

LUCY TILL FRENCH WEDDINGS

British expat Lucy Till is making memories for herself and others as a wedding planner in the south of France.

BY CAROLYNE KAUSER-ABBOTT

The first time I met Lucy Till, she arrived at the hiking trailhead with her two dogs and a winning smile. She had done it! She had managed to escape from her office on the cusp of her hectic wedding planning season, when squeezing in some personal time is no small feat. However, after you spend a few minutes with Lucy, the understanding begins to sink in; this is one accomplished lady who juggles many balls concurrently. Lucy is a wife, mother, small business manager, pet owner and an expat with a passion for the environment.

Born in Surrey, England, Lucy attended King's College in London to focus on environmental studies. Graduating in the early 1980s with a degree slanted towards green technology, Lucy quickly realized that her job prospects and market timing were less than ideal. So she returned to the books and achieved a master's in tourism studies.

After graduation, Lucy found a position at a travel organization in London where she met her future husband. Not long after their wedding they relocated to Washington D.C., where she found work with a company that specialized in bespoke academic-travel for alumni and museum groups. During those five years, Lucy says she had no time to feel like an expat as they were both juggling careers and too busy for much reflection on the matter.

Work took them back to the U.K. in 1992. Lucy tells me that she was not pleased with the return move; she loved her work, and her thirst for travel was far from quenched. After close to a decade in the U.K., it was 9/11 that opened the door to their next opportunity. The post-September 2001 travel industry downturn was dramatic and relatively immediate. Lucy's husband was out of work, and they had three children under the age of eight.

Rather than let the events turn into cries of misfortune, they created an opportunity and pulled up their U.K. roots, selling their house and moving to charming Uzès in southern France. The contrast between the bustle of London's suburbs and the Gard Provençal was dramatic, and just what the Till family was seeking.

They arrived in semi-rural France and embraced all of it. The kids were still young enough that their transition into local schools and new friends was seamless. Lucy had a decent base in French, which continued to improve along with the children's second





language skills. Lucy describes their early days in France as idyllic. It was a great time for the young family; school was walking distance from home, the markets were lovely and the sunshine a welcome change. Uzès felt like home.

By 2003, Lucy needed a project, so she drew upon her prior experience working with a milliner and established a small hat shop in St-Quentin la Poterie. Lucy created custom hats and began hosting weeklong hat-making courses. Although popular, the labor-intensive nature of the craft was hardly lucrative, and the realities became less practical as her children hit their teens. The shop closed in 2010.

Lucy's sister married in France in 2009, and it was then that the reality struck Lucy like a flash from a photographer's camera – planning a wedding from a distance is difficult. Lucy knitted together her skills from travel planning and her contacts from nine years in France and launched Lucy Till French Weddings. Her first client landed in her lap by fluke, the son of an acquaintance – a wedding that Lucy claims was in some ways the most complex of all the events she has organized.

Lucy Till French Weddings, now into its sixth year, manages 12-15 weddings a year. Prospective clients find Lucy's services via word of mouth, testimonials and online organic search. Her clients are typically young professionals with busy careers and those who realize that planning a wedding from a distance, involving time zones and a second language, is challenging and stressful. Lucy relieves that anxiety.

I asked Lucy about their early expat experiences and what recommendations she might have for others considering a relocation to another country. Pragmatically, Lucy said, "It helps to be committed, having the attitude that you are moving to stay. If you feel that you have an out, you may be less inclined to integrate into the community."

For more information on Lucy's wedding planning services, visit www.lucytillfrenchweddings.com. ■

