

THE SCOTTISH WEDDING PLANNER

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INTRODUCTION

I dreamed of a wedding of elaborate elegance; a church filled with flowers and friends. I asked him what kind of wedding he wished for; he said one that would make me his wife. (Anonymous)

Whatever type of wedding you dream of, the large or the small, the elaborate or the simple, the traditional or the unconventional, it should be an extraordinary occasion; one which you will both remember forever. Scotland is an extraordinary country, undoubtedly one of the most beautiful in the world. Its untamed landscape has an elemental, uplifting quality which gives a fitting backdrop to the deeply serious, profoundly happy emotions of a wedding. In addition, it has some of the most fabulous venues in the world. From castles to ancient chapels to grandly elegant country hotels, the choice is unsurpassed.

On top of all that, the marriage laws in Scotland make it possible for residents of anywhere in the world to marry there and to choose whether they want a religious, non-religious or civil ceremony. Furthermore, the recent Civil Partnership legislation has allowed same-sex couples for the first time to make a public, and legally-approved, commitment to each other. With different regulations from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and most importantly no residential requirement, it is easy to combine your wedding with a holiday in one of the world's most romantic countries.

Whether you and your partner are Scottish born and bred, or whether you are travelling across the world to marry in this most beautiful of countries, this book explains everything you need to know to help you arrange your wedding in Scotland and has tips and advice from other couples who tied the knot there.

As Wilfred Arlan Peterson wrote: *Happiness in marriage is not something that just happens. A good marriage must be created.*

Marrying in Scotland can't fail to be a perfect first step towards creating that happy marriage!

A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

Why Scotland?

Looking for a stunning venue for your wedding? One which combines romance, beautiful scenery and splendid historic surroundings? Well, Scotland is probably the most romantic country in the world. Unique venues, including fairytale castles and imposing estate houses; a breathtaking and beautiful landscape, with misty glens, tranquil lochs, uplifting mountains; a sense of permanence and spectacle with its stirring music, history and tradition: Scotland has it all.

Add to this the ease of getting married in Scotland, whatever your nationality, it is hardly surprising that although in recent years there has been an overall drop in the numbers of weddings taking place in Scotland, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of weddings where either one or both partners were not resident in Scotland. In fact, Scotland is fast becoming one of the most popular worldwide venues for weddings.

Locality

Traditionally, it was expected that a couple would get married in the local church or registry office of the bride or the groom – more often than not, the bride, as conventionally it is her 'special day' more than his. However, it is becoming increasingly popular for couples to plight their troth in a place chosen for other reasons than locality. To make their wedding day truly special, they want to marry and stay in a unique and beautiful location. This may not even be in their home country.

Although many couples still want a traditional wedding, with their whole extended family and friends around them to witness their vows, contemporary weddings are tending to become smaller. This is partly because of the general trend towards smaller families and partly, with the far greater mobility of people today, because families are very often widely spread, relatives living a long distance from each other, often in different countries.

Where once a local venue was generally most convenient, because families tended to live reasonably close, now this is far less likely to be the case. Getting married in a different country may involve the guests in no extra travel than if they were to travel to the bride's or groom's home town.

Frequently, couples wish to make the ceremony itself a very intimate and personal affair, with only themselves involved, or perhaps with just their closest friends or relatives with them. By having their wedding in a different country, this makes it easier to explain to the wider family and friends why they are not invited to the ceremony – the cost, time and logistics would make it impractical to invite everybody.

If your budget is limited, of course, it makes sense to restrict it to just you and maybe a couple of guests. This way, you can spend what money you can spare on paying for just what you want, rather than having to spread the money too thinly and end up with a wedding which is unsatisfactory for both you and your guests.

Kerry & Steve Pantony invited nobody to their wedding – for the best of reasons

We decided that if we were going to get married we wanted everyone to be there or no-one. We live in England and Steve's family is all there but my family and a lot of my friends are in Australia. To get everyone together seemed like a logistic and financial impossibility so we opted for no-one (that we knew).

We considered a variety of holiday destinations for the wedding. Unfortunately, many of the more tropical locations appear to marry people off at a rate of knots that made it all seem a little like a mass production factory. We didn't want to get married in England nor in Australia as we thought more people would be more upset at not having been invited. Scotland seemed like a good choice both because it is quick and easy to get to from England and because we figured that the paperwork required would be very similar (if not the same) as it would be in England.

If you prefer to have an intimate ceremony with just the two of you, yet don't want to upset your friends and family, there is always the option to throw a big party on your return home, and invite everybody and his dog!

