



## **Marriage abroad – why do it?**

Dreaming of a white church wedding, organised two years in advance, with all your friends and family in attendance, including several people you don't know but who your parents insist on inviting because "we went to their son/daughter's wedding and it would be rude not to invite them", with you parents footing the bill which won't be much less than £20k? No, me either.

Our idea of a "traditional" wedding is based on Victorian ideals, so it is no surprise that as time moves on we are moving away from the idea of a big white wedding in the local church.

Of course there's nothing wrong with following "tradition" and getting married in your hometown surrounded by the people who love you, but there is an alternative, in fact many alternatives, and more and more people these days are choosing to go down this route to wedded bliss.

The rise of couples getting married abroad over the past decade can be attributed to several factors; waiting until later in life to get married (the average age for both men and women to marry is now over 30); better financial security which leads to couples choosing to pay for their own wedding, which means they have more control over events and therefore there's less pressure to marry locally as their parents aren't contributing to the event; a desire to be different and not copy the neighbours/childhood friends; but probably the most compelling reason is cost. The average UK wedding with all the bells and whistles costs around £20k – money perhaps better spent on a house deposit? With a wedding abroad costing a fraction of that amount many couples think it makes sense to combine the happiest day of your life with saving a fortune.

Around 30% of UK couples now get married overseas and the figure is growing fast. Some countries make it relatively easy to exchange your vows, whereas others involve complicated paperwork, however this is reflected in the popularity of those regions as a wedding destination. The Caribbean for example, is generally high on lists of best places to get married due to low or no "residency" requirements and simple paperwork. The US states of Nevada and Florida are similar, as are Cyprus and Greece in Europe.

With the overseas wedding industry worth £1.7 billion a year and growing, more and more countries are relaxing residency and legal requirements in order to gain a piece of the action, for example, Ireland will relax its residency requirements in November 2007.

So, apart from the cost and escaping irritating relatives, why should you consider a wedding abroad?

A wedding "with a difference" perhaps? There are many weird and wacky wedding ceremonies on offer overseas. If you're dreaming of an underwater wedding consider the Caribbean or Central America; weddings on horseback are on offer in the USA and Canada; arrive at your ceremony on elephantback in Sri Lanka; marry while "Elvis" serenades you in Las Vegas; be married by the ship's captain on a cruise; or,

for a winter wonderland wedding choose Lapland or the Ice Hotel in Sweden or Canada. Basically whatever your dream wedding you're bound to find someone, somewhere who will arrange it for you.