



WALDEN IN AURORA

HAPPILY *Ever After*

Whether you're looking to host an upscale affair, searching for the perfect themed venue or seeking something off the beaten path, Ohio offers a variety of places to say, "I do."

By Jessica Esemplare



Each bride has a unique vision for her special day. Some prefer a more intimate venue with just enough space for family and close friends, while others picture a party fit for a queen. And while traveling to a beachside retreat or foreign country sounds fun, it can also be expensive. But a destination wedding doesn't have to break the bank: These Ohio locations offer everything from quaint countryside affairs to tropical adventures.

PICTURE PERFECT

At the *NorthPointe Hotel and Conference Center* in Lewis Center, a professional wedding planner and coordinator will walk you through your big day and the director of catering will personally attend to your entire menu. Their services go beyond the standard ceremony and reception: The serene and secluded grounds — which include 15 park-like acres — are also perfect for rehearsal dinners, bridal showers and elegant luncheons or brunches before and after the wedding.

"When you drive in, it's really like driving into the Garden of Eden," says NorthPointe general manager Kathryn Burton. "We're really close to Columbus, but it's like a retreat."

Couples can choose between indoor and outdoor locations for ceremonies, receptions and pictures, and with 119 rooms on site, guests won't have to



worry about getting from the party to their rooms.

Families can share a two-room suite and the happy couple gets a free stay in an executive suite on the night of their wedding. The best part? Room service will bring the bride and groom freshly prepared entrées and desserts from their reception in case they didn't have time to eat.

NorthPointe's picturesque grounds, brick streets, Georgian architecture and proximity to Highbanks Metro Park make great photo opportunities as well.

"It's very quaint," says Burton. "All this outdoor space is really conducive for taking pictures."

100 Green Meadows Dr. S., Lewis Center 43035,
614/880-4300. northpointecenter.com

AFFAIR IN AFRICA

If you're craving a warm-weather destination without the expense, consider a wedding at *Kalahari* in Sandusky. With on-site event planners and caterers, 39 different African-themed event rooms to choose from, plus 890 guest rooms including 273 suites, this one-stop destination is guaranteed to please attendees of all ages. There is plenty for guests to do surrounding the big day: play areas and parks, including indoor and outdoor waterparks, a jungle-themed playground, an arcade, miniature golf and an adventure area that includes an animal park. Restaurants range from family-friendly to fine dining, and adults can perk up or wind down at the resort's cafe or lounge.

Brides can prepare for the big day



KALAHARI RESORT

at the spa, which offers hot stone massages, body wraps, manicures and pedicures, and other services. Or the attendants can throw a bachelorette party at the spa with customized treatments to fit the group's needs, plus wine and refreshments.

7000 Kalahari Dr., Sandusky 44870, 855/411-4605. kalahariresorts.com

COUNTRY CHIC

Walden in Aurora combines the best of the great outdoors with lavish accommodations. With both indoor and outdoor wedding packages, couples can choose between hosting their event in the wedding garden, which faces horse pastures, a silo and a restored 175-year-old barn, or exchange vows in the intimate Jodhpurs Lounge with a large stone fireplace, copper-topped bar and private patio access. Other options include outdoor tent receptions and sit-down affairs at the Blue Ribbon Café and the Upper Café. Dinner selections range from traditional meals to "five diamond" dining, complete with a cheese and crudités table. The sample menus have enough choices to satisfy even the pickiest eater.

Guests will enjoy the best this country estate offers: 23 comfortable suites and an on-site spa with traditional services and special "four-handed" treatments (two therapists per massage or facial), plus group or private yoga classes, golf on the scenic par 72 course,

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tennis, horseback riding and a swimming pool and fitness center.

There are also a variety of packages designed exclusively for the bride and her bridesmaids. Before the big day, indulge in a six-hour restorative treatment with a body wrap, massage, facial, manicure and pedicure followed by a champagne lunch. On the day of the wedding, the spa staff can complete your perfect look by doing your makeup and hair. For newlyweds in need of some down time, there's a three-hour couples package that allows you to choose two treatments of your choice and includes a private suite for some much-needed alone time.

1119 Aurora Hudson Rd., Aurora 44202,
330/562-5508. yourvalden.com

LINKS TO SCOTLAND

Although out-of-country weddings are all the rage, it is possible to have an international theme right here in Ohio. Enjoy a Scottish retreat at *Glenlaurel Inn* in Rockbridge, where the stone



GLENLAUREL INN

manor house with dark timber walls, cozy rooms and a stately dining room nestled in the scenic Hocking Hills will make you feel like you've traveled abroad. The grounds are perfect for small weddings (about 30 guests) and some packages offer themes relating to Scottish heritage, such as an afternoon

Celtic woodland wedding or an evening Highlands wedding.

"Some guests want a formal Scotland wedding," says Becky Russell, marketing and guest services consultant. "We can have the bagpiper play and we'll cater the wedding to [the couple]."

Guests can stay in rooms, suites, cottages or crofts (small cottages) with a variety of amenities, from indoor whirlpools and outdoor hot tubs to fireplaces and double hammocks. And there's plenty for guests to do: golf on the eight-hole Scottish-links-style course or enjoy in-room spa services and private hiking trails, a necessity after the three-course breakfast that is included in the cost of lodging.

"This is a really nice place for a small wedding," says Russell. And if you want to keep it really intimate? "We're also a great place for elopements," she says. ■







14940 Mt. Olive Rd., Rockbridge 43149, 740/385-4070. glenlaurel.com

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