

A full-page photograph of a bride standing on a rocky shore at sunset. She is wearing a long, white, strapless gown with a ruffled bodice and a long, flowing train. She is holding a bouquet of orange and yellow flowers. The background shows a calm sea and distant mountains under a soft, golden sky.

Gowns to go: travelling right

'Have dress will travel' seems to be the motto for a growing number of brides today. As many as 80,000 Brits get married abroad each year, and the figures are rising. **Georgia Daniels** heads off for the sunshine

Opposite page: Maggie Sottero; this page, clockwise from left, : Amanda Wyatt, Anoushka G, Sanyukta Shrestha and Tobi Hannah all cater to the destination wedding market with clever cuts and lightweight fabrics that travel



THE LURE OF THE WHITE SANDY CARIBBEAN BEACH HAS LONG been hard to resist for many couples, especially those who want to escape and do it alone on their big day, but New York City and a handful of European destinations are increasingly popular.

Lisa Burton, who runs The Bridal Consultant, one of a growing number of specialist companies that have sprung up to cater for the needs of wanderlust brides and grooms, says that Greece is the most sought-after location. "I have been in this business for eight years and Greece has always been popular but, ever since the *Mamma Mia* movie, it has really taken off. The fantastic weather, beautiful locations, friendly people and most of all value for money combine to make it the perfect choice. Couples find that if they marry in Greece in the summer months and give their guests enough notice, many of them will combine the wedding with their summer holiday."

As well as being able to, on average, halve their costs if they marry abroad, couples find that it is far less stressful, involving a smaller scale event with fewer guests. Many couples are juggling full-time jobs with children even before they marry and handing the organisation of their nuptials over to an expert turns if from a stress fest into a dream come true. Most people opt for somewhere that sunshine is near enough guaranteed, and they save further money by already being *in situ* for their honeymoon.

"Not only has the number of weddings abroad increased over the past few years, but the type of people doing it has changed too," says Burton. "We are now dealing with those who once would have been happy to spend £15,000 but no longer can or simply want to hang on to their pennies in this unpredictable economy. This is definitely a more discerning clientele, and it is growing. As such, it is no longer good enough for specialists such as us to just run a phone or web-based service – we have opened offices where our clients can come and talk to us face to face."

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WISING UP

It seems it's not only English couples who want to get married abroad. Between 6,000 and 10,000 people travel to our shores from other countries each year to get married, too.

Retailers need to sit up and take note. Marriages abroad are not included in the Office of National Statistics figures, which means that there are far more weddings, and therefore calls for wedding gowns, than official numbers quote. Destination weddings are big business, and retailers should ensure they get a slice of the action. "The Number One bug bear of brides who come to me is that they struggle to find a suitable dress," says Burton. "They complain that bridal retailers are sorely lacking in expertise when it comes to advising them on a suitable dress to take abroad. They say that the choice is poor and the knowledge of what kind of fabrics travel well is scant. Retailers also appear to turn their noses up when the bride says she is getting married abroad."

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Sincerity's floaty chiffon gown, right, has all the right fashion-now features. Dresses in the lovely Dessy Bride collection, bottom right, are destined expressly for brides who go travelling



Packing tips

MANUFACTURERS EACH HAVE their own advice, which retailers should pass on. Anoushka G advises covering the dress in a polybag and then putting it into a long over-bag as the air between the plastics help prevent creasing. When the bride gets to her destination she should take it out of the bag and hang it in a steamy bathroom; the creases should drop out.

At Maggie Sottero the suggestion is to turn the dress inside out, fold the sides of the gown inwards so it is small enough to fit into the suitcase it is being transported in and then to fold the bodice of the dress over the skirt until it fits completely into the case, ensuring that corset bones do not bend. If the dress is too heavy to go onto the plane as hand luggage and therefore has to go in the hold, the case should be labelled: 'Fragile Wedding Items'. Upon arrival the bride should take the dress out of the case and hang it up (with the train, if there is one, pulled out over a chair if possible) so that any creasing is reduced as much as possible by the wedding day. Maggie Sottero

agrees with Anoushka G – a steamy bathroom will help drop creasing.

Sanyukta Shrestha says the dress should be flat packed in hand luggage with some acid-free tissue and covered with soft muslin. At the destination, the dress should be hung from the highest place in the room and then cold-ironed on the inside, if necessary.

A good tip from Mon Cheri is that any beading on the dress is properly protected so that the beads do not snag on any other part of the material.

As an industry we need to wise up to all trends, and it seems that weddings abroad are not only here to stay, but are on the increase. Maybe it's time to check your stock for what may be suitable, and certainly bear destination dresses in mind when you visit BBEH in March.



THE CHOICE IS SURPRISING

A quick tour round the manufacturers shows that there is, in fact, plenty out there for destination brides, but retailers certainly need to do their homework on what might be suitable to wear in hot weather, and what travels well. Anoushka G's lace Katrina dress (SRP £1,050), shown on the previous page, is very lightweight and hardly creases. Sincerity and Tobi Hannah both offer chiffon dresses at around the £720 mark that are eminently transportable and the fabric makes them ideal to wear in hotter climates. The Tobi Hannah dress is short, which of course makes it even easier to pack.

Amanda Wyatt has a chiffon gown in the collection (£800) which, despite being lightweight and slinky, still has a wow factor. It is easy and comfortable to wear in soaring temperatures. Mon Cheri's chiffon Amalfi gown (£600) is made from lightweight chiffon that is perfect for a destination wedding.

Sanyukta Shrestha's Esther gown is her best-selling destination wedding dress and has been a favourite with the press. Made from organic silk, bamboo and organic cotton, this extremely lightweight dress is timeless and simple in design. The combination of fabrics keeps the body cool in hot weather and is resistant to UV light, mould, mildew, salt water and abrasion. The SRP is £2,049 and there is a chiffon over-layer at £744.

Maggie Sottero's most sought-after destination wedding gown (style RD1044) is made from billowing gossamer chiffon and retails at around £925. This is a slimline, sultry dress with a single floral embellished shoulder strap. "We are finding that the popularity of weddings abroad has increased in recent years and we have reflected this by bringing a destination range into our collection," says Amanda Aislabie at Maggie

Sottero. Dessy Bride, too, has a beautiful range of organza and tulle dresses which are great for overseas weddings. Lightweight and fairly slimline, they travel well and with price tags ranging from £275 to £400, they are brilliant value and perfect for those on a budget and keen to save money by choosing to get married abroad.



GETTING IT THERE

Transporting the dress to the dream location is something brides need to be advised on. Giselle Hulme at The Empty Box Company has been successfully supplying travel boxes for wedding dresses for 20 years. "No bride wants to put her dress in the hold when she goes on the aeroplane. She wants to – in fact should be advised to – keep it with her at all times, yet all airlines have restrictions on hand luggage. Our Travel Maxi box is the largest size that an airline will permit in the cabin, and it is big enough to fit any dress as long as all the air is pressed out of it. Most destination wedding dresses are sleek and slender, but even the larger dresses will fit if they are packed correctly," she says.

Travel boxes also double up as wedding dress storage boxes and are made from special ph-neutral board that prevents discolouration of the dress. "We encourage retailers to keep a stock of our boxes so that the bride can purchase one as soon as she buys her dress. If she buys the travel box from the retailer she has the added advantage of getting it packed for her, which is always a great relief." **BB**