Where money is not an issue, you may decide to marry abroad and still invite a large number of guests. The falling cost and increasing ease and speed of travel mean that this is more achievable than it ever was. You can combine the most important day of your life with an unforgettable holiday for your friends and family.

Once you have decided you wish to marry away from your home town, or even country, the next question is, where to go? Scotland is a favourite destination for weddings for a number of different reasons.

Romance

In the first place, romance is high on the agenda. What couple doesn't want their wedding to be as romantic as possible?

Scotland has been synonymous with romantic marriage for hundreds of years, thanks to Gretna Green. Once the law in England was changed in 1754, preventing anybody under the age of 21 marrying without parental consent, there began a flood of eloping couples heading for Scotland, where they could marry from the age of 16 without the need for their parents to agree. As Gretna Green was the first village over the border from England, it soon became the place for eloping couples to make for, with local blacksmiths ready and willing to marry them 'over the anvil' in exchange for money. There are many tales of couples making a dash for Gretna with angry fathers in hot pursuit!

Since the first recorded marriage at Gretna in 1772, its popularity continues today, and there are now over 4,000 weddings a year at Gretna Green, about 17% of the total marriages in Scotland.

But there's much more to the romance of Scotland than eloping couples. The history of the country is full of colourful, sometimes tragic, heroes and heroines, from Bonnie Prince Charlie to Rob Roy, Robert the Bruce to William Wallace (Braveheart), Mary Queen of Scots to Flora MacDonald. The works of Scotland's most famous writers, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns, are full of stories and poems of romantic love and daring deeds.

And then there's the most romantic aspect of all, the country itself. As you travel through the country, it seems that around every corner is another breathtaking scene. Dramatic mountains surrounded by heather-clad glens, all reflected in the mirror-clear water of isolated lochs; an unspoiled landscape full of wildlife including stags and hosts of birds; lonely seashores, with islands appearing from the mists in the distance; tranquil meadows lining the banks of rushing salmon rivers.

And finally, if you needed more, sitting amongst the gorgeous landscape, highlighting it like jewels in a stunning setting, are literally thousands of castles, stately homes and picturesque ruins, any one of which would make an unforgettable wedding venue. Just think of those gorgeous wedding photographs to show to the folks back home!

History, Myth & Legend

If you want historic surroundings for your wedding, you can't do much better than Scotland. It has been inhabited for around 8,000 years, with evidence of ancient lives still to be seen in the form of dwellings, cairns and burial mounds throughout the country. Among the most striking of these archaeological remains are the stone circles to be found at Callanish in Lewis and Brodgar in Orkney. Imagine getting married beside these standing stones as the sun sets in high summer...

Over many centuries Scotland has attracted settlers from all over Europe. First came the Picts from Ireland, followed by the Romans, and later, the Vikings from Scandinavia – not forgetting the regular cross-border attempts by the English to subjugate the fiercely independent Scots.

These settlers laid claim to different areas of the country, which has given different regions their distinctive characters. In fact, it wasn't until the 15th Century that Scotland as we know it today came into being. The modern name for the country derives from the Scoti, a Celtic tribe originally from Ireland. Prior to the adoption of the name 'Scotland' the land was divided into many smaller kingdoms. The Highlands was called Caledonia by the Romans, a name which continues in used to the present day, particularly poetically.

CALEDONIA!

There are many songs and poems which celebrate Scotland under its more romantic name. Sir Walter Scott, in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, wrote:

*O Caledonia! stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child!
Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountains and the flood,
Land of my sires! What mortal hand
Can e'er untie the filial band,
That knits me to they rugged strand!*

Scott's friend, James Hogg, known as the Ettrick shepherd, wrote a poem entitled *Caledonia*.

*Caledonia! thou land of the mountain and rock,
Of the ocean, the mist, and the wind-
Thou land of the torrent, the pine, and the oak,
Of the roebuck, the hart, and the hind;*

Far more recently, in the 1980s, Dougie Maclean wrote his own take on the theme, in a haunting song which has become something of a Scottish anthem.

