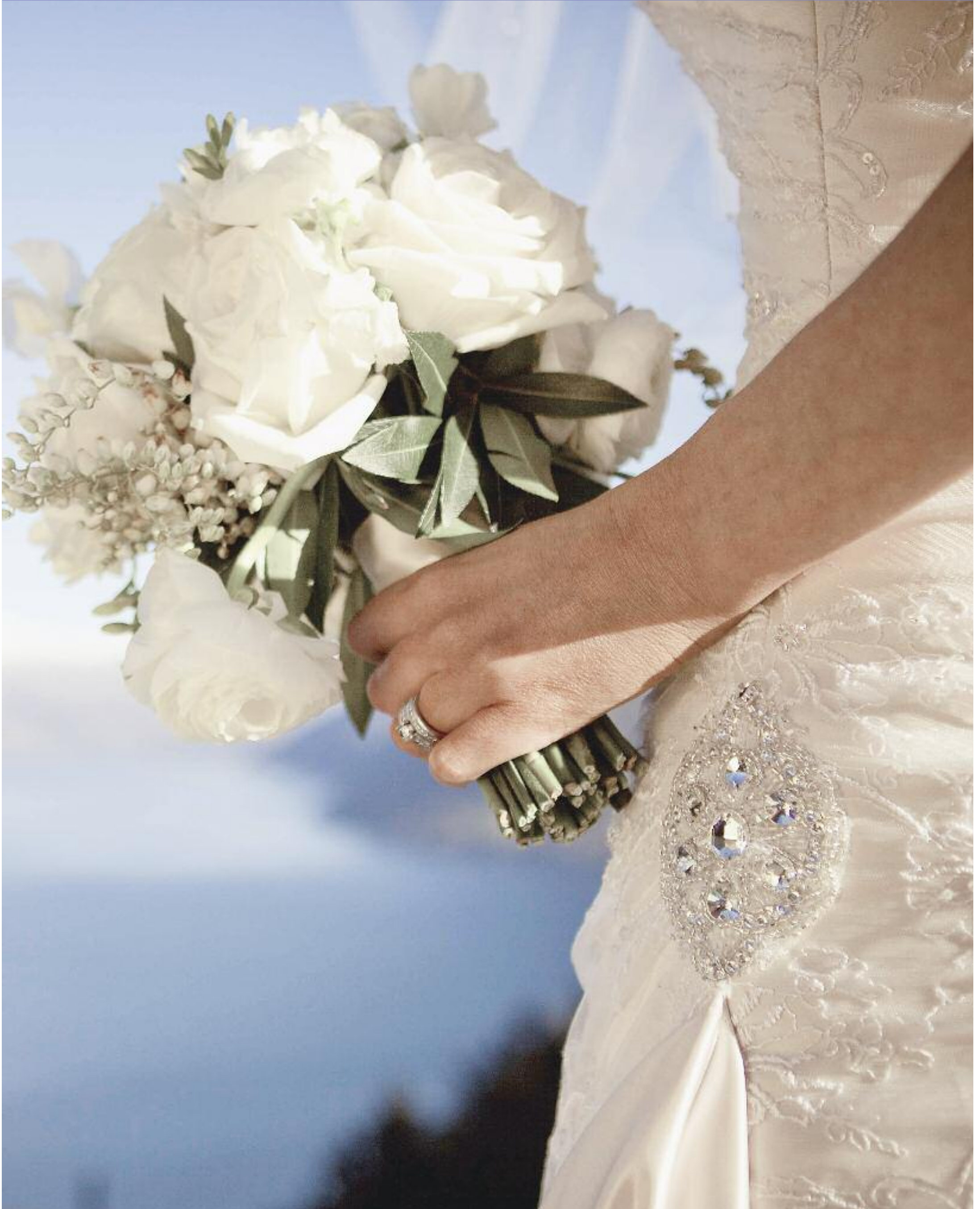


GREEK-AMERICAN

# Weddings

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# Greek Wedding Traditions

By Eleni Sakellis

The Greek wedding has taken on mythic proportions in the popular imagination worldwide, thanks in no small part to the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, even if it is nearing sixteen years since its release.

