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DESTINATION: *Tucson*

BRIMMING WITH SOUTHWEST CHARM, THIS WILD WEST TOWN HAS BECOME A MODERN JEWEL OF THE HIGH DESERT. GRAB YOUR PARTNER AND GET READY TO GET HITCHED IN STYLE.

BY JULIE LEMEROND





Samantha and Ryan Moore wanted a wedding venue that would capture the beauty of the Tucson desert. They found that and more at the Stardance Event Center, where they fell in love with the large barn doors that opened to reveal stunning mountain views.



“If YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES and think of a desert wedding destination, you see rugged mountains, beautiful blue skies, a lush green desert—and what you are picturing is Tucson,” says Toby Parks, director of sales and marketing at Hacienda del Sol. Brides from near and far are taking a new look into Arizona’s big backyard, and it’s no surprise they’re choosing this southern Arizona city as their choice to stay and play on their wedding day.

Tucson sits in a high valley of the Sonoran desert. The sun shines often, and the city is both metropolitan and outdoorsy. It’s a perfect warm getaway for out-of-town wedding guests, and for those who live here, it’s just about guaranteed that they will see Tucson in a new light over the wedding weekend.

There is plenty to see and do, both in town and a short drive out. There are hiking trails galore, national and state parks nearby (don’t miss a pretty drive through a sea of tall cacti at Saguaro National Park), and the sunny weather (which makes the rest of the country green with envy) beckons you outdoors.

Tucson residents also take pride in being home to the University of Arizona, one of the top-ranked schools in the state. Through the architecture, local cuisine, people and landscape, the city feels uniquely Southwestern.

Welcoming and warm, Tucson has made its way onto the map as a destination. Here are some of the wedding and reception venues that will make your big day all the more special.

Loews Ventana Canyon

Getting married by a waterfall is always spectacular, but doing so in the middle of the desert is almost magical—which is what makes Loews Ventana Canyon unique. In fact, the entire resort was built around this waterfall; construction plans changed at the very last moment after a monsoon created the natural wonder back in the mid-1980s.

Options abound; the resort can accommodate anything from a small four-person wedding in their intimate Butterfly Garden to upwards of 500 people in their larger ballrooms. This conservation-friendly resort has also partnered with the Arizona Desert Museum, with lots of information about the Southwestern terrain, fauna and flora throughout the property.

