

Can I Get Married in France

France the land of over 30,000 thousand castles is a spectacular country to choose to hold your wedding ceremony. However a civil wedding in France requires legal procedures and advance planning, as well as a minimum stay of 4 weeks and blood tests to complete the necessary documentation prior to the legal ceremony.

As this is usually difficult to arrange, many couples opt to have a legal wedding in their own country, before jetting to France for a religious ceremony held at a spectacular location like a fairytale chateau in the Loire Valley or in Paris and they then honeymoon in France. Either type of ceremony in France will offer you a romantic and picturesque setting for that special day.

A civil marriage is mandatory in France and religious ceremonies, which are optional, are not legally binding in any way and can only be performed after the civil ceremony. To be legal, a marriage in France must be performed by a French civil authority. In practice this means that the mayor or his legally authorized replacement performs the marriage ceremony.

For a civil ceremony there is a requirement of residency in France which one of the parties to be married must comply with. One of the parties must reside in the town or the arrondissement if in Paris, for the thirty days prior to the marriage. In addition to these thirty days, French law requires the publication of the marriage banns at City Hall for 10 days which makes a total residency requirement of 40 days before the ceremony can be scheduled to take place at City Hall.

Documents for a civil ceremony are as follows:

1. Birth certificate not from a hospital but from the official government Bureau for recording births like the Bureau of Vital Records in America.
2. A notarized "Affidavit of Law" (Certificat de Coutume), drawn up by an attorney in law licensed in the State of residence of the party, stating:
 - that this person is free to marry
 - that the marriage to be performed in France will be recognized as valid in their home country
 - and that publication of marriage banns is not required in their home country, neither under States nor Federal law.
3. In the case of previous marriages, a certified copy of the death certificate of the deceased spouse or a certified copy of the final divorce decree must be produced.
4. Prenuptial certificate of health issued not more than two months prior to the date of the marriage by a medical doctor after:
 - serological tests for syphilis,
 - serological tests to determine blood types and possibly the presence of irregular anti-bodies,
 - and further for females also serological tests for rubella and toxoplasma.

It is possible to have these tests done in France.

In all cases, it is recommended that the couple contact the Marriage Bureau of City hall upon arrival in France as extra documents may be required, such as a residence affidavit.

All the documents listed above must be translated into French for presentation to French officials. Translations can be done in the United States by a Translating Agency or by a certified translator in France. If the translations are done in the United States the translations as well as the original of the document must be presented to the French Consulate General for verification.

All foreign documents must be legalized before being presented in the French authorities. American documents can be legalized by obtaining the Apostille provided for by the Hague Convention which was signed by the United States on October 15, 1981. The apostille is usually obtained through the office of the Secretary of State of whatever state the document was issued in.

Regarding prenuptial agreements, if no special measures are taken by the parties with a French Notary or an attorney at law in the States, prior to the marriage, they are considered married under the *communauté réduite aux acquêts*. This means that what each party owns personally before the marriage, or whatever comes to them afterwards through inheritance, remains their property. Only what is acquired during the marriage is owned equally by both parties.

American citizens holding ordinary American passports are not required to obtain a visa for a trip to France as long as they do not stay longer than three months. The visa exemption does not apply to students, journalists or to members of airline crews no matter what the length of their stay.

American citizens holding diplomatic or official passports must obtain a visa before going to France no matter what the length of their stay. Other foreign nationals must check with the visa section of the Consulate General of France.

As the legal requirements for getting married in France are detailed and may be reviewed or amended at any time, it is recommended that you engage a competent wedding planner if you wish to get married in France. Not only will she advise you on up-to-date legal requirements she can assist you with every little detail for your special day.

A fairytale chateau in France is a magical location for your wedding vows.

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About the Author

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