Greek-Americans have done their part in expanding the idea of the Greek wedding in all its grandeur, from the huge guest list to the impressive reception menu, but the traditional aspects of the Greek wedding are what make it truly unique and special. Those of us from the average, usually large, Greek family will undoubtedly have attended numerous weddings throughout a single lifetime. I recall being shocked and saddened to hear that one of my classmates (non-Greek) had never attended a wedding in her life at the ripe old age of 12 or 13. By that age, most Greek-Americans have been to at least three or four weddings and have probably participated as a flower girl or ring bearer in at least one or two. There are a lot of Greek wedding traditions and from one region to the next, there are many variations. The traditional music varies, too, who has attended several Greek weddings of those from various parts of the country will attest.

The traditions actually begin well before the bride and groom have even met. The tradition of the prika, or dowry, begins with the mother of the bride buying items or making them by hand for her daughter's future wedding, linens, clothing, household items, and usually storing them in a large chest over the course of many years. In the past, young women showed off their skills in embroidery and other crafts in the items they made by hand for their dowry. Today, most of the items a bride needs are purchased.

In the past, engagement rings in Greece were usually not the diamond solitaire type we associate with them today. The Greek engagement ring was a gold band worn on the left ring finger after the engagement blessing and then the same ring served as the wedding ring, moved from the left to the right hand during the appropriate moment of the wedding ceremony. In some villages, the engagement is still an important separate ceremony, though it is also how the wedding service begins, but more on that later.

Setting the date is another aspect of the traditional Greek wedding that should not be overlooked if you're planning a church wedding. There are certain times of the year when weddings are not performed at all, namely during fasting periods like Great Lent, the two weeks before the Dormition of the Theotokos on August 15, August 29- the commemoration of the beheading of St. John the Baptist, September 14- the Elevation of the Holy Cross, and the 40 days leading up to Christmas.

In ancient times, January was considered the best month to marry since it was the month dedicated to the goddess of marriage and fertility, Hera. The Roman version of Hera is Juno, which made her month of June the preferred month to



Among the traditions: "The stefana, or crowns, are linked with a ribbon that symbolizes the union of two people into a married couple"

wed. Sunday is traditionally the preferred day for weddings, but more and more couples choose Saturday, and some now even choose to marry on weekdays. The Thursday before the Sunday wedding was when the dowry or prika was delivered to the couple's soon-to-be home. In the days leading up to the delivery, it was a custom for the dowry to be on display in the bride's parents' home so visitors could admire it wish the bride well in her marriage. The dowry is no longer common, but in many places where Greeks have settled, the parents of the bride sometimes give the gift of a house or help with buying a house which has, to some extent, come to replace the dowry of the past.

Choosing the koumbaro and koumbara who are "sponsors" of the wedding is another Greek tradition. The groom's godparent is asked first, then the bride's godparent, if they decline or simply cannot do it, close friends and family are then asked. The role is a serious one since the koumbaro and koumbara participate in the wedding ceremony and then are expected to baptize the couple's first child, a huge responsibility.

Another tradition usually a few days before the wedding is the making of the marital bed. The family and friends are invited to a party to

make the bed at the soon-to-be husband and wife's house for good luck and fertility. After the bed is made, flowers, money, and koufeta are thrown on top, and finally a baby is also set on top of the bed. Whether it's a baby girl or boy will supposedly determine what the firstborn child will be. The preference is traditionally for a baby boy. In some regions, rice is also thrown on top of the bed.

On the day of the wedding, the koumbaro or best man shaves the groom as part of the dressing for the wedding tradition. Meanwhile at the bride's home, her maid of honor or koumbara leads the bridesmaids in helping the bride dress for the wedding. In some regions, the names of the single bridesmaids are written on the soles of the bride's shoes and the names that are worn off by the end of the night are those of the ladies next to be married.

