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Dear Friend,
Congratulations on your engagement!

Whether you are from around the corner or around the globe, we are honored that you are considering Saratoga for your wedding. As one of the headlines in this guide reads, "Saratoga is a Hot Destination for Cool Weddings". Wow, is that an understatement! As you'll see in this year's Saratoga Destination Wedding Guide, Saratoga is exploding as the destination of choice for the most discerning brides & grooms.

Nestled in the foothills of the Adirondacks and only a three hour drive from NYC, Boston and Montreal, Saratoga offers the year round amenities and charm of the quintessential wedding retreat but with the splash and sophistication of a big-city downtown. Speaking of downtowns, ours has been recognized by Travel & Leisure, Yahoo, and Esquire (among others) as one of America's best!

This guide has been created to help you easily navigate through all of what Saratoga has to offer. Of course, you can also find additional, up to the minute information on our website, www.saratoganyweddings.com. If you have any questions at all or would like to schedule a personal site tour, please don't hesitate to call us. We here at the Saratoga Convention & Tourism Bureau are ready to assist you and make your wedding Perfect from Start to Finish!

Sincerely,

Todd Garofano
President

Saratoga Convention & Tourism Bureau

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Story by

STACEY MORRIS



DESTINATION SARATOGA

HOT SPOT FOR COOL WEDDINGS

Above: The entire bridal party jumps for joy by Saratoga Spa State Park's reflecting pool during the Hall of Springs wedding of Brittany Littlefeld and Luciano D'Orazio of Saugerties.

Photo by Dave Bigler

There was a time when destination weddings were associated strictly with tropical locations. Eloping to a beachside locale was out, inviting loved ones along for the festivities was in, and a trend was born.

Lisa Light, a destination-wedding planner and author of the book *Destination Bride*, says that what started as a custom reserved for the wealthy blossomed into a mainstream tradition 20 years ago, with vacation hotspots such as Las Vegas, Miami and Newport elbowing for market share. In recent years, however, area restaurants, hotels, caterers and the like have noticed a growing number of destination weddings taking place in Saratoga Springs.



Jenna Decker and dad Robert arrive in a horse-drawn carriage at Saratoga National Golf Course at her wedding to Adam Ouimet on Oct. 13. The ceremony was on the terrace, cocktail hour on the veranda, and reception in the tent.

Photos by Tracey Buyce

“Around the late ‘90s is when ‘destination wedding’ became a term and a practice,” says Light, a Chatham resident who runs Lisa Light International Events & Design. “The trend started in Hawaii, and then Jamaica captured it because they saw it as a money-maker and marketed it well.”

Though she plans weddings around the globe, Light said the Hudson Valley recently became the number one destination wedding location in the United States, and Saratoga Springs has grown exponentially more popular in the past decade.

“People in all four corners of our country have heard of Saratoga Springs because it’s renowned in a ‘Great Gatsby’ sense,” says Light. “The mineral baths, race track, and natural beauty already make it a romantic destination.”

Area wedding experts agree that the Spa City’s make-up is a compelling formula: whirlwind weekends that start with a rehearsal dinner at a downtown restaurant, ceremony and reception at an elegant venue such as the Canfield Casino or Hall of Springs, and a Sunday brunch at the Gideon Putnam. In between



there's fun to be had: museum stops, rounds of golf in the State Park, hikes in the Adirondacks, spa treatments, or shopping up a storm along Broadway.

So solid is the trend for Saratoga-based destination weddings, the Saratoga Convention and Tourism Bureau recently created the position of Destination Wedding and Social Market Specialist, appointing industry veteran Tom Ellis in May.

