

Oceans a-lovin'

What could be more romantic than getting *married by the sea*? From beaches to castles, we've found the best UK venues and honeymoon hotels

WORDS **Hayley Spurway**



Saying 'I do' by the sea doesn't have to mean flying off to Hawaii or the Caribbean. From beaches to lighthouses, castles and seafront hotels, there is a huge range of coastal wedding venues across the British Isles. 'There are plenty of locations where couples can fulfil their dream,' confirms a spokesperson for wedding experts Confetti. Not only is there something irresistibly romantic about a beach wedding, but also, says Cornwall-based wedding planner Sarah Vaux, 'Lots of people choose the seaside as a venue so they can turn the occasion into a break with friends and family.' If you can't get to the coast, bring the beach to your big day with a marine wedding theme. Read on to discover how and where to do it, plus why three couples chose to tie the knot by the British seaside.

THE WEDDING PLANNER

Ten coastal venues for a blissful day

1 For island lovers **Burgh Island Hotel, South Devon**

An island wedding doesn't mean dropping the glamour factor: hop to Burgh Island for a ceremony in a luxury Art-Deco hotel by the South Devon coast. *Contact 01548 810514, burghisland.com.*





2 For a fairytale wedding Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland

Get married in the magical setting of Bamburgh Castle (above), whose turrets rise above the wildly romantic sea. *Contact 01668 214515, bamburghcastle.com.*



4 For a boho big day Artist's Beach House, Whitstable, Kent

A seafood barbecue and blankets on the beach... enjoy an intimate, unfussy wedding in a cool, New England-style seaside home on Tankerton Beach. *Contact 01637 881942, artistsbeachhouse.uniquehomestays.com.*

3 For a beach setting Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides

Make the dress code 'flip-flops and posh frocks' for a wedding on the Hebridean Isle of Harris. *Contact 01859 502011, visithebrides.com (also visit rodelhotel.co.uk for a reception venue).*



'Our big day turned into a holiday'

Living north of Inverness in the Scottish Highlands, 39-year-old Jeremy and Anita Spurway, 35 – a marine scientist and hydrologist – spend much of their spare time exploring the local coastline. On Midsummer's Day in 2004, they tied the knot in an amphitheatre overlooking Tangusdale Beach on the Isle of Barra.

'We had always wanted to get married on an island and we fell in love with the pristine beauty of Barra,' Anita says. 'We even had our rings designed to mirror the pattern of the ripples on Tangusdale Beach.' The pair used windmills and kites to decorate the 'machair' (fertile sand dunes) where the civil ceremony and reception took place, had tables in the marquee named after their favourite beaches, and the service itself included a 'sand ceremony'. 'Sand collected by friends and family from beaches across the world was poured into a vessel to symbolise the unification of our two lives,' Jeremy explains.

And festivities didn't stop with the wedding day, as Anita describes: 'Having ferried 140 guests to such a remote location, we were glad they stayed for a few days around the event. In the end, the wedding turned into a big summer holiday. The fact that we had lovely weather helped!'



Anita and Jeremy's wedding included a 'sand ceremony' (below)



'The cake was covered in seashells'

James and Victoria Cowan, who are 30 and 37 respectively, run a sailing school on the Norfolk coast (norfolketc.co.uk), which provided the inspiration for their wedding at Blakeney Point last May.

'The tiny village church – which is in my parents-in-law's parish – hadn't been used for a marriage in 30 years, but, with special permission from the Archbishop of Canterbury, we had the organs pumped up and crammed in a hundred guests for the occasion,' James says. After a traditional ceremony, guests walked to a marquee perched by the sea near Blakeney Point, for a reception based on a maritime theme.

'The view of the coast from the marquee was stunning and, as you entered, there was a boat filled with ice and bottles of Champagne,' Victoria recalls. 'We laid sailcloth on tables, and the cake, covered in seashells, was placed next to a model sailing boat on a table draped with fishing nets, shells, driftwood, pebbles and wild flowers. Shells were also entwined in the bouquets and used as table decorations.'

The ocean-inspired theme was carried through to the menu, too: fresh seafood was served as part of the wedding breakfast. 'All through the day, we could look out onto where we sail,' James says. 'It was the perfect location – just awesome.'