520.529.7912, loewshotels.com

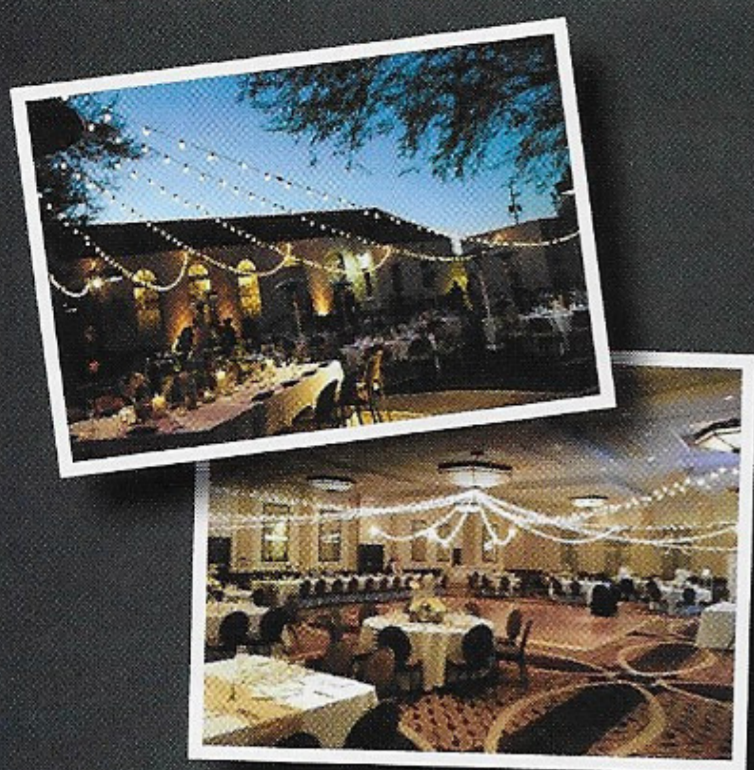
Tanque Verde Guest Ranch

Driving to the Tanque Verde Guest Ranch is an experience in and of itself. As you get further away from the city lights and closer to the starlit Saguaro National Park, it dawns on you that you’re heading to a real southwestern ranch. Dozens of horses in the corral (and maybe a cowboy, too) greet you as you drive down the gravel road, ending your journey at the rustic reception area.

“We provide a really fantastic Western experience. We can do everything from a ranch-style wedding to something classic and elegant,” says catering sales manager Mary Ellen McBee. “We’ve hosted weddings for local clientele, and have also had groups fly in from all over the world to hold their weddings here.”

Activities such as horseback riding, fishing, swimming, hiking, biking and family-friendly options are available. The ranch has been around since 1868, long before Arizona was even a state. “We provide that unique Southwest flair. For most couples, their favorite part is coming out and experiencing the old cowboy days,” says McBee.

That’s what drew Chelsea Minni and Tyler Menke to Tanque Verde for their October 24, 2014, wedding. “We wanted a Western-themed wedding, so we chose to remain here in Tucson and bring our families to us,” says Chelsea.

