

Wedding travel

Wedding travel is travelling to get married. **Destination weddings** are an entire section of the travel and wedding industry, and you'll find accommodation, planners and agents that specialise in arranging the perfect celebration at many destinations worldwide. Alternatively, a couple can plan their own travel, for any reason they choose, and on any scale. However, as marriage is usually a legal construct, and often involves catering for guests, there are additional complications over an average holiday to ensure that everything runs to plan.

This article gives general advice followed at the reader's own risk. Details vary widely depending on many factors, so the advice may be misleading for any specific couple. For reliable information about marriage abroad in your specific case, ask professionals knowing the jurisdictions involved.

Understand

“ Do you, [N.N.], take [N.N.] to be your wedded wife, to cherish in love and in friendship, in strength and in weakness, in success and in disappointment, to love her faithfully, today, tomorrow, and for as long as the two of you shall live? ”

—Modernized wedding vow

There can be many reasons why couples travel in order to marry: they may want it to be a shared travel adventure that enables them to get closer to their friends and family; they may be trying to have a smaller wedding — or even to elope — and avoid the encumbrances of a large social function; they may be travelling back to a place of their heritage that has ancestral or religious value to them; they may be trying to avoid local laws limiting whom or how they can marry; or they simply have found a beautiful or special place that will make the experience especially memorable.

The destination might have more liberal laws for same-sex marriage or marriage across ethnic or religious groups. An international marriage is still recognised at home in some cases where a local marriage would not be possible.

Recent immigrants or mixed-nationality couples may choose to have a ceremony in "the old country", in a location relatively easy for their guests to reach, or where they get more for their money. Legal requirements for marriage may also be a lot less onerous in some third country.

In romantic fiction, the star-crossed pair elope to a faraway place where neither is locally known as a means of escaping families who disapprove of the union, allowing them to present that union as a *fait accompli*. (Bonus points if the groom plucks his beloved off the balcony of her family's home and into a waiting carriage, perhaps using a ladder. Extra points for escaping across the Scottish border, which was once a common tradition, or to some exotic and foreign locale.)

No point holding a massive 200-person reception if the families are feuding, Romeo and Juliet style, and shalt most certainly slay each other before the morrow.

In practice? Eloping to a tropical beach may merely be a way to escape the winter cold. Elopements may be spurred by reasons ranging from a dislike of being the center of attention, to keeping the costs down, to avoiding all of the fuss and bother and work of planning a large social event. They are also chosen by people who want to avoid unpleasant scenes with a difficult family member, such as when the parents' marriage ended in an acrimonious divorce or key loved ones are not on speaking terms.

Prepare

The requirements to be wed (as foreigners) vary between countries, and can be also vary between visitors and residents. Make sure you can be wed there – and that the marriage will be recognized – and that all needed paperwork is ready in time.

Some countries or religious institutions may restrict the ability to marry someone of another religion, limit the ability of divorcé(e)s to remarry, or impose a waiting period before widow(er)s and divorcé(e)s can wed another. In some countries, laws vary between provinces or federal states.

The relation between spouses varies between jurisdictions, and sometimes where you were wed may be significant. Regardless, you will want to have researched the law for any country involved (such as the wife needing the husband's permit for travelling, something you don't want to realise when alone at the border). In many jurisdictions it is possible to make a prenuptial agreement to override much of what you may think is not fair or appropriate in case of divorce, and regarding heritages. In some jurisdictions a similar agreement is always made.

You will also want to check any local customs. You will not want to be unprepared when the officiant asks about the dowry or the *mahr*, and you don't want to violate any local taboos. If you come from different traditions, make sure you know what both of you expect, and what guests will expect.

Officiants

In many countries marriage usually includes both a religious procedure and a civil one, while in others the religious procedure is recognized by the civil authorities and an alternative to civil marriage (or the only procedure recognized). Where civil marriage is enshrined in law (such as the [Netherlands](#)) there is often a mandate or very strong social tradition that the civil marriage be done first and religious institutions may refuse to schedule a religious wedding before the civil wedding. Also where clergy have the mandate to wed, clergy of minority denominations may not have it – recognition of religious officiants from non-mainstream denominations varies widely. In some countries the church will wed only members, or only heterosexual couples, while still offering a similar procedure to bless a civil marriage between persons they would not or did not wed. Know what procedures you want and what the possibly differing requirements are.

Notice periods

Most countries require an application or license be obtained a specified amount of time in advance, which in turn requires documentation of identity, that the partners are not close relatives and that neither partner is already married. Some may require your documents be translated into the local language. Local laws vary in the amount of time required between the license and the ceremony; while some allow the license to be obtained a few days in advance or even same-day, lodging a Notice of Intended Marriage in [Australia](#) incurs a one month minimum notice period.

The English traditional practice of reading the banns of marriage in a house of worship ("if anyone dost know any reason why these two should not be joined together in holy matrimony, thou art to declare it...") has now largely been superseded by obtaining a licence and meeting the required periods of notice. It is still a legal, valid alternative to obtaining a licence in many jurisdictions, but not necessarily available for a wedding abroad as both prospective spouses must be already known in the local parish. You may still want to have the banns read in your respective home congregations, if that is the custom, in addition to getting your licences.

Residencies and visas

Carefully research the laws of your chosen country, your home country, and your intended country of residence. Some countries (such as [France](#)) impose a minimum residency requirement for couples before marriage. [Mexico](#) requires a tourist permit to get married, with only a civil marriage recognized as legal. Wedding of a mixed-nationality couple may in some cases be a lot easier, with less bureaucratic hassle, in a third country than in the country of either. In other cases such an arrangement may cause a lot more hassle down the road: in the [United States](#), it's a big hassle for a foreigner to immigrate after marrying a US citizen abroad, but much less difficult if you do the paperwork first and get married in the US. Marriage law in different countries (even if otherwise similar), or even different states in federal countries, may differ significantly on such points, so research ahead carefully.

