

Whats, Wheres and Vows: 21st Century Weddings

What is a traditional British wedding? No doubt for many inhabitants of these islands, the standard wedding will somehow involve a church, swanky cars, some hired penguin suits, a teary mother and a tiered fruit cake. It's amazing how vivid this imagery remains despite much of it no longer having a place in the modern wedding experience – in fact church ceremonies account for only about a third of all UK weddings. A blend of multiculturalism, a growing informality and a reduction in the role of the church have played their parts; but the result is a dazzling array of options for the open-minded couple.

Bells and choirboys

This is the default wedding, if you like. The bride and groom wake up in different houses, the bride gets done up, assisted by the mother and bridesmaids, the groom goes to the pub, the best man loses the ring, the father of the bride gets all philosophical and the clans sit on opposite flanks of the church. Inevitably the church wedding will be a religious affair, with hymns, prayers and vows, and then it's off to the reception for speeches and dinner, and then everyone prepares for the evening do.

The registry office

Here the couple will make their vows in public but the religious aspects are stripped away. It's all legal, official and often informal and takes place in a council building ... but is no less romantic for it. This kind of marriage is not only the preserve of the non-religious; some churches refuse to marry divorcees, no matter how religious they are. And nor are they for the down at heel or shotgun weddings – don't forget that Charles and Camilla tied the knot in a registry office.

All-in-one

Now that all sorts of venues can apply for the right to hold weddings, hotels and country clubs have been quick to get in on the act. Hotels are particularly popular because they offer all-day packages that include the wedding, the reception and the evening function all in one place. And guests coming from all over the world can usually get a discounted room too, which might mean more expensive wedding presents! (But don't count on it.) There's also no need for limos and umbrellas as everything is under one roof.

The civil ceremony

Another change in the law has allowed for same-sex marriages to take place. This will almost certainly take place in the registry office or another licensed venue, but other than that it's exactly the same as a traditional wedding – two people declaring their love for each other in public.

The themed wedding

And then there are the weddings that really exercise the couple's imagination or indulge their fantasies. A favourite is the medieval or Robin Hood wedding, where damsels, knights, knaves and peasants come together for a truly memorable wedding. Everyone dresses up, there will probably be a hog roast and traditional English music, and a good time is had by all. History and fantasy are equally plundered with wedding themes including baroque, 18th century ball, Wild West saloon, skydiving, Roman, biker, Lord of the Rings ... or whatever else takes their fancy.

Get away from it all

Of course, not everyone wants to take their chances with the British weather, which is why many people opt to start their honeymoon early and get married abroad. So don't be surprised to be invited to a genuine Las Vegas wedding or to see the couple exchanging vows on a tropical beach or on a cruise liner.

So although we all probably have an idea of what a traditional wedding is, knots are being tied in all manner of ways, some wacky, some practical. Some traditions are still part of the modern wedding, but others have fallen by the wayside. The only constant is that the newlyweds like nothing better than to have loads of lovely wedding gifts to open; Better still, if they're unique and personalized wedding gifts that come with a smile!

About the Author

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