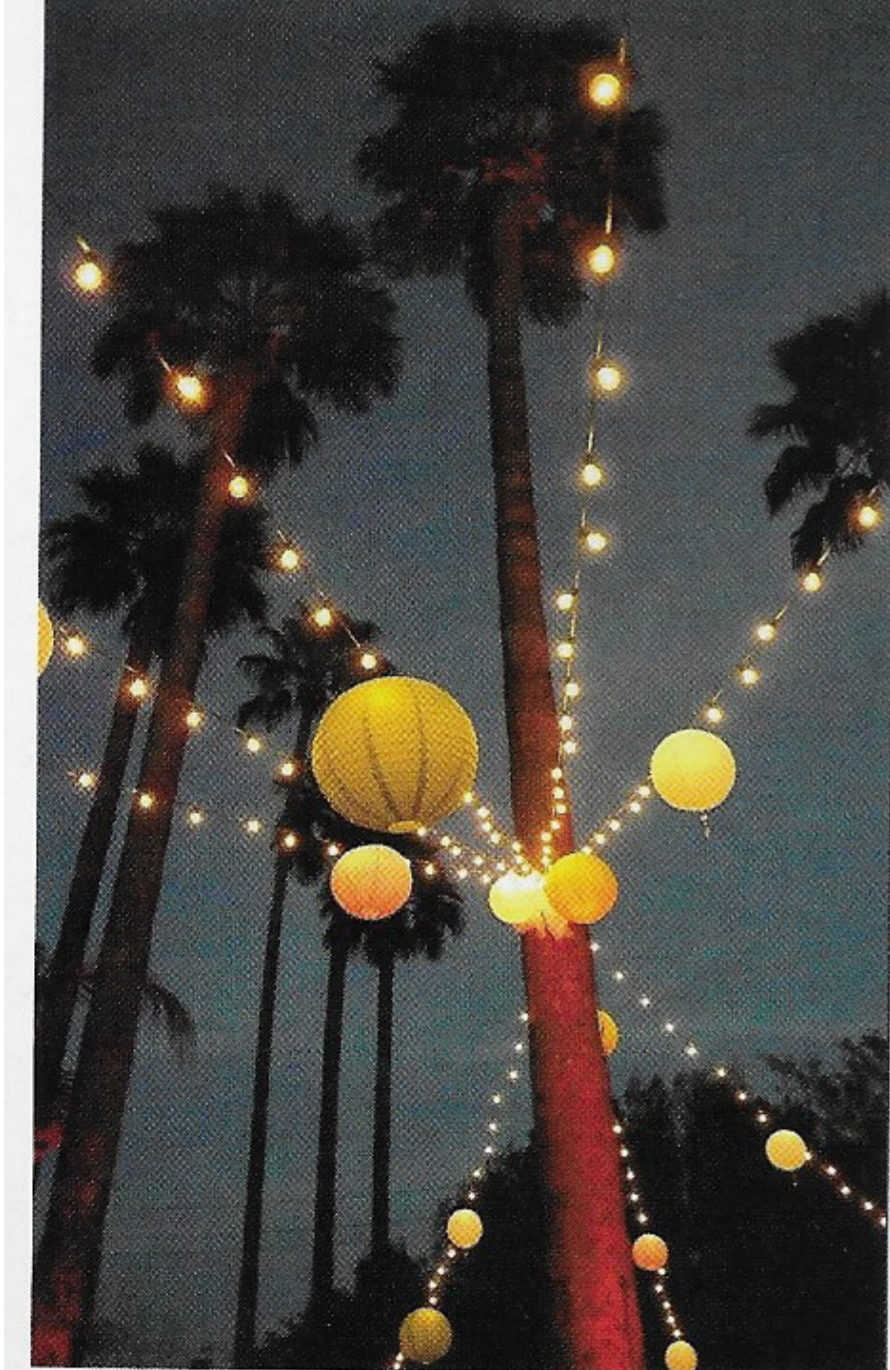


Whether you're having your evening reception in an indoor or outdoor venue, **lighting** is one of the most important elements you should consider when planning your decor, and a very effective way to shine a light on one of the most **important nights of your life.**



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At Hacienda del Sol, hand-carved wood beams, authentic Southwestern architecture and elegant grounds all create a charming experience for a wedding.



Horses have been a part of Chelsea's life for 20 years, and she's known since she was young that she wanted to ride a horse into her wedding ceremony. Her dreams came true at Tanque Verde. "The backdrop for the wedding was the base of the mountain range around sunset, where the shadows of the saguaros painted a truly beautiful picture," says Chelsea. "It really showed the beauty of the Southwest."

520.731.5568, tanqueverderanch.com

Hacienda del Sol Guest Ranch Resort

One of the most historic resorts on our list, Hacienda del Sol was originally constructed as a boarding school for girls. Built in 1929, it housed the daughters of some of the most prestigious families in the United States. After World War II, it became a guest ranch getaway for another elite group—classic Hollywood stars such as Katharine Hepburn and Clark Gable. Hacienda del Sol is still

going strong and continuing to expand, adding another 32 guest rooms to this boutique resort experience, with the expansion finalizing in May 2015.

Hand-carved wood beams, authentic Southwestern architecture and décor, and well-maintained, elegant grounds all create a charming experience for a wedding. What's more, they are one of Tucson's four-diamond dining experiences, boasting two sommeliers and 8,000 bottles of wine in-house.

520.901.1399, haciendadelosol.com

JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort & Spa

Nestled in the hills of Tucson Mountain Park, the JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort is a wedding destination. The luxury resort can accommodate a wide range of guest lists, from small and intimate groups all the way to 1,000-plus people.

"One of the things that makes us so unique is our

nightly complimentary tequila toast,” says catering sales executive Linda Montano. “The tequila toast is a story about the legend of [the traditional toasting words] ‘Arriba, abajo,’ which goes back to the traditional Mexican custom where a prospective groom who wishes to marry his beloved asks her father for his daughter’s hand in marriage.” The story and toast makes for a charming way to kick off a wedding event.

520.791.6053, marriott.com

La Mariposa

The lush grounds of La Mariposa make you feel as though you have left the desert completely. This family-owned business boasts a gorgeous green lawn for ceremonies, with an arching gazebo at the end of the aisle. The resort excels at intimate ambience, yet can host weddings of up to 200 people. La Mariposa offers an in-house chef and a variety of reception dinner options, from buffet-style to plated dinners.

520.749.1099, lamariposaresort.com

Stardance Event Center

Samantha and Ryan Moore choose Stardance Event Center as their ideal wedding venue, tying the knot on April 12, 2014.

