

Frequently Asked Questions

WEDDINGS AT THE ROSAMOND GIFFORD ZOO

*Thank you for considering us for your special day.
Below are answers to questions that may come up as you make your plans
and wonder what to expect.*

Do you have a minimum number of guests for weddings at the zoo?

Yes, our minimum guaranteed guest count is 50 people.

What is the capacity of the catering facility at the zoo?

While our banquet room rental capacity is up to 200 guests for a buffet style dinner, we recommend 175 or less for events with a dance floor (like weddings!) and 150 or less for plated dinners with a dance floor. We can accommodate up to 300 people for a cocktail and hors d'oeuvre reception.

Can we bring in an outside caterer?

Catering at the Zoo is a full service in-house catering facility and we are not able to accommodate outside caterers. However, you may have a bakery of your choice provide specialized cakes or other desserts. Our talented catering team will be happy to work with you to select the menu for your event.

I have a lot of guests on special diets. Can dietary restrictions be accommodated for my reception?

With advance notice, we are happy to work with you to try to accommodate special dietary requests.

Do you offer special pricing for children?

Yes. We offer a reduced buffet price for children ages 3-10 and an alternate menu choice for plated meals.

I'm nervous about choosing our menu. Can we do a tasting?

Yes. We schedule complimentary tastings in January, February and March for the upcoming wedding season. If you are planning a buffet or plated dinner you will have the opportunity to sample your menu choices before submitting your final selection to your event coordinator.

Can we bring our own alcohol in for the reception?

Catering at the Zoo offers a full-service bar option. Our liquor license does not allow outside alcohol to be brought in. Liquor brought in to the facility will be subject to confiscation.

What are my bar options?

OPEN BAR: the host pays for the guest drinks at a set price per hour

HOST BAR: the host pays for the guest drinks based on actual consumption

CASH BAR: the guests pay for their own drinks

Your bar is available for up to 4.5 hours during a wedding. Your coordinator will help you compare the various options and decide what works best for your budget.

So...how much does it cost to get married at the zoo?

We get this question all the time, but it really depends on what your vision is for the day. Cash bar vs. open bar, zoo rentals and buffet vs. plated dinner all affect the price tag. The number of people you are expecting is a huge factor in the overall cost. Entertaining 50 guests is vastly different from entertaining 150. We believe you can have a beautiful, meaningful wedding on any budget. However, the more people you wish to join in the festivities, the more you can expect to invest. Sharing your budget with your coordinator early in the process will allow us to make suggestions that suit your needs.

We love animals! What parts of the zoo can we see at our wedding?

In the evening, your guests will have access to any of the areas you have reserved for your event. Our indoor zoo rental is especially popular for weddings – your guests can sip their cocktails and visit our open-air aviary, our adaptation (nocturnal) area, plus our very popular otter, lion and primate exhibits as well as the fish and amphibians. We are the only venue in Syracuse that gives your guests the opportunity to visit with some of their favorite animals during your cocktail hour.

Sounds amazing! How do I book my wedding at the zoo?

If you're interested in booking your big day at the zoo, contact our event team to set up a tour of our facilities and check the availability of your desired date. You can reach our team at events@rosamondgiffordzoo.org. An appointment is required to tour our facilities. Your event coordinator will put together a proposal for your approval. We can hold your date for up to 2 weeks while you decide if the zoo is the right venue for you. If the proposal is acceptable, we'll draw up a contract and our receipt of the signed contract and deposit will lock in your date.

What if I change my mind about our menu or other details after I sign my contract?

No problem at all... our contract is intended to reserve the date for your event. All other details – facilities, bar and menu options can be modified as you work through the planning process. The deadline for changes to your event is 2 months prior to the wedding and your final guaranteed guest count is due 5 business days before the big day.

What is your payment schedule for weddings?

In order to reserve your date, we require a non-refundable \$500 deposit and a signed contract. The deposit will be applied to your final billing. We require a \$1,500 payment 6 months before the wedding and a \$1,500 payment 3 months before the wedding. The balance is due the day of the wedding, and the final payment must be paid with either cash or credit card. You are welcome to make weekly or monthly payments if you wish.

What if something unexpected happens and we are forced to cancel the wedding?

Per your contract, the deposit and any payments are non-refundable in the event the wedding is cancelled.

When is my final guest count due?

Your guaranteed guest count is due by 10 a.m. 5 business days before the wedding. Your final invoice will be based on that number.

What is the service charge on my proposal?

A 19% service charge is automatically added to food and beverage sales on the contract. The service charge is not a gratuity. The service charge covers all the staffing needs and behind the scenes planning and orchestration for your event. Plated dinners have a 25% service charge to cover the additional labor required to execute your event.

Should I add a gratuity to the payment of my invoice?