Another shoe related custom is that the groom is supposed to buy the bride's shoes for the wedding day. Either he or the koumbaro or best man delivers the shoes and the bride is supposed to pretend that they are too big and don't fit her. The koumbaro then places coins in the shoes for good luck and to help them, supposedly, fit better. The Cypriot tradition is called stolisma and af-

ter the bride is ready, includes wrapping a red sash around the bride's waist for fertility while music is played and all her relatives give her a blessing. The red sash is also draped around the groom's waist at his house, and then the kapnistiri takes place during which a censor is used to bless the bride and groom.

When the bride is about to exit her parent's home, her parents break a large wedding pretzel or "nifopsomo" over her head and give all those in attendance a piece so they can wish all the best to the bride for a happy marriage, health, and wealth.

In many regions of Greece, a procession to the church takes place with traditional songs performed for the bride and her family and the groom and his family along the way. A band sometimes escorts the bride to the church and everyone in the community follows and dances all the way to the church. Traditionally, the groom waits outside of the church for the bride's arrival and then gives her the bouquet before they walk down the aisle together. The father of the bride or her brother gives the bride away to the groom outside the church.

The wedding ceremony begins with the blessing of the couple's engagement and the rings. As noted in *Manhattan Bride*, "The betrothal service recognizes the engagement of the couple by the church and includes the priest's blessing of the rings. He also alternately blesses the bride and groom three times."

As noted on *nvphotographers.com*, "The stefana, or crowns, are linked with a ribbon that symbolizes the union of two people into a married couple and are placed on a table in front of the bridegroom, along with the Bible, the wine, and the rings."

"The koumbaro or koumbara exchanges the rings three times and swaps the stefana three times, before he places them on the couple's heads. This is a physical demonstration of their spiritual bonding (the couple and koumbari)."

When the priest begins the wedding blessings, he joins the couple's right hands. Then the priest blesses the stefana blessing, reads the Gospel of the Wedding in Cana (Jesus' first miracle), then pours wine into a single cup or glass, and gives it to the couple to take three sips each from it. The couple drinking from a single glass symbolizes their commitment to sharing their life and experiences for the rest of their days.

The Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony has remained the same since the 11th century. "It is a 'blessed union' that implies this must be a permanent union," said Fr. Robert Stephanopoulos, Dean Emeritus Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, as reported in *Manhattan Bride*.

The two parts of the Greek Orthodox wedding service are the betrothal and the marriage service. A small table on which a special tray is placed with the wedding crowns, betrothal rings, candles, goblet of sanctified wine, and the book of

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# Protelia Weddings Talks to The National Herald

By Eleni Sakellis

Protelia Weddings is named after the Ancient Greek word "protelia," which were the offerings the couple made to the gods prior to their wedding to please them and be blessed for the start of their new life together. So, Protelia is symbolic of the couple's preparation before being blessed on their wedding day.

Protelia Weddings and Events is a boutique event planning company with over 15 years of experience in the field. Based at the beautiful wedding venue Kleopatra, Protelia since 2002 has successfully planned and organized over 800 weddings, baptisms, parties and other social and business events.

The company recently expanded their business to offer services for wedding and event planning all over Greece as well as the Greek Islands. They can create tailor-made solutions for the destination wedding of your dreams.

The National Herald spoke with Mado Chatzipanagiotou who manages Protelia Weddings and Events. Ms. Chatzipanagiotou told TNH about their wedding planning services, how

far in advance a couple should begin planning their special day, and what Greek-American couples can look forward to when working with the company.

TNH: What can a couple expect when they choose Protelia to plan their wedding?

MC: Having more than 15 years of experience in designing and planning dreamy weddings and events, we pride ourselves on delivering the highest levels of customer service for a truly stress-free planning process.

As an event planning company with an excellent knowledge of the country and culture, we organize unique events under the Greek sun, by trying to interpret the couple's personal vision of what Greece or the particular location they have chosen means to them and give them advice on which details will make a difference.

We aim to immerse ourselves in our clients aesthetic, their personality, passions, artistic sensibility and then create a small piece of art customized to their own dreams.

TNH: How far in advance should couples begin planning for their wedding with Protelia?

