

Expat Weddings: The Netherlands vs. Abroad

Or: How to Decide Where to Get Married



You are in love. You are getting married. And, because you are an expat, what *should* be one of the easiest questions for many engaged couples to answer is not such a straightforward one: WHERE will you get married?

There are many factors that can swing your decision when searching for the answer to this question. In this article, we would like to cover some of the aspects that should be taken into consideration.



Documentation

Most countries will oblige you to get married before the law before you can hold a religious ceremony. Therefore, the first step is always to inform yourself about the documentation you will need. This can vary from country to country even within the EU, but be prepared to supply:

- your passport
- proof of residency (sometimes even with rental bills or proof that you own a house)
- a legalized birth certificate
- proof of civil status – often not only from your place of residence (e.g. the Netherlands), but also from your country of origin!
- in case of a second marriage, proof of a previous divorce.

Apostille

If you need a legalized document, the authorities will mostly require an 'apostille' – which is basically an international certificate comparable to a notarization. But beware, an 'apostille' can only be attached to a document that has been issued by a recognized authority, which in practice might require you to travel to your home country in order to obtain an official copy of – for instance – your birth certificate (or to authorize a family member or friend who lives there to do so on your behalf). Sending your mum with her copy of your birth certificate to the authorities for the 'apostille' will not suffice!

Simple

If you want to get married outside the Netherlands, then having your marriage legally recognized in the Netherlands afterwards is fairly simple. You take your official marriage document to your local authority (*stadsdeelkantoor*) and in most cases they will accept it as it is – of course there are some exceptions that will require further legalization – and your status will be changed to 'married' in the Dutch records. However, there are other hurdles to consider.

Summerhouse

Let's say, you have always dreamt of getting married in St. Tropez. Some nations, including France, will not allow legal marriages in their country unless:

- one of the spouses has the country's nationality, or
- one of the spouses is a resident of this country, or
- there are other factors that show one of you has 'strong ties' with the country.

In one case, it was the grandmother's summerhouse in the Provence that allowed a young couple to be married by the village mayor (but only in *that* village and the mayor still had to be persuaded). So yes, you will be able to have your dream wedding in St. Tropez – but prepare to be legally wed *beforehand* outside of France.



Big Project

Another thing to consider if you wish to get married outside the Netherlands is that – unless you hire a wedding planner – the further away from your country of residence you plan to get married, the less control you will have over your own wedding. Planning a wedding is a big project and many couples that want to get married in their home country or favorite destination underestimate the time it takes to meet up with all the vendors. They forget to add their travelling costs to this destination whilst preparing their wedding budget.

Location

What if you are considering tying the knot in the Netherlands? Many international couples shun this option because they are not sure their Dutch is good enough or simply because they do not know where to go. There are wedding professionals who can help you with this. And, especially if you and your fiancé(e) have decided that you do not really want to have a religious wedding, in the Netherlands there are many nice locations – from restaurants and beach clubs to small castles – that are licensed to host a legal wedding. The official representative would travel there just for your ceremony. The ceremony by law is required to be held in Dutch, so make sure you bring someone who can translate it for you! (No, this does not need to be an official translator, but the *trouwambtenaar* (marriage officiant) must be satisfied with that person's command of the Dutch language!)



'Destination Wedding'

In many ways, wherever you decide to get married as expats – it will always be a 'destination wedding'. If you get married in your home country, you will have to travel there – but for many of your family and friends it will be local and convenient. If you decide to get married in your favorite location, you and your guests will have to travel there, and if you get married in the Netherlands, your guests will have to travel too. On the other hand, it might offer you the possibility to discover more sides of the country you now live in and to showcase your current lifestyle to your family and friends.

Whatever you decide, your Wedding Day is all about you. Choose to create the memories you want to remember forever!



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