

Irish Times 13th October 2007

How to tie the knot right around the universe

Getting married abroad is an option more and more of us are taking.

Is there anything as cheesy as other people's weddings? Your own is, of course, pure class. But other people's... Then again, maybe I've been watching too much YouTube.

A brief glance at its wedding clips gives us the bride who unintentionally reveals her bottom drawer to the congregation by bending over in a crinoline.

Then there are the umpteen injuries to middle aged women scrumming to catch bridal bouquets, the endless falling over of drunken folk and at least one incident where a groom getting 'the bumps' is thrown through a hotel ceiling.

Best of all however is the groom whose mobile rings at the altar. And who leaves to take the call.

As if that weren't sad enough for the bride, sadder still is the fact that she may well have paid more than euro 30,000 for the privilege, for such is the estimated cost of the average Irish wedding.

Is it any wonder then that so many people are reassessing their nuptials? Not the ceremony itself which, either religious or civil, is of course the main event. But all the palaver that goes with it, all the faff about button holes and place settings and colour co-ordinated napkins. And that's without even mentioning the utter bad taste that is the 'wedding gift list'.

All in all it makes a pretty good case for elopement. By marrying abroad you get to keep numbers to a small but select few, or even just the couple itself, in a way that offends no one. You can pretty much guarantee a sunny day. What's more, the honeymoon starts as soon as you arrive – how stress-free is that.

There isn't nearly as much red tape as you might think either.

Marriages which take place outside the State are normally registered in the country in which they occur and are not registered in Ireland by a Registrar or the General Register office.

To find out the procedure for obtaining a marriage certificate from your chosen country, and to ensure all the legal requirements are met, contact the relevant embassy. For Catholic weddings your local parish priest may be able to help find a priest to marry you abroad.

Marriage certificate in a foreign language it will normally be accepted for official purposes in this State if accompanied by an official translation, or a translation from a recognised translation agency.

Both parties to a marriage contracted abroad must be over 18 for the marriage to be valid in Irish law.

Certificates of Freedom to marry, also known as 'Civil Letters of Freedom', may be needed for marriage in some foreign countries. To get one, apply to the Consular Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Irish Citizens living abroad should contact their nearest Irish Embassy.

Italy remains the destination of choice for very many Irish couples. Not alone does it have beautiful scenery and churches for Catholic ceremonies, but its town halls are just as gorgeous, being mainly elegant palazzos. Rome's beautiful Campidoglio, for example, was designed by da Vinci himself.

If it is Italy you want, and someone to take charge of everything for you, check out Irish Weddings in Italy.ie, run by Italian wedding planner Paola Shanahan.

An expert on where and when to go for best value, Shanahan recently organised a wedding for 35 guests - including paperwork, reception, flowers, music, photographer, make-up, hair and more – for euro 10,000. As an Italian married to an Irish man, she has the advantage of understanding what Irish couples want for their big day, and knowing precisely how to get it in Italy.