MC: The sooner a couple decides to set their wedding date,



the more options we have to book the space that interests us at the best possible price and to organize our partners to have a perfect result and a good orga-

nization. The usual timeframe that a couple organizes their wedding abroad is 6 months to 2 years. However, we at Protelia due to our great experience of

15 years in planning weddings, we pride ourselves on being able to organize the perfect wedding on any Greek island in much less time.

TNH: What should Greek-American couples be aware of when they decide to plan a wedding in Greece? Do they need special paperwork or permission?

MC: It depends on the type of ceremony and the religion of the couple. In any case, we are willing to deal with all the bureaucracy required to perform any type of wedding ceremony.

TNH: What do Greek-American couples look for the most when they plan their wedding with you as opposed to what Greek couples look for?

MC: Greek-American brides give more emphasis to detail, are very organized, and have impressive weddings that remain unforgettable to their guests!

TNH: Are there any major differences, either in scale or preferences?

MC: Greek-American brides are very interested in the excellent service and satisfaction of their guests. They place a special emphasis on the wedding gown. They are real hostesses at their event.

More information is available at [proteliaweddings.com](http://proteliaweddings.com).



## Wedding Receptions at Ktima Kleopatra

By Eleni Sakellis

Ktima Kleopatra is a charming venue that combines elegance and professionalism for a memorable wedding reception. Not far from Athens, Ktima Kleopatra is easily accessible from Attiki Odos and Varis-Koropou Highway, and has an impressive range of features for the perfect wedding or baptism reception.

Ponds with running water, enchanting bridges, relaxing lounge areas, a picturesque chapel, wooden deck, pool, and waterfall are among the features

to enjoy at Ktima Kleopatra.

The wedding and baptism venue also has a special feature, the automatic sliding roof that along with the sliding glass panels converts the reception area from an indoor heated space or to an open outdoor one. In this way, Ktima Kleopatra can accommodate your wedding re-

ception in any kind of weather, and any season.

The National Herald spoke with Ktima Kleopatra about what Greek-American couples can look forward to when they plan their wedding at the venue.

TNH: What can a couple expect when they choose Ktima Kleopatra as the venue for their wedding?

KK: For more than 17 years of collective experience, our team provides the highest caliber of services.

The Kleopatra's team specializes in conceiving, designing and co-ordination of inspiring event concepts for weddings.



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The Kleopatra's team specializes in conceiving, designing and co-ordination of inspiring event concepts for weddings.

Our expertise and services cover all aspects of your requests: From the ceremony in our beautiful little church and reception design, pre-event planning, extraordinary decoration and styling, stationary, food and art de la table, cakes, music and entertainment, flowers, photography. We can handle special requests such as personalized wedding website, introduction to stylists and makeup artists, assistance with guests accommodation and full concierge service for you and your guests.

We are here to provide you with a stress-free planning process and to create a completely tailored and unforgettable event!

TNH: What do Greek-American couples look for the most when they plan their wedding at Ktima Kleopatra as opposed to what Greek couples look for? Are

there any major differences, either in scale or preferences?

KK: The difference is that the Greek-American couples are more demanding in terms of the organization and decoration, just like the team from Kleopatra.

TNH: How many guests does Ktima Kleopatra accommodate?

KK: Ktima Kleopatra can accommodate 400 people indoors or outdoors.

TNH: How far in advance should couples begin planning for their wedding with Ktima Kleopatra?

KK: The couples should begin planning a year before their wedding at Ktima Kleopatra to book the date of their choice.

TNH: What should Greek-American couples be aware of when they decide to plan a wedding in Greece? Do they need special paperwork or permission?

KK: There is necessary paperwork and documentation needed. Each party to the marriage will need a copy of the following documents. For a religious ceremony, plan to have two copies each - one for the house of worship and one for the town hall:

- A valid passport
- A birth certificate with the Apostille stamp certifying the copy

- An official Apostille translated into Greek, which can be certified by a lawyer, a foreign ministry's translation department, a certified translator or the Greek Consulate from your home country

- Proof of freedom to marry, or affidavit of marriage, notarized, in both English and Greek

- A decree of absolution of your previous marriage, if applicable

- A copy of the local newspaper where your intent to marry was published

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