James and Victoria had a full-on marine theme



5 For princess brides

Polhawn Fort, Rame Head, Torpoint, Cornwall

Cross the drawbridge and tie the knot in the cliff-top setting of a historic fort with a private beach (above). *Contact 01752 822864, polhawnfort.com.*



7 For a bit of luxury

Warpool Court Hotel, Pembrokeshire

For beauty and indulgence, say your vows at a four-star country manor overlooking St Bride's Bay. *Contact 01437 720300, warpoolcourthotel.com.*

6 For lighthouse fans

Old Dungeness Lighthouse, Kent/East Sussex border

One of the quirkiest and most romantic wedding venues on the south coast; climb the spiral staircase and say 'I do' backed by panoramic views over the English Channel. *Contact 01303 258691, dungenesslighthouse.com.*



THE LAW OF THE SHORE

☀ If you want your ceremony literally on the sand, head to Scotland, where a local minister or registrar can marry you on the beach of your choice. Any venue must be deemed 'safe and dignified', and you may need to get a temporary licence through the local registrar or council.

☀ In England and Wales, weddings must take place in a register office, licensed civil venue or religious building. Contact your local registrar or check out confetti.co.uk for a list of places. You

could also contact a coastal wedding planner (try sarahvaux.co.uk or suffolkcoastalweddings.co.uk). To tie the knot on the beach or clifftops, you can undergo the legal service in a register office and have a humanist ceremony or blessing in the setting of your choice. For more info, see gro-scotland.gov.uk (for Scottish weddings), gro.gov.uk (for England and Wales) or groni.gov.uk (for Northern Ireland). Details on humanist ceremonies are at humanism.org.uk.

8 For a maritime theme

National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Falmouth

Surround yourself with sea views, sailing boats and all things nautical at a ceremony in the waterside museum. Contact 01326 214557, nmmc.co.uk.



9 For an Italian vibe

The Italian Chapel, Orkney Islands

Have your wedding under the roof of a magnificent chapel perched on the Orkney island of Lamb Holm. Contact 01856 781268, undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/eastmainland/italianchapel.



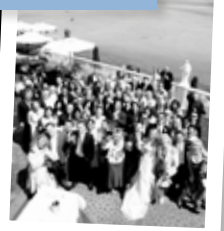
10 For a church ceremony

St Just in Roseland Church, Cornwall

Opt for a religious ceremony by the sea in a waterside church, then sail off to St Mawes Castle (below) for the reception. Contact 01326 270248, stjustinroseland.org.uk, englishheritage.co.uk/stmawes.



The Portmeirion coast brought a touch of the Med to Lisa and Jonnie's wedding



'We wanted a British beach wedding'

TV producer Lisa Dawson, 28, and her husband Jonnie Garcia-Quevedo, 31, who owns a plastering business, chose the Italianate holiday village of Portmeirion on the North Wales coast for their wedding in May last year. Based in Blackheath, south-east London, they both love the beach and Jonnie spent childhood holidays at Portmeirion.

'We really wanted to get married by the beach without having to go abroad,' Lisa says, 'and Portmeirion is special, as it's where Jonnie first told me he loved me. It's got a lovely Mediterranean holiday feel and our guests stayed in coastal cottages in the village.'

'I'm Spanish,' Jonnie adds, 'so we continued the Med-style theme with a flamenco guitarist, fans given out as favours and sangria served alfresco.'

After the civil ceremony, held at the Hercules Hall in the village, younger guests played on the beach while the couple had photos taken and enjoyed a toes-in-the sand walk along the shore. 'Even when we went indoors to eat at the Portmeirion Hotel, the sea view flooded in through the windows,' Lisa continues. 'Being by the beach meant everyone was in high spirits. And we gave out "sea and sand" candles, so our guests could take a memento home with them.'

To find out about Portmeirion, see portmeirion-village.com. For more inspirational beach weddings, visit youandyourwedding.co.uk. **COAST**

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HONEYMOON HOTELS BY THE SEA

BLUE REEF COTTAGES Scarista, Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides This romantic outpost (below right) has a Jacuzzi and sauna (01859 550370, stay-hebrides.com).

DRAKES HOTEL Brighton, East Sussex Ask for the seafront room and you'll get a bed that's seven feet wide (01273 696934, drakesofbrighton.com).

DOYDEN CASTLE Port Isaac, Cornwall This remote hideaway is on the clifftops of Cornwall's rugged north coast (0844 800 2070, nationaltrustcottages.co.uk).

HARBOURMASTER HOTEL Aberaeron, Ceredigion This quirky inn offers a suite with panoramic sea views (01545 570755, harbour-master.com).

ROMNEY BAY HOUSE HOTEL Littlestone, Kent Bag a four-poster suite and drink in the 1920s ambience of this seafront enclave (01797 364747, johansens.com).

