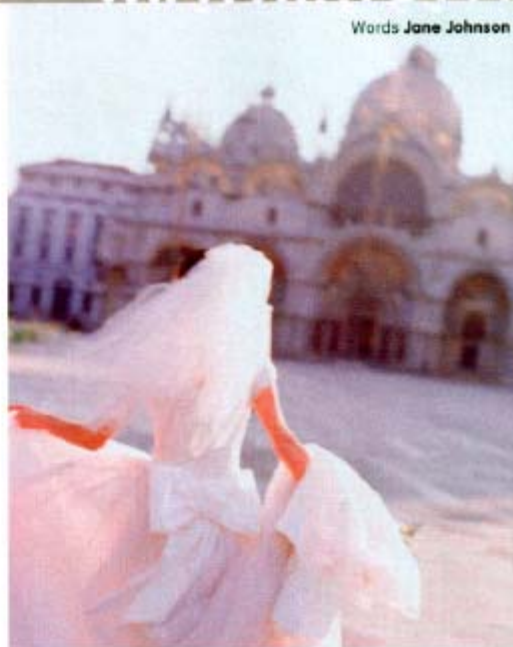


MATRIMONY

Words Jane Johnson



IF YOU LOVE ITALIAN STYLE, THE LAND OF ROMANCE IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO HOST YOUR WEDDING.

For centuries Italy has seduced visitors with its powerful blend of culture and romance. Its art has enthralled, its architecture enchanted, its countryside captivated. From Dante to d'Annunzio, its love poetry has inflamed many a sensitive soul. And since the nuptials of Italian nobility gave birth to opera in the 17th century, its music has enslaved millions. Combine these seductions with more recent passions for Prada and panforte, and you can see why Italy is attracting worldly couples wanting to marry in Venice rather than Vegas.

The idea of eloping is a thrilling one – as is the idea of not having to deal with the dreaded seating plan for 150 of your nearest and dearest. Couples who have been married previously often don't feel the need for a "big fat Greek wedding" and, if one of the couple hails from abroad, a wedding in Europe might provide more neutral territory.

If stress avoidance is part of your decision to marry in Italy, you might consider engaging a wedding planner or specialised travel agent, who can not only remove all the difficulties of translation, but also ensure you have the necessary documentation, and follow the correct procedure for a legal marriage.

Paola Bamonte, whose company Marry

Me Abroad organises weddings in Italy, says that while the official process is not overly complicated, it certainly helps to have someone who knows the language and laws. For instance, Bamonte says, "There is one Italian law that states that a divorced bride must wait 300 days before marrying again, while a divorced groom can marry the next day."

And if the church you've chosen happens not to welcome foreigners, it helps to know the alternatives. Bamonte says she can organise a ceremony with civic validity in any religion. One of her upcoming weddings is for a Jewish couple; the rabbi is flying out from the UK to marry them in the Cinque Terre.

A wedding consultant can help you get creative with ceremony venues. Marry Me Abroad offers a selection of villas and castles, country churches and seaside town halls from Venice to Tuscany to Positano on the Amalfi Coast.

One recent wedding on Lake Maggiore saw the happy couple taken by boat to the town hall for a civil ceremony. Aperitifs followed back on board, as they headed to a small island to exchange their private vows, before lunching at a renowned restaurant. This sort of civil ceremony might cost from around \$2500, while one in a Venetian palazzo may be

up to \$9000. The fee includes documentation, an interpreter, assistance in Australia and Italy, location rental, the minister/celebrant/registrar and witnesses if required.

Photography, hair and make-up can all be arranged via a consultant, as can accommodation for the couple, their friends and family. Marry Me Abroad will also organise pre-events such as a spa day, sailing, or an evening at the opera. You could enjoy a wine tasting at the villa featured in the party scene in *Stealing Beauty*, or watch the famous Il Palio race in Siena from a balcony overlooking the Piazza del Campo. Bamonte tells of one couple marrying in Florence who have requested a nature guide and a helicopter to escort them to Cinque Terre National Park for a private tour.

By opting for an intimate Italian *matrimonio*, it seems you can make your wedding one long honeymoon.

Marry Me Abroad, call 1300 553 573 or visit www.marrymeabroad.com

For airfares call Qantas on 13 13 13 or visit qantas.com. For holiday packages to Italy call Qantas Holidays on 13 14 15.