*Oh, but let me tell you that I love you
That I think about you all the time
Caledonia you're calling me
And now I'm going home
If I should become a stranger
You know that it would make me more than sad
Caledonia's been everything
I've ever had.*

The universal love of a good story has led to much of Scotland's war-filled, harsh and violent history becoming inextricably linked with a more romantic version of its past. For example, the picture that we have of the dashing and dramatic Rob Roy, alleged hero of the 1715 Jacobite uprising, owes far more to the romantic versions of his life painted by Daniel Defoe in his 1723 fictionalised biography, *Highland Rogue*, followed by *Rob Roy* by Sir Walter Scott and the 1995 Hollywood film. These depictions romanticise and glorify the deeds of a man who was in fact little more than a cattle rustler, thief and bandit.

A supreme example of the way fiction has overtaken fact is the delicious story of how the statue of William Wallace erected outside the visitor centre at the Wallace Memorial in Stirling has been beheaded on a number of occasions by people upset that the statue looks far too much like Mel Gibson in his portrayal of Braveheart!

Perhaps the best-known 'fact' about Scotland is that there is a monster living in Loch Ness. This myth has a most illustrious history, with the first documented sighting of the beast being by no less a personage than St Columba himself, the man responsible for bringing Christianity to Scottish shores.

Nessie isn't the only mythical being alive and well in Scotland. Tales and legends of ghosts and kelpies, fairies and giants are common.

CHARLIE & FLORA

The meeting of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Flora Macdonald is one of the great romantic tales of Scotland. After the Young Pretender's devastating defeat at Culloden in 1746, he went on the run to escape the English government troops who were after his blood, and lived as a fugitive for five months.

Flora Macdonald met him on the island of Uist when she was 23 and she helped him escape to Skye, disguised as a serving maid. After his escape from there back to Europe, Flora Macdonald was arrested and imprisoned for a year before being pardoned.

She went on to marry and have seven children, while the prince ended his days in exile, a disillusioned drunkard, no longer 'Bonnie' or even regal. As a final romantic flourish to the tale, it is said that Flora's funeral shroud was made from the sheet on which Bonnie Prince Charlie slept while on Skye.

The incident is commemorated in *the Skye Boat Song*, which was actually written well over 100 years later. The massive death and suffering caused by the terrible battle at Culloden is evident in the words.

*Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing
Onward the sailors cry
Carry the lad that's born to be king
Over the sea to Skye
Loud the wind howls, loud the waves roar,
Thunderclaps rend the air
Baffled our foes, stand by the shore
Follow they will not dare*

*Many's the lad fought on that day
Well the claymore did wield
When the night came, silently lain
Dead on Culloden field
(Chorus)*

*Though the waves heave, soft will ye sleep
Ocean's a royal bed
Rocked in the deep, Flora will keep
Watch by your weary head
(Chorus)*

*Burned are our homes, exile and death
Scatter the loyal men
Yet e'er the sword cool in the sheath
Charlie will come again.
(Chorus)*

Wherever you look, Scotland's history, myth and legend intermingle – and when you see the hundreds of castles, gothic-style stately homes and historic monuments, the moody and mysterious lochs and glens, read the poems and stories and see the artwork produced by artists over the centuries, it is small wonder that fact and fiction mingle in such an inspiring fashion.

SCOTLAND'S MOST HAUNTED

Glamis Castle in Angus, childhood home of the late Queen Mother, is claimed to be the most haunted building in Scotland, with an impressive total of at least nine ghosts and one monster. This was reputed to be a hideous and sub-human child born into the Strathmore family some 200 years ago which lived to an immense age, dying in the 1920s.

Ancestry

Throughout history, the Scots have been renowned for travelling the world, both by choice, in search of adventure or a better life, and sadly through coercion, notoriously during the Highland Clearances of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many of those with Scots blood love to come back and trace, or at least visit, their roots. A wedding is a great time for reflecting on family history, so it is not surprising that many brides or grooms with Scottish ancestry decide to marry in Scotland, often in the area where their original clan hailed from. They may even find long-lost relatives living in the area.

And while on the subject of clans, a marriage in Scotland gives even grooms without Scottish roots the excuse to wear Highland Dress, which has to be the most dashing form of wedding suit in the world – a kilt outfit including sporran and skean dhu! While it is traditional for the bride to wear a stunning fairytale gown, all too often the poor groom is condemned to a boring grey suit. Not so in Scotland – here both bride and groom dress to impress!

*Here's to it!
The fighting sheen of it,
The yellow, the green of it,
The white, the blue of it,
The swing, the hue of it,
The dark, the red of it,
Every thread of it!*

*The fair have sighed for it,
The brave have died for it,
Foemen sought for it,
Heroes fought for it,
Honour the name of it,
Drink to the fame of it –
THE TARTAN!
Murdoch Maclean*