

Good weather, value for money: the popularity of civil weddings



Vicki and Lee Squirrel



The largest group of foreigners to choose civil weddings in Cyprus are the Brits. **Nadia Sawyer** talks to a wedding organiser about what is involved

ACCORDING to Cyprus' Deputy Ministry of Tourism, Aphrodite's island of love is one of Europe's leading destinations for couples wishing to marry abroad, citing the climate, scenery, venue and ceremony options as the main influencing factors. But there are many other elements to consider when organising a wedding, which is why foreign brides and grooms are employing the services of wedding planners to organise their nuptials for them.

Vicki Squirrel is a wedding planner based in Paphos and has been running her business Tie the Knot, with the

help of her husband Lee, for five years.

"We came to Cyprus for a friend's wedding many years ago and absolutely fell in love with the place," recalls Vicki.

In 2013, having decided to escape the "rat race", they sold up and relocated to the island, with a very resourceful Vicki, who had been an experienced events' organiser back in the UK, securing a job within two days at a wedding services company. But within in a year, she decided to go it alone.

"I knew I could offer a much more personal service," she explains. Utilising social media such as bridal forums and Facebook, she set about

advertising her company's services and found that her business grew rapidly. With the majority of her clients coming from the UK, she also helps couples from Lebanon.

So what does she consider the main reason for foreign couples choosing Cyprus for their wedding?

"Most definitely the cost," says Vicki. "The value for money – what they get over here is an awful lot more than they would do in their home country. The fantastic weather is obviously a massive plus for them and there is such a huge selection of venues".

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*Celebration
of Civil Marriage
in Agios Athanasios
Municipality*



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A lovely day... from

With an increasing numbers of foreigners getting married on the island **Nadia Sawyer** talks to one couple who took the plunge here

Arranging a marriage and a wedding reception is usually a complex affair that requires months of organising and often creates stress and discord between a couple and their respective families. One would think, therefore, that the idea of choosing to get married in a country thousands of miles away would be the stuff of nightmares, but not for one British couple who elected to do just that.

Claire Rogers, 31, and her husband John, 41, who live in Middlesbrough in the UK, got married in Cyprus in September 2018. They first met at a party back in 2013 and briefly dated.

"We broke up," says John, wryly, while Claire quickly interjects with laughter and a very forthright "I dumped him."

But John was not to be defeated. When their paths crossed again in 2015, while

they were both working in the mental health services sector, he seized his chance. With a mutual interest in fitness, they began training together and soon rekindled their relationship. Then things started to get serious – within a year they had moved in together and were talking about getting married.

"I picked my ring, and my maid of honour took John to the shop to make sure he knew which ring I wanted," says Claire, admitting to being a bit of a control freak.

The official proposal came while they were on holiday in Tenerife – at an isolated cove.

"I got down on one knee, which was painful because it was very rocky," jokes John, as he describes popping the question.

But why didn't they get married in the UK and why did they choose Cyprus for their marriage and wedding



John and Claire Rogers
(Lee Squirrel)

reception?

While John says that the weather was an important factor because "up north it is very unpredictable", Claire claims that "cost played a big part".

John cites some friends whose wedding in the UK cost £30,000, yet Claire esti-

mates that the total cost for theirs in Cyprus came in under £12,000, which included flights and accommodation.

They also had to take into consideration the fact that it would be their honeymoon destination and a holiday for the family and friends accompanying them.

"Cyprus wasn't too far away for people to travel," says Claire.

And how difficult was it to arrange?

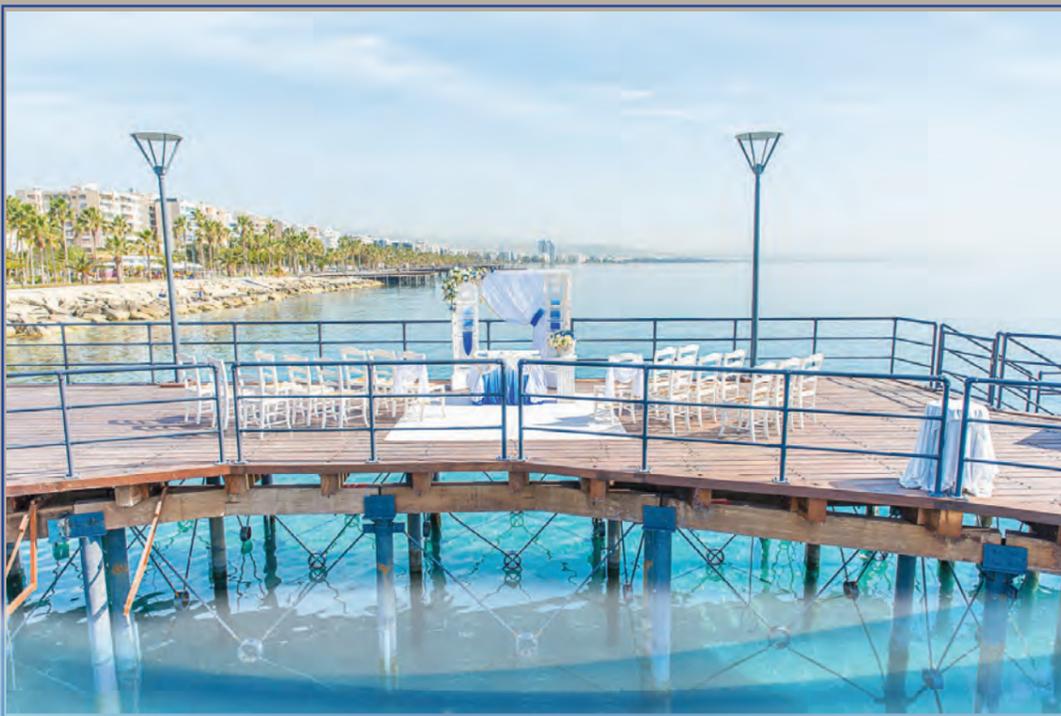
They found a wedding planner online who, says Claire, organised everything from the flowers to the photographer.

