



St Peter's Cathedral, Rome. Image courtesy of www.justgetmarried.com.

ALL *Abroad*

AN INCREASING NUMBER OF COUPLES ARE FORGOING THE TRADITIONAL WEDDING EXPERIENCE IN FAVOUR OF A UNIQUE AND INTIMATE CELEBRATION IN AN OVERSEAS DESTINATION.
BY ALLIRA CARROLL.

IMAGINE SAYING 'I do' in a quaint 10th century church nestled among the hills of Tuscany's wine country? Or exchanging rings barefoot on a beach somewhere in the Pacific? Or with a stunning backdrop of an ancient Roman cathedral?

An estimated 5,000 Australian couples chose to get married abroad in 2005 and the numbers are continuing to grow. With the average cost of a wedding priced around the \$30-\$35,000 mark, in some cases it proves more cost effective to relocate wedding celebrations to an exotic overseas location.

But before you ask family and friends to share in your big day on a secluded island in the middle of nowhere, you should think carefully about what is involved and how you'll go about planning your dream day abroad.

IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

You may have fantasised about your wedding day since you were a young girl and marrying abroad is one of the best ways to ensure it is a unique and individual celebration.

However, not all couples are suited to getting married overseas, explains Angela Sitarz from www.weddingdestinations.com.au.

"If a couple dreams of a full traditional wedding with all the trimmings and all of their loved ones in attendance, they may be more suited to getting married at home. If they're seeking something a little more special and magical, focusing just on the two of them with their closest family and friends only, then an overseas wedding is perfect."

With research and careful planning you can create a distinctive wedding that

surpasses all your expectations and one that will be talked about by your guests for years to come.

THE LEGAL LOW-DOWN

So you've taken the plunge and decided to wed overseas, what next? Firstly, check the local wedding laws of your chosen destination. They vary from country to country and some governments require you to be in the country for up to 60 days before the wedding. The Australian embassy at your location of choice can give advice on these details and provide any necessary documentation.

You can find government advice about getting married abroad, contact details for international embassies, and destination travel and safety updates at www.smartraveller.gov.au/marriage_os.html.

TAKE CHARGE

Believe it or not, organising an overseas wedding yourself is not nearly as terrifying as it sounds. If you have access to the internet it is actually relatively easy. Your inspiration may stem from a favourite holiday destination or advice from a friend, but do be prepared for lots of research, time and effort. If you can't visit the venue prior to the wedding, make sure you have lots of reputable recommendations.

An easier option could be a resort package. Boutique and larger hotels offer beautiful packages which include all the essentials as well as extras like the a wedding coordinator to ensure everything runs smoothly. And it means all your guests can stay in the one place.

Once you've chosen your destination, make a list of the hotels and resorts in the area which offer wedding packages. A simple internet search will provide lots of information, but it's definitely worth checking out a specialised company such as www.resortweddings.com.au.

WEDDING PLANNER

If just the thought of planning an overseas wedding by yourself causes you to run for the hills, take a deep breath and consider this: a wedding planner specialising in weddings abroad can match your style and tastes with their local knowledge to create a tailor-made celebration.

Most will specialise in a particular destination, like Deborah Taliani, from www.justgetmarried.com.au, who organises weddings in Italy and Australia. "We help couples achieve their perfect wedding day without the hassle and worry. A wedding planner will not only save you time, but also money as they can source the best possible services and suppliers within your budget," explains Taliani. "We are there to help couples through the language barrier, legal matters and coordination."

Of course expert help comes at a price, but having someone with thorough local knowledge and strong relationships with local suppliers will ensure you get excellent service and invaluable peace of mind.

THE INS-AND-OUTS OF INVITES

One of the most important elements of your wedding will be the people you choose to celebrate it with. Regardless of whether you're planning for a handful of people or a

hundred to attend, if you are inviting guests to an overseas wedding they will need extra special attention.