There are a few rare locations where it's possible to hold the ceremony literally on the border; the Peace Arch park in [Blaine-White Rock](#) on [British Columbia's](#) US border is one popular such choice. This may make sense if the two families are from different, adjacent countries — while anyone who legally has to be present (typically an officiant, two spouses and two official witnesses) needs to be on the same side of the line, photographers and family can be on either or both sides.

In some countries a marriage may require you to convince the authorities about it being sincere, and not a sham marriage to get residence permits or other advantages. The procedure to verify this is usually based upon your match arising suspicion and can be anything from a cursory glance to lengthy interviews (sometimes of both partners separately) about even intimate questions, and you might need to get additional documentation. Professional legal advice is recommended.

If one jurisdiction allows something unusual, such as proxy weddings (where one spouse — most often a deployed soldier in active service — sends a messenger to take their place for the ceremony) or a ceremony where one spouse appears by phone or video instead of in person, don't be surprised if these legal novelties carry no weight in some other country. [Kansas City](#) might allow a webcam appearance, but the resulting marriage usually won't be recognised at the Canadian border.

Changing family name

A wedding can include changed family name. You should ensure at all times that the name in your passport matches your name on your travel documentation exactly. The safest option may be to do all the name updates when you return home — and before setting out on your next travel adventure. The headache involved when a Ms. Smith booked a flight but a Mrs. Johnson (née Smith) is trying to check in is better avoided — give the airline a call to make sure, or better yet, get whatever they tell you in writing so you can show the relevant advice the airline gave you to the personnel at the airport.

Minimum age

At least if you are under the age of 21, then you should check the minimum age to marry with or without parental or judicial consent. This varies between jurisdictions (countries, and sometimes states), may be higher for a non-resident, may be higher for same sex couples, and may be different for women and men.

Returning home

After you've fulfilled all the requirements to be married abroad, you should then carefully check that your marriage is recognized in your own countries, including those you are citizens of and that where you will live. It may require extra steps, such as registering your marriage locally.

Countries which do not allow same-sex marriage, usually do not recognize them when performed abroad, though there are notable exceptions such as Israel. Homosexuality laws are under review in many countries; contact relevant government agencies for current status. If you insist on a marriage not recognised at home, check what consequences it will have. It might just get ignored, you may get complications for documents not agreeing one with another, or you may even face charges on an illegal marriage.

Destinations

- Italy is one of the most popular destinations to get married in, especially Florence.
- Cyprus is popular for travellers from a few Middle Eastern countries which forbid interfaith marriage at home.
- Scotland was a popular place to elope in an era when English law forbade anyone under 21 to wed without parental consent; Gretna Green was a first easily-accessible point across the Scottish border.
- Amsterdam was one of the early adopters of legal same-sex marriage (in 2001); see LGBT travel#Same-sex marriage for other popular destinations.
- Las Vegas is known for weddings on short notice (no waiting period, no blood test) and novelty weddings (including rock star impersonators for officiants). Nevada was also one of the first US states to liberalise divorce law; a Reno divorce is available to any couple, providing that at least one of the partners has lived in Nevada for six weeks.
- Mexico: Resort towns such as Cancún and Puerto Vallarta are comfortable during northern winter.
- Niagara Falls is known primarily for honeymoon travel, but also offers destination weddings.
- Bermuda and Malta are among the few countries which allow masters of ships registered under their flags to conduct weddings at sea. Another option is a wedding on a cruise ship in port, with a local officiant from that port.
- Denmark is much easier for non-Germans to get married in than Germany and is thus a popular destination for civil marriages of couples resident in Germany that include at least one non-German spouse.
- Macau is sometimes a destination for foreigners living in China who want to get married. The bureaucracy is less horrible than on the mainland, and the city has some gorgeous old Catholic churches.

Marriage at sea

While marriage aboard a ship at sea has long been romanticized in fiction, only a small handful of tiny countries grant ship's captains *ex officio* rights to perform a wedding. Fortunately, some of the largest cruise liners and companies are registered in these countries – such as Celebrity Cruises and Azamara Club

Cruises register their ships in Malta and Princess Cruises and Cunard, with ships in Bermuda. Accordingly if you choose your cruise line carefully – they can plan and officiate your wedding. However, checking that it can be recognized in your home country is still critical.

If you choose to get married in a foreign port while on your journey, then you may be at the mercy of the weather if the cruise needs to skip a port, or there are delays in disembarking. This may throw your entire plans into disarray.

Of course, you can always choose to complete the legal parts of the wedding before leaving your home port.

Cost of guests

Imposing travel costs on guests is one of the more controversial parts of wedding travel. Although there may be many people who want to share your special day – imposing a significant cost burden that travel can require is not something that should be taken without consideration.

Unless you intend to pay for the transport costs of all attendees, which may be impractical, there are some things that can be done to assist in their planning. The wedding accommodation may provide a group discount to guests, and you can provide them with this pricing. You may also like to consider providing access to cheaper accommodation nearby.

Go next

See also: [Bachelor\(ette\) parties](#), [Honeymoon travel](#)

A couple with friends or family living far from the wedding place, can choose to celebrate with them at another occasion. This can be a [bachelor or bachelorette party](#), at a [honeymoon](#) trip just after the wedding, or a "second wedding" (which could be at an anniversary).

See also

- [Organizing a group trip](#)
 - [Religion and spirituality](#)
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