"It was so easy. The wedding planner was an absolute godsend," continues John. "She guided us through everything."

Electing to have a civil ceremony at the wedding reception venue, the Vasilius Nikoklis Inn in the Nikokleia area, north-east of Paphos,



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beginning to end

they were taken by the wedding planner to the local town hall a couple of days earlier so that they could conclude the paperwork formalities.

And why did they choose that particular venue?

"We were looking for something that was a bit traditional, rustic, but also very intimate, private and quaint," says John.

Indeed, the inn has a beautiful setting and an interesting history. Situated on the west bank of the Diarizos river bed, it commands magnificent views across the valley all the way down to the sea. Reputed to be over 100 years old, it was renovated with the aim of remaining true to its heritage as a travellers' rest, but now boasts a pool and beautiful gardens. Using social media, the couple researched reviews of the inn and watched videos uploaded by other couples who had married there, further convincing them that it was the right choice.

And what about the wedding day itself?

"All the girls met for a champagne breakfast in the hotel [where they were staying]," recalls Vicki, while John went to the gym "to calm down."

Having taken the advice

of the wedding planner not to get married in the heat of the day, Vicki put her bridal gown on in the afternoon while a friend helped her with her hair and make-up. The whole wedding party then made its way to the inn with Claire in a limousine accompanied by her maid of honour and bridesmaids,

much food," says Claire. It was followed by wedding cake ordered to her specification - a three-tiered raspberry, white chocolate, lemon drizzle and mandarin affair which John says was "unbelievable".

Entertainment consisted of traditional Greek dancers and the wedding planner

'I would do it all again. Everyone commented on how organised it was, how lovely the venue was... the food... I wouldn't change anything'

John in a separate car with his best man and the guests in a hired coach.

When they arrived, chairs had been set up in the garden for the ceremony and the registrar, a lady, was waiting to marry them. Claire walked down the aisle to the theme music from the film *Amélie*, a homage to John's daughter, Amélie, 11, who was one of the flower girls.

After the ceremony, the wedding party was treated to a traditional Cypriot barbecue. "There was far too

had also organised a DJ with the wedding guests having previously selected three songs each of their choice, ensuring that everyone was happy with the music and were up and dancing. At the end of the evening, the best man suggested that they take advantage of the crystal clear night time sky to gaze at the stars - a romantic conclusion to what Claire describes as "an absolutely fantastic day."

"I would do it all again. Everyone commented on how organised it was, how



lovely the venue was... the food... I wouldn't change anything," she reflects.

"It was phenomenal... it went beyond any expectations I had... it was a lovely

day from beginning to end," concurs John.

Would they advise friends or relatives to get married in Cyprus? Claire lets her husband

have the final word on the matter.

"I actively advise people not to get married in England," says John, adamantly. "I tell them to go to Cyprus!"

Make your occasion personal



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For any further information regarding the procedure of civil marriage please contact the Civil Marriage Office at the Nicosia Municipality Town Hall, by phone: 0035722797238 or by email: civilmarriages@nicosiamunicipality.org.cy



Good weather, value for money: the popularity of civil weddings

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Although hotels are the obvious choice, Vicki says that wedding receptions can be held in town halls, country inns, wineries, golf clubs and even on boats. Food is also an important consideration, with barbecues being a particularly popular choice among her clients.

With the wedding season usually running from April to October, Vicki confirms her busiest months are May and September, but she is active all year round in the planning processes.

So what exactly does a wedding planner do?

Starting off with general advice, Vicki says that the first stage is helping the couples to find, choose and book the right venue.

"There are a lot of things to take into consideration. There is no point in choosing a venue that has a lot of steps if you have elderly or disabled persons in your wedding party," she explains.