Catering at the Zoo does not charge a gratuity to your invoice. We pride ourselves on providing our employees competitive compensation. If you believe the staff went above and beyond with services and expectations, please feel free to add gratuity to your final payment and we will distribute the gratuity to our staff involved in your event. Gratuity is not necessary or expected, but always appreciated.

Do I need to rent tables, chairs and linens for my wedding?

No, the quote for your event includes tables, chairs, tablecloths, napkins, plates, silverware and glassware. We also have a dance floor available at no extra charge. If you are looking for specialty linens beyond what we offer, we are happy to refer you to one of our trusted vendors.

Are there restrictions on décor at the zoo?

Our banquet room was designed as a neutral canvas to accommodate the many types of events we host. Your coordinator will be happy to give you suggestions that work well in our venue.

Specific restrictions include: no open flames - candles must be enclosed in glass; no live animals; no rice, birdseed, flower petals, confetti or glitter; no flammable materials, such as sparklers and firecrackers; no straw or hay; no special effects equipment, including but not limited to smoke, fog and pyrotechnic machines. Balloons are allowed only in the banquet rooms and may not be taken into the zoo.

Tape, tacks, staples, nails, screws or putty on walls or fixtures are not permitted. However, if you have decorations or banners, you may use painters tape to affix them to walls. No decorations or banners of any kind may be affixed to the wallpaper in the banquet room.

If you are bringing a free-standing item such as an arch, arbor or pop-up tent, you must provide weights to secure it. If you do not provide weights, it cannot be used due to the potential for damage to animals and zoo property. Your event team will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Do I need to take my décor home the night of the wedding?

We recommend you enlist a trusted friend or relative to be responsible at the end of the night for anything meaningful you wish to keep.

What kind of send offs are allowed?

Ribbon wedding wands, pom-poms or flags to wave are acceptable. Bubbles are allowed. Rice, birdseed, flower petals and confetti are not. Onondaga County does not allow fireworks of any kind, including sparklers, in our county parks.

What is the difference between set-up styles?

- CEREMONY SET UP:
Theater style seating on both sides of a central aisle.
- COCKTAIL SET UP:
Bar height tables for standing guests in addition to round tables with chairs.
There is usually seating for about 50% of your guest count.
- SEATED – DINNER STYLE:
60" round tables with 8 chairs at each table.
- FAMILY STYLE:
Banquet tables (30" wide by 6'-8' long) placed end-to-end to create one long table, with seating on either side.

What are your rental times?

Wedding rentals run from 5:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. If you wish to include a private zoo rental, the indoor zoo or entire zoo rental is available from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. While the zoo is available until 8 p.m., we typically close these areas after the cocktail hour once we move your guests into the banquet room for dinner. We don't want your guests to inadvertently miss dinner, the first dances, toasts, etc. If you wish to extend your cocktail hour to use the zoo for the maximum amount of time, we are happy to push your dinner service to a later time.

Rental of the facility does not guarantee access the day before, the entire day of, or the day after rental date as we may have other events booked during those times. Décor, vendors and other setup must be arranged with your event coordinator. The zoo closes to the public at 4:30 p.m. every day. We welcome thousands of guests through our doors and it takes time to ensure all guests have exited the property and to get our facilities clean and ready for your wedding. With the exception of the bride, groom and wedding party, we do not allow guests into the building until 5:30 p.m. Please let your guests know that they should not arrive prior to 5:30 p.m.

A typical wedding day timeline at the zoo looks like this:

- 5:30 p.m. Guests begin arriving and are seated in the courtyard
- 6 p.m. Ceremony
- 6:15 p.m. The indoor zoo opens and the cocktail hour begins. The bridal party will be taking pictures with the photographer
- 7:15 p.m. The indoor zoo closes, cocktail hour ends and guests are moved to the banquet room
- 7:30 p.m. The wedding party is introduced, the bride and groom have their first dance followed by the parent dances and toasts from the best man and maid of honor
- 8 p.m. Dinner buffet opens
- 9:15 p.m. Dinner buffet closes, followed by cake cutting, dancing and fun!
Photographer may want to take some shots of the happy couple on the patio once the sun goes down
- 10:30 p.m. Last call at the bar
- 11 p.m. Event ends, décor and personal items are packed up

What if the weather is bad?

If your ceremony is planned in our outdoor spaces, your event coordinator will work with you to create a "Plan B" just in case the weather does not cooperate. We will be watching the weather in the days leading up to the wedding and make the decision when the ceremony needs to be moved inside. Your guests may be seated at their tables in the banquet room and we will arrange them so you have an aisle to walk down.

I've never done this before and I'm not even sure what questions I should be asking.

How will I know if I'm missing something important?

Our event coordinator's job is to make sure your wedding goes perfectly. We will guide you through the entire planning process. Once your wedding is booked, your coordinator will review our Wedding Planning Timeline with you. We will be available by phone or email should any questions arise during the planning process. We will schedule your tasting, design your timeline for the day, coordinate with your vendors and supervise the room set up and décor. We will meet with you 2 weeks prior to the wedding to review all the final details. We will be onsite during the wedding, supervising the banquet captain, directing guests throughout the evening and keeping the schedule on track. Our goal is to make sure you and family are able to relax and enjoy the evening.

