&B at the Takitumu Villas costs from £2,054pp, including flights, flowers

and formalities, a bottle of bubbly and a wedding co-ordinator, through All Ways Pacific (01494 432747; all-ways.co.uk).

9 BEACHES BERMUDA

20 For an eco-friendly wedding (if you overlook the flights), this resort combines a laid-back approach with green credentials. The resort is spread over 18 acres: a collection of rustic-chic cabanas a short stroll from the nine beaches that surround the resort. Nice touches include organic champagne, flowers and a cake, and planting a seedling of the endangered Bermuda cedar tree.

■ A week's B&B costs from £798pp, including flights, through BA Holidays (0844 493 0758; baholidays.com). The basic wedding package, bookable at 9beaches.com, costs \$1,150; organic add-ons cost extra.



The church at Budir, with glaciers, fjords and mountains as a backdrop. Getty



Marry Mediterranean-style with a ceremony in a historic Sicilian palazzo, followed by a promenade through the streets.

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