Once the venue has been decided, other requirements are then discussed. These include, but are not limited to, décor, flowers, hair, make-up, transport, music and entertainment.

"It's a holiday island. There is so much entertainment on offer. From belly dancers to fire dancers, DJs, singers, saxophone players," says Vicki.

With regards to photographs of the wedding day, this is where Lee, Vicki's husband, steps in. Previously a sports promoter back in the UK, a love for photography



turned into a profession and a business in Cyprus, Lee Squirrel Wedding Photography, and Lee is now available to capture all the memorable moments on a couple's special day.

Unlike other local wedding planners, Vicki does not offer standard wedding packages, electing instead to create packages specifically for

And what about the legal requirements for a civil wedding: specifically the paperwork?

According to Vicki, the paperwork is very simple, especially for British couples.

"They don't have to get anything translated. As long as it is English, it is fine," she explains. "I send my clients a list of the documents



mentary series about it. Entitled *Sun, Sea and Brides to Be*, it is currently being aired and features some of the British wedding planners working in Cyprus, including Vicki.

"I was approached by one of the producers who said they were thinking about making a TV programme about British wedding planners working here," Vicki explains. Keen to get involved, she put the producer in touch with other wedding planners and filming began in 2017.

"I am in four episodes. I was originally going to be in five, but one of my couples started filming and then the groom felt very uncomfortable and decided he didn't want to do it anymore and so they pulled out," she admits.

And of all the weddings that Vicki has organised in Cyprus, is there one that particularly stands out in her memory?

Encouraged to select music for the marriage ceremony itself, one bride, whose husband-to-be was a *Star Wars* fan, secretly chose the Darth Vader imperial march, much to the surprise of her spouse

and that of the guests.

"Everyone fell about laughing," says Vicki, as she recalls their shock at the opening few bars when what they were expecting was romantic music.

And has the Brexit debacle affected her bookings?

"The Brexit thing doesn't seem to be worrying people at the moment. They are still booking. They are still getting excited about their weddings here. I haven't seen a decrease in enquiries because of Brexit," she states. In fact, so confident is Vicki about the future that she has just taken on a Cypriot lady, Maria, to help her.

And is there anything else that could be done to promote the island as a wedding destination?

"The Cyprus Tourist Organisation is already doing a fantastic job in promoting Cyprus", says Vicki. "In fact, it sells itself."

For further information on planning a wedding in Cyprus go to <https://www.tietheknotcyprus.com/>

'Every package is tailor-made to each client. Why would a bride want what the last bride had?'

each couple.

"Every package is tailor-made to each client," she confirms. "Why would a bride want what the last bride had?"

With regards to the marriage itself, Vicki can organise either a religious (Anglican or Catholic) or a civil ceremony, and, over the years, has built up a good working relationship with the local municipalities offering the latter.

required by email, they scan them back to me and then I check them to make sure all is in order. They then bring the originals with them and we all go to the town hall together a few days before the marriage. This is all part of the service."

In fact, so easy and so popular is it for British couples to get married in Cyprus that the UK's Channel 4 decided to make a 20-episode docu-

CIVIL WEDDINGS: THE FACTS

- 37 per cent of couples preferred to get married during the months from July to September, according to a Cyprus Tourism Organisation report from 2016, the latest figures available. The least favourite months were January to March.

- The Larnaca district was the most popular, 39 per cent of the ceremonies took place there, followed by Paphos (33 per cent) and Nicosia with 22 per cent.

- Especially popular was Aradippou as were Paphos and Larnaca town.

- The majority, 42 per cent, of wedding tourists came from the UK, while 33 per cent arrived from Israel, 8 per cent from Lebanon and 5 per cent from Russia.

- Not all weddings are performed in municipal buildings. 14 communities allow weddings outside the municipality, and in these communities 79 per cent of people opted for a hotel to tie the knot and the rest other areas such as the beach.

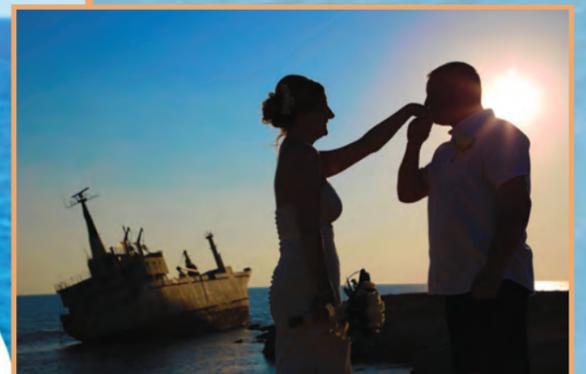
- The weddings are an important source of income for the municipalities. Four out of 23 said they have the ability to perform more than 20 a day, and another seven more than 10 a day.

- An average couple from the UK had 29.2 guests and stayed for 6.1 nights. The Russians stayed even



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