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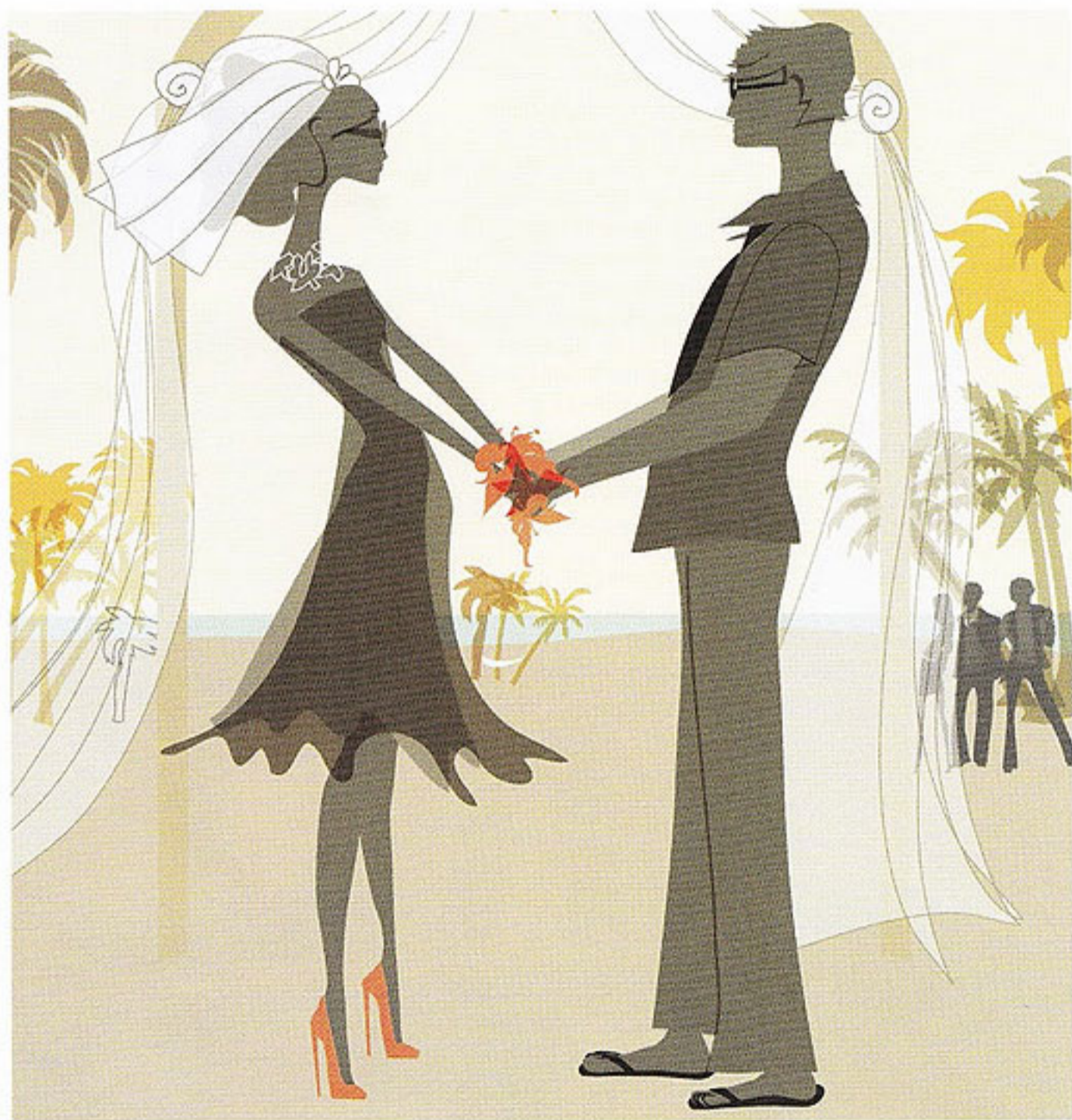
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INSIDE GUIDE

GETTING MARRIED ABROAD

It's cheaper than tying the knot in the UK, and you'll avoid those 'will-it-rain' worries – but before you pack your passport, dodge potential pitfalls with our need-to-know guide...



WILL I REALLY SAVE MONEY?

Yes. The average British wedding costs between £21,000 and £25,000. Get hitched abroad and you'll only spend around £6,000 (according to research firm Mintel) – and the bride and groom can save even more cash by combining their celebration with a honeymoon.

SOUNDS GREAT – ANY DISADVANTAGES?

Elderly or financially pressed guests may not be able to travel, and fluctuating exchange rates can make it hard to plan your budget. Unless you hire a bilingual wedding planner, getting over language

barriers can be tricky, too, and if you pick somewhere very popular, you risk experiencing that 'conveyor belt' feeling. Don't forget that guests will need to book flights, and may need to get visas and vaccinations, so you should send out save-the-date cards at least six months before the big day. You can keep guests updated on travel and hotel options by setting up your own webpage – free – at www.weddingpath.co.uk.

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Easy wedding destinations for British couples include Italy, Cyprus, Mauritius and South Africa – all have (almost)

guaranteed good weather, a huge choice of venues and frequent flights.

If you're organising your wedding through a planner or tour company, they'll handle the legal side for you. Otherwise you'll need to contact the country's embassy or consulate (see www.fco.gov.uk) to find out which legal documents are required, and whether you need a visa and/or proof of residency (many places require you to be present in the country for a period of time before your marriage – in France, for example, it's 40 days). If you want something quick and simple, try Las Vegas – you can marry the day after you fly in, even without your birth certificate. In stricter countries, it's easier to have a civil ceremony first in the UK and then a blessing or symbolic ceremony abroad.

You can't register an overseas marriage in the UK, but you can deposit your documents with the General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk) as an official record. This means you can get additional wedding certificates – or replacements if you lose the original – without having to apply to the authorities in the country you married in (which could take ages or require a visit).

WHICH COMPANIES CAN HELP ME PLAN THE BIG DAY?

Using a wedding planner takes the hassle out of arranging things from afar. Larger hotels and resorts, such as One & Only (www.oneandonlyresorts.com), have their own on-site. Or you can opt for a local specialist: Chic Weddings (www.chicweddings.eu) organises stylish parties in Italy. A budget of £10,000 covers a night's stay in a pretty Sicilian pile for 30 guests, plus a classical musician for the ceremony, dinner and drinks as well as the wedding cake, a DJ, table decorations and bouquets. Alternatively, try Tuscan Dreams (www.tuscandreams.com). In South Africa, the Aleit Group (www.aleit.co.za) has packages from £199pp, including venue hire, minister, catering, gazebo, tent, lighting, wedding cake, flowers, musicians, hair and make-up, photographer and transport. ■

THE AVERAGE UK WEDDING COSTS £23K. ABROAD, YOU'LL ONLY SPEND ABOUT £6,000