It may be the first invite to an international wedding your friends receive and while most will be delighted and praise you for such a unique idea, reasons why some can't attend may run thick and fast. Excuses may involve lack of money and an inability to get time off work, so you need to make it as fun, easy and affordable as possible for special guests whose attendance you feel will make your day complete.

It is also a thought to put some money aside in your budget to pay for travel and accommodation costs for close family and friends who you really want with you.

To make sure those who can't attend feel like they are still part of your celebration, wedding planner Deborah Taliani suggests organising an informal cocktail reception when you return to show the wedding video and photos.

"Brides especially embrace this tip as it's another excuse to wear their beloved wedding gown!" says Taliani.

COUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

You may have always dreamed of an elaborate princess-style gown with a train and jewelled stilettos, but if you're saying 'I do' on a beach in Hawaii or Thailand, neither option is going to be practical.

Bridal couture designer Jo Durkin says brides are now choosing simple, classic styles with a twist rather than fuller gowns. She suggests toning down the beading and lace for beach weddings and instead using accessories to make the statement.

"Choosing beautiful chandelier-style earrings with a simple slim-line dress can be impact enough."

DESTINATION HOTSPOTS

WHAT WAS HOT IN 2006

- Vanuatu
- Cook Islands
- Bali, Indonesia
- Koh Samui, Thailand
- Maui, Hawaii
- Florence, Italy
- Chianti, Italy
- Amalfi Coast, Italy

HOT PREDICTIONS FOR 2007

- Sabah, Malaysia
- Mauritius, Africa
- Santorini, Greek Isles
- Portofino, Italy
- Umbria, Italy

INTERNATIONAL UNIONS OF LOVE

Karl Smith & Gaye Miskelly

LOCATION Vaiano, Italy
GUESTS 18

"The magical feeling of being on holiday with the love of my life, in one of the most romantic destinations in the world, was the best thing about getting married abroad.

"Our wedding planner at www.justgetmarried.com.au made it so easy, using her on-the-ground expertise to suggest things we would never have considered, but which made it all so special.

"The ceremony was conducted by the local town mayor and held in the grounds of a beautiful villa overlooking the Tuscan hills. Afterwards, guests took a tour of the Tuscan countryside and then carried on to the reception where we were served seven courses of amazing local Tuscan food.

"The only unfortunate aspect was not being able to invite everyone, but when we arrived home we arranged a beautiful Italian-themed cocktail evening with 100 guests at a local winery and we had our professional photographs shown on a big screen.

"My advice is if you do organise anything yourself, get your quotes in writing. With a wedding planner, they supply wedding photos without even asking, but if you try to book something direct with the companies yourself, get pictures."

Lainey & Cameron Franks

LOCATION Florida
GUESTS 100

"We picked the coastal beach town of Seaside, Florida, to get married partly because it had really beautiful rental houses to stay in. A wedding coordinator from the venue introduced me to local operators, but I also surfed the internet a lot to find good suppliers.

"About 70 per cent of our original invitees came and everyone treated the wedding and the time there like a holiday, so they had as much fun as we did. Most arrived early, so by the time of the wedding everyone knew each other and had so much fun together. I had never been at a wedding where the bride and groom's friends mixed so much!

"The best part of a wedding is having those you love most in the world around you, so by making it fun, easy and affordable for your guests, it'll be more fun for you." ♥



TIPS FOR ACHIEVING YOUR DREAM DESTINATION WEDDING

- Talk to as many couples who have married abroad as possible about their experiences and suppliers they have used.
- Check with your travel agent about discounts for flight and hotel bookings of 10 or more.
- Book an insurance package that covers all of your wedding plans.
- Keep guests in the loop with a personal wedding website with updates, online photo album, guestbook and more. www.weddingwindow.com offers free trials and 12 month subscriptions for AU\$106.
- Last but not least, if you are choosing to marry abroad for a special and unique experience, embrace the traditions of your chosen country and don't try and create an 'Australian' wedding overseas.