Do you supply the officiant?

This is an important personal choice we leave to the couple.

What is your policy on same sex weddings?

We welcome all loving couples regardless of sexual orientation, color, or creed.

Will there be other events going on at the zoo while my wedding is going on?

Catering at the Zoo will not have another event booked during your wedding. Our other departments occasionally have small, after-hours programs, but the guests do not interact with each other.

I grew up in Syracuse, but live out of state now. I would love to get married in my hometown – can you help me plan my wedding long distance?

Yes, we often work with brides planning their weddings from other parts of the country.

We can adjust our regular planning timelines to accommodate your visits to Syracuse.

Can I request an animal for my wedding?

Your event coordinator can provide you with a list of our animal ambassadors who are currently available for a meet and mingle at your wedding. We cannot always honor requests to see a particular animal. Providing a safe and healthy environment for our animals is our highest priority, and if an interaction will stress an animal, we reserve the right to cancel it. However, if there is a particular species you would rather not have at your event, please let us know.

Speaking of animals...our dogs are part of our family and we would really like to have them be part of our wedding.

Can we do that at the zoo?

Service animals are welcome though there may be limited access to certain exhibits. As part of the Onondaga County Parks system, pets are not allowed. Please let your event coordinator know in advance if any service animals will be in attendance so that proper clearance may be provided.

Is there an area for the bridesmaids and groomsmen to get ready before the wedding?

Yes. We have 2 rooms available – our conference room and our education classroom. If you wish to use one or both of them, let your event coordinator know and he/she will book the room for you. Typically, our brides and grooms use these areas just for last-minute primping. We also have an alcove in our café area we can utilize for staging.

Do I have to use vendors from your preferred vendor list?

We highly encourage our brides and grooms to choose from our provided list, however we do allow you to use the vendor of your choice. The vendors must be properly licensed, insured and comply with Catering at the Zoo standards. Vendors not on our Preferred Vendor List must be approved by the Event Manager. We require photographers, musicians and DJs new to our facility to schedule a site visit prior to the wedding.

Can I have live entertainment?

Yes. Bands need to be "self-contained" with their own speakers, sound board, PA Rack, extension cords, power strips, gaffers tape and microphones. For the safety of your guests, all electrical cords must be taped to the floor with gaffers tape.

Can we use an iPod for our music?

We do have a sound system that is compatible with an iPod, but it's more suitable for background music for smaller events. For larger evening events, we recommend hiring a DJ or band for best results.

Can I do a rehearsal the night before the wedding?

We do offer a complimentary ceremony rehearsal the night before your wedding. The rehearsal space is based on availability. Officiants are required to attend any ceremony rehearsals to ensure he/she and your event coordinator have consistent information.

I would love to have some photos taken of us with the zoo animals, but I'm not renting the entire zoo.

Is there a way I can do that?

Yes. Our couples often have their "first look" at the zoo the afternoon of the wedding while the zoo is open to the public, followed by photographs on the trails and at the animal exhibits before the zoo closes.

Are there restrictions on photography or videography?

Photographers must follow zoo rules, stay on the path and obey posted signs. Flash is prohibited where indicated. Photographers have access to areas of the zoo reserved for the event only.

How long before my wedding should I book my date?

Weddings typically book 1 to 2 years before the date, but if you are flexible with your desired date we can often accommodate shorter timelines. Our team will be happy to check the availability of prospective wedding dates.

Is there a charge for parking at the zoo?

No – parking is always free and we can accommodate over 600 vehicles.

I really want my grandmother to attend the wedding, but she is confined to a wheelchair.

Can the zoo accommodate guests with mobility challenges?

Yes. The zoo, our banquet room and Courtyard are handicapped accessible. We have 6 wheelchairs available for our guests and designated handicapped parking spots in both our main lot and the employee parking lot.

Some of my guests are smokers. Is smoking allowed at the zoo?

We are a non-smoking facility; smoking is not allowed in the building or near the entrance. We do have a designated smoking area located near the public drop-off area.

Where are the restrooms located?

We have a men's room, ladies room and family bathroom located in our main lobby across from the banquet room and a men's room and ladies room located in the café area for use during the cocktail hour. They are accessible and ADA compliant.

I'm worried about my guests driving after having so much fun at our reception.

Is it okay if they leave their vehicles in the parking lot overnight?

No problem – we encourage guests to call a cab service, Uber or Lyft. They are welcome to retrieve their vehicle the day after the wedding.

Does my event help support the zoo?

Yes. Catering at the Zoo is a subsidiary of Friends of the Zoo, which is a non-profit organization created to support the zoo.