“We wanted a venue that captured the beautiful Tucson desert and mountains,” says Samantha. They took advantage of Stardance Event Center’s large barn doors, which open up on both sides, revealing the stunning landscape and bringing the outdoors in. “We couldn’t have asked for a more gorgeous setting to celebrate the day.”

Many of Samantha and Ryan’s guests were from out of town, and they relished the opportunity to

take in Tucson. “They loved the mountain views and were blown away by our breathtaking sunsets,” says Samantha.

520.744.3050, stardanceweddings.com

Miraval Resort and Spa

Although Miraval has hosted small weddings, the real magic that they create is during pre- or post-wedding stays, for the bridal party or for the bride and groom.

Miraval is a one-of-a-kind resort that offers not just a pampering retreat, but also specializes in out-of-the-box activities and services where you can learn a little bit more about yourself.

For couples, there are wellness specialists to guide you through activities designed to build better communication skills and create a stronger bond. The Private Quantum Leap II Challenge, a trust-fall exercise, requires communication and teamwork, while the Equine Experience can help teach you how to remain present and be attentive to cues from your partner. Other options include private partner yoga, hiking, trail rides, spa treatments, cooking classes and more.

Miraval isn’t just for honeymooning couples—girls’ getaways and bridal parties are even more popular at Miraval. Luxury spa services, teambuilding activities, restorative yoga, floating meditations or simply indulging in pool time are all available for you and your besties.

Miraval has a cell phone restriction policy (silent, please, and keep them in your room), ensuring a deeply reflective and quiet getaway for all. Many guests never even change out of their robes throughout their stay. It’s a place to relax and take the journey inward.

520.825.4000, miravalresorts.com ✕

OUT AND ABOUT: TUCSON HIGHLIGHTS

WHILE OUR HIGHLIGHTED VENUES OFFER PLENTY OF ACTIVITIES TO STAY AND PLAY THROUGHOUT YOUR WEDDING WEEKEND, THERE’S ALWAYS MORE TO EXPLORE IN TUCSON. HERE ARE A FEW HOT SPOTS FOR A TASTE OF TUCSON:

ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM

With native animals and botanical gardens, this is a family-friendly experience that everyone will enjoy. This museum is one of the top attractions in Tucson and was voted by TripAdvisor as one of the top 10 museums in the United States.

520.883.2702, desertmuseum.org

BIOSPHERE 2

The University of Arizona’s Biosphere 2 (our planet Earth is considered Biosphere 1) is an earth science research center and an international attraction. Visit a tropical rainforest, the ocean, a savanna and a coastline all in one day.

520.838.6200, b2science.org

SABINO CANYON

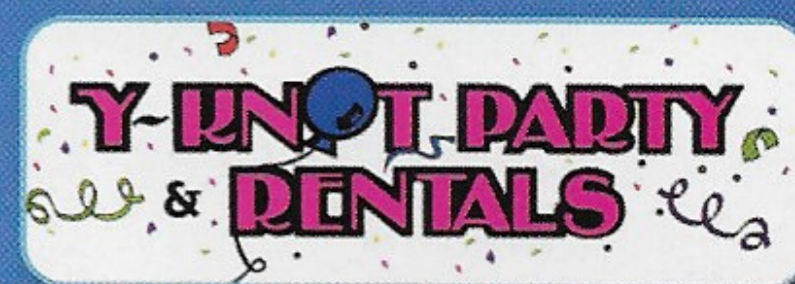
Put on your walking shoes before you board the tram through Sabino Canyon, where a narrated tour will tell you about the history of this region long before Tucson was a spot on the map. Stop along the way for a hike or two.

520.749.2861, sabinocanyon.com

TRAIL DUST ADVENTURES JEEP TOURS

One of the best ways to see the desert is to get off the beaten path, and Jeep Tours do just that. Choose from a variety of tours, some focusing on the ecology of the desert, some more playful, like desert rallies and desert dining experiences.

520.747.0323, traildustadventures.com



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