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Get hitched on the beach ... at Bournemouth

Tourism chiefs believe that Dorset resort will be able to host weddings on the sand this summer

Steven Morris

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Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today ... you, your spouse-to-be, plus additional beachgoers. Photograph: Chris Ison/PA

Some couples with a taste for the exotic - and an eye for spectacular wedding pictures - jet off to a beach in the Caribbean, Hawaii or perhaps the Maldives to celebrate their nuptials.

But from this summer, romantics keen to feel sand between their toes as they tie the knot should be able to take advantage of a budget option - by heading for the beach at Bournemouth.

Tourism chiefs believe the Dorset resort will be first in England and Wales to be able to stage weddings on the beach.

They are applying for planning permission to set up a luxury, cream-coloured beach hut to serve as a "chapel" for brides and grooms. The idea is that local hotels would provide a venue for the reception, and a back-up wedding venue if the weather proves inclement.

Mark Smith, head of Bournemouth's tourism department, said the resort had been receiving around 60 inquiries a year from couples wondering if they could get married on the beach.

"With the increasing cost of foreign travel and weddings abroad, it's a good time to introduce our very own 'UK weddings on the beach' offer," he said. "Our aim is to have the project completed in time for the start of the wedding season in May."

If it gets planning permission, the small wooden hut will be set up close to the sea wall and the resort's cliff lift to enable the happy couple and guests easy passage to a clifftop hotel for the reception. It will be available through the summer months before being hauled off the beach in October. The area of beach immediately surrounding the hut will be roped off to give the wedding party some privacy, although thousands of bathers will still be close by to watch on sunny days.

The planning application is still awaiting approval.

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Peter Charon, leader of Bournemouth council, claimed that the resort could challenge places like the Caribbean. "With seven miles of sandy beaches, palm trees and luxury beachfront hotels and restaurants, Bournemouth can rival anywhere in the world as the perfect beach wedding location," he said.

One of the requirements Bournemouth borough council is having to comply with is providing a permanent structure - by law this is needed for a marriage or civil partnership to be valid in England and Wales. The situation is different in Scotland, where marriages can take place in the open air.

Traders in Bournemouth greeted the plan with enthusiasm. Matt Peiovan, the operations manager for the beachside restaurants WestBeach (crct) and Aruba, said it was an excellent idea.

"It's got to be a good thing for the resort. The beach is a key selling point for Bournemouth so the more people you get on it and using it the better.

"People seem to love getting married on the beach and they'll be able to do it here for a fraction of the cost of going abroad. Weather is an important factor, of course, but we are due a good summer this year."

Melanie Kiani, who runs Bournemouth-based wedding planners Bellissimo, said she thought it would be "very popular" as there were surprisingly few wedding venues close to the sea in the area.