

Wedding WOWS

While venues, group size and licences might be wedding essentials, it's the theme that gets clients excited and eager to book. *Charlotte Cullinan* asks the experts what's hot for 2019

Creating the wow-factor has always been a key consideration for couples planning an overseas wedding. However, photos are now often splashed across social media before the cake has been cut, with many couples creating hashtags to ensure everyone at home can see their spectacular day. As these six wedding experts explain, 2019 is the year metallics, awe-inspiring backdrops and curated colour schemes can help you create eye-catching celebrations for your clients.

Spectacular spaces in Mexico

Expect beach weddings to be oozing in the popularity stakes, advises AMResorts' weddings and business development executive Joanna Byrnasiewicz. She explains: "Our UK brides prefer grand arches and spectacular spaces to frame their ceremony, as beach weddings are less popular this year. Brides are now preferring to wear very elegant, grand outfits, with high heels and big dresses, and to match that you need the right location."

Suggest the adults-only Secrets Akumal Riviera Maya to clients, where the impressive Lagoon Arch can accommodate up to 150 guests. The dramatic arch is surrounded by koi carp ponds and a small garden,

complete with twinkling fairy lights woven through the trees.

Book it: A Secrets Wedding in Paradise package at the Lagoon Arch is free when booking at least seven nights in certain room categories. Funway Holidays offers seven nights' all-inclusive at the property from £2,199pp, including Gatwick flights. Based on two sharing, departing January 9, 2019.

■ funway4agents.co.uk

A waterfall in Thailand

Khao Lak's boutique residence The Sarojin introduced a jungle waterfall wedding location in July, following increasing demand for nature-themed nuptials.

Owner and executive director Kate Kemp explains: "An unusual and magical setting is a key draw for future brides and grooms looking for an unforgettable venue, particularly in the digital age we live in. With friends, family and others all watching via social media, couples really want a remarkable location that truly stands out."

Couples can choose from a western or Thai ceremony, held in front of a waterfall, with up to 12 guests. Decorations can be tailored to clients' requests, with many couples opting for tropical flowers and candles. Dining options include a waterfall dinner for two and a BBQ on the beach for groups. The property can **take to 50**



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also be exclusively hired for weddings of up to 130 guests.

Book it: Ceremonies start at £2,100, including tailor-made vows, readings and music, venues decorated with flowers, bouquet, corsage, personal wedding planner, one-tier wedding cake, a bottle of sparkling wine, four hours of photography and a room upgrade.

■ sarajin.com



The happy couple can plan every detail with Sandals' Asle to Isle programme

and a wedding album, two copies of the marriage licence and a gift.

■ loveatatlantis.com

Royalty and glitz in the Caribbean

Clients can use the 10 theme 'inspirations' in Sandals and Beaches Resorts' Asle to Isle programme when planning their union. Wedding brand manager Olivia Knight is tipping the two newest concepts as big hits for 2019. The English Royalty theme launched earlier this year, inspired by Prince Harry and Meghan's wedding. It helps create a regal blush, pink and purple celebration. It was followed by Bands of Gold, which enables couples to craft a sophisticated gold look, with sapphire and white blooms.

Local culture in the Bahamas

Jena Conway, associate director of weddings and events at Atlantis, Paradise Island, says infusing local culture into weddings is increasingly popular. "Here at Atlantis, guests can celebrate Bahamian culture in every aspect of their wedding, from authentic Bahamian dishes and cocktails inspired by local flavours, to fantastic music by a local junkanoo band - sure to get the party started!"

Offering late-night snacks is another growing trend among Atlantis's couples, who often choose the slider bar, which has small bites including Cajun chicken, beef patties, vegan burgers and a conch slider.

Conway recommends using images on Atlantis' website of the 19 ceremony and reception venues set-up, and the Real Weddings section, to help clients visualise their big day.

Book it: The Simply Love wedding package starts at £2,867 and includes an on-site ceremony, officiant, bouquet and boutonniere, ceremony seating, one hour of photography

Each inspiration has suggestions to help with the large decisions, such as the structure used for the ceremony, down to finer details of the table decorations and even napkins. Couples can combine individually priced items from any theme to create a unique look.

Book it: Sandals and Beaches offer a free wedding when booking three nights or more, with \$500 credit towards decor and other elements when staying longer than six nights. Seven nights' all-inclusive at Sandals South Coast in Jamaica in a beachfront deluxe room costs from £1,979pp, including Gatwick flights and transfers. Valid for travel from May 1-June 25, 2019.

■ sellingsandals.co.uk

A private villa in Italy

Kuoni weddings executive Samantha Berry has seen an increase in couples interested in holding their nuptials at a

private villa, explaining: "They are generally looking for something low-key but that is private and unique to them, and our best options are in Italy."

Suggest the picturesque Borgo San Biagio, located on the border of Umbria and Tuscany, which has six buildings and sleeps up to 20 people. Couples can get married in the on-site chapel and invite up to 80 guests.

Book it: The Borgo San Biagio's 2019 rates are yet to be confirmed, but, this year, Kuoni's wedding package at the villa costs £5,067, including management and town hall fees, document achievement, a civil officiant, assistance and an interpreter on the day, a bouquet and boutonhole.

■ kuoni.co.uk



Guests can get a feel for the real Bahamas at Atlantis Paradise Island



Kuoni features Italian villa Borgo San Biagio, which sleeps up to 20 people



Extravagant decorations are in at the Olympic Lagoon in Asia Naga

Shifting trends

Melissa Lowe, marketing and customer engagement manager, Perfect Weddings Abroad

"There has definitely been a shift in wedding themes this year. In previous years it's been a more rustic, laid-back theme for a wedding abroad, however now we're seeing more couples wanting more extravagant decorations, with flowers and fairy lights, along with features like flower walls, long wreaths on tables and extravagant centrepieces to make pictures look more Insta-worthy. Couples want to give their guests the wow-factor and make them

take more photos to post on social media, including using a wedding hashtag, which is becoming increasingly popular.

The metallic theme is all over Instagram and it's starting to become a favourite with couples. We are also seeing an increase in a range of bridesmaid dresses within the bridal party. Instead of a set style or colour, brides are going for multiple colour choices.

Another trend we are seeing among our 2019 couples is a rustic



garden theme, with a lot of foliage and natural plants, rather than arranged flowers. We have also seen an increasing number of requests for different style wedding cakes. We had one couple this year who had a Nutella cake!"