

Getting Married

Contributed by Administrator
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Well over a hundred thousand marriages are performed in Las Vegas each year. Having a Vegas wedding has become a byword for tongue-in-cheek chic, and there are indeed drive-thru chapels where bride and groom do no more than roll down their car windows before being serenaded on their way by Elvis himself.

What's more surprising, however, is that most marriages in the city seem to be deeply formal affairs. Both the casinos and a horde of independent wedding chapels compete to offer elaborate and expensive ceremonies with all the traditional trimmings, from white gowns and black limousines, to garters and boutonniers. The happy couples are more likely to have saved and planned long in advance than to have succumbed to a spur-of-the-moment impulse.

You don't have to be a local resident or take a blood test to get wed in Las Vegas. Assuming you're both at least eighteen years old and carrying picture ID, and neither of you is already married - US citizens are expected to know their Social Security Numbers - simply turn up at the Clark County Marriage License Bureau, downtown at 200 S Third St (Mon-Thurs 8am-midnight, and continuously from 8am on Fri to midnight on Sun; tel 455-4415,), and buy a marriage license for \$50 cash. To get a divorce in Las Vegas, you have to have been a Nevada resident for at least six weeks.

With no waiting period required, the cheapest option is then to walk one block to the office of the Commissioner of Civil Marriages, 309 S Third St (same hours; same phone number), and pay another \$50 cash to have a civil wedding performed.

Wedding chapels claim to charge as little as \$50 for their most basic ceremonies, but at that sort of rate even the minister is regarded as an "extra" costing an additional \$40. Reckon on paying at least \$100 for the bare minimum, which is liable to be as romantic a process as checking in at a hotel, and to take about as long. The full deluxe service ranges up to around \$600. Photography in particular can be expensive; many chapels won't let you bring a still camera, let alone make a video. When you pay for the services of their own photographers, you're not usually buying the right to keep the negatives, and may have to pay exorbitant rates for each individual print.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau provide full listings of wedding chapels on their website (), as well as details of operators such as Las Vegas Weddings and Rooms (tel 1-800/488-6283) that offer all-inclusive wedding packages. The busiest days in the calendar are New Year's Eve, which gives American couples the right to file a joint tax return for the entire preceding year, and Valentine's Day.

WEDDING CHAPELS

Little Chapel of the Flowers 1717 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 735-4331 or 1-800/843-2410, . Mon-Thurs 9am-9pm, Fri & Sat 9am-10pm, Sun 11am-6pm.

Rather traditional, not to say twee, establishment with two antique-furnished chapels off the same lobby, that's notorious as the site where Dennis Rodman and Carmen Electra got hitched. Weddings range between \$185 and \$985; the latter includes a helicopter ride, with, if you prefer, the ceremony on board.

Little Church of the West 4617 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 739-7971 or 1-800/821-2452. Daily 8am-midnight.

Having originally formed part of the Last Frontier casino, the Little Church of the West is on the National Register of Historic Places, and has moved progressively down the Strip to its current site south of Mandalay Bay . It's among the more peaceful and quiet places to exchange your Vegas vows - if that's really what you want.

A Little White Chapel 1301 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 382-5943 or 1-800/545-8111. . Daily 24 hrs.

Las Vegas's best-known location for celebrity weddings, where Bruce Willis and Demi Moore married each other, as did Jack and Vera Duckworth of British soap Coronation Street, while Michael Jordan and Joan Collins married other people. The chapel that pioneered the "24-hr Drive-Up Wedding Window" has since refined the concept by roofing over the driveway as the "Tunnel of Love," and painting naked cherubs on its blue-sky ceiling. Staffed by fifteen ministers, it can provide tasteful black baseball caps embroidered for "Bride" and "Groom," and is even planning to add an on-site massage parlor.

NOVELTY WEDDINGS

When it comes to getting hitched in style, the sky is literally the limit in Las Vegas. Most wedding chapels can persuade Elvis to arrive in a pink Cadillac and sing Love Me Tender, but there are plenty of options guaranteed to make you the star of the show. Unorthodox options include plighting your troth amid the pirates aboard HMS Britannia outside Treasure Island (tel 894-7700); on the deck of the USS Enterprise at the Hilton (tel 697-8750); floating on a gondola in the Venetian's Grand Canal (tel 414-4253); with a fire-breathing dragon for witness on the EFX stage at the MGM Grand (tel 891-7984); or cavorting in medieval costume at Excalibur (tel 597-7278).

At Circus Circus, A.J. Hackett Bungy (tel 385-4321) can take your vows perched on a tiny platform immediately before plummeting on an eighteen-story bungee jump. A Little White Chapel in the Sky (tel 382-5943) arranges marriages in a hot-air balloon from \$650, while Las Vegas Helicopters (tel 736-0013) can provide a minister to perform your ceremony either hovering over the Strip or on the rim of the Grand Canyon.

CASINO CHAPELS

Almost all of the major casinos have their own wedding chapels, which tend to eschew the kitschier elements of the independent chapels and offer ceremonies starting at around \$400. Among the most popular are:

Bellagio tel 693-7700

Caesars Palace tel 731-7422

Excalibur tel 597-7278

The Flamingo tel 733-3492

Mandalay Bay tel 632-7490

New York-New York tel 740-6625

Paris tel 967-7000

Treasure Island tel 894-7700

The Tropicana tel 798-3778