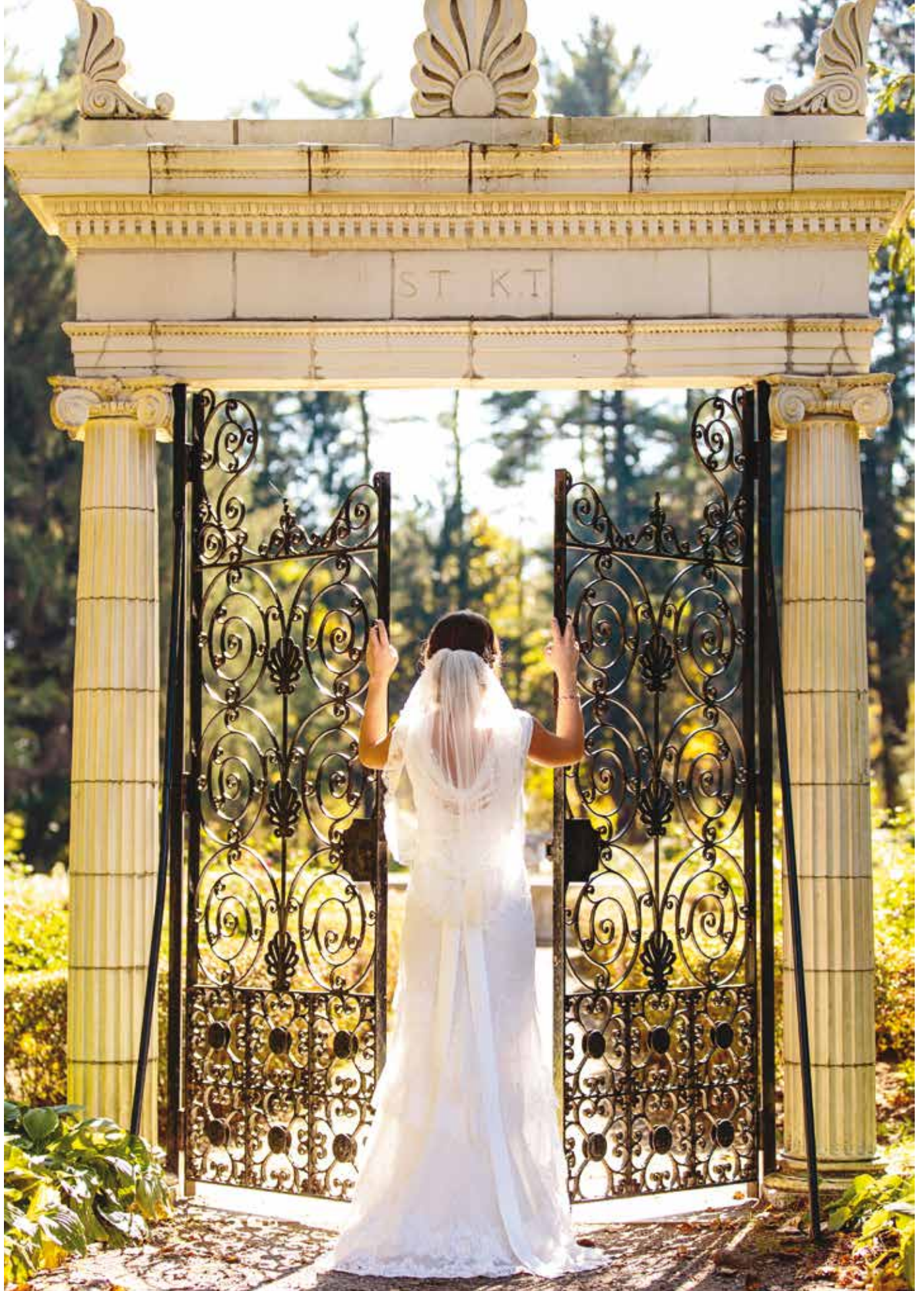
Even before taking the position, Saratoga had already won him over. His own wedding five years ago took place on Sacandaga Lake, with a honeymoon at the Batcheller Mansion Inn. "Saratoga is a very romantic place...I drank the Kool-Aid for this town a long time ago," he says with a laugh. "We're hoping to make Saratoga Springs synonymous with Newport, the Napa Valley, and Savannah in terms of romantic locations for a destination wedding."

"A lot of people tell us they want a place people can get to in a day," says Ellis, who spent more than two decades doing event planning in New York and Los Angeles. "Flying has become much more expensive and problematic. It's a



For Carolyn Majors and Joshua Weissbard of Brooklyn, their June 1 wedding at Saratoga Polo was like the Fourth of July. Guests raise their glasses to cheer the couple after the ceremony, which was held under a canopy of twigs on the polo field.

Photos by Niki Rossi



Jenna at the Katrina Trask gate at Yaddo on her wedding day. Photo by Tracey Buyce



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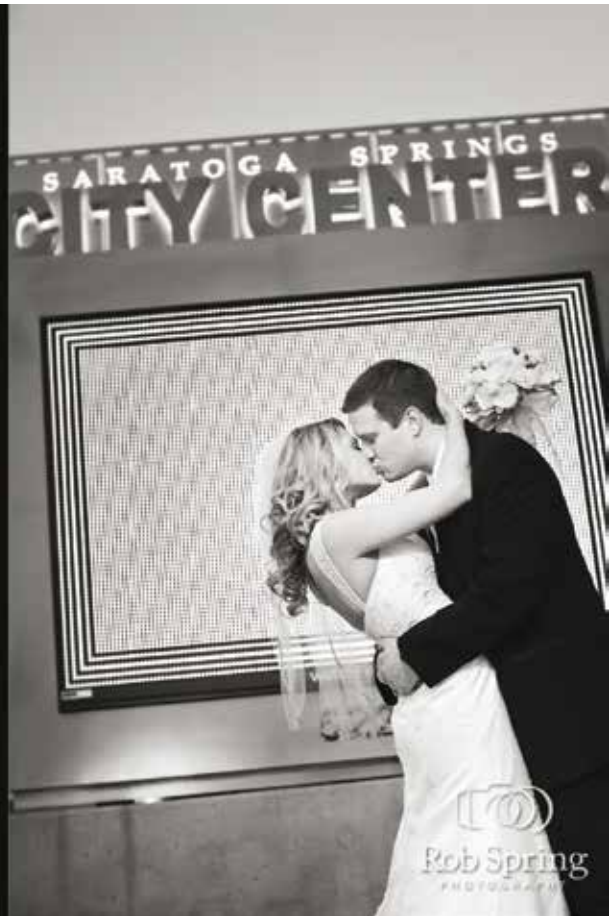


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big reason why upstate New York has become a destination in general.” He adds that most clients are from nearby metropolitan areas such as New York, New Jersey and Boston, but inquiries come from as far as California.

Susan Baker, vice president of sales and marketing at Mazzone Hospitality, says that Saratoga-based destination weddings once were comprised only of brides or grooms who had a personal connection, such as vacationing in the historic city or attending Skidmore College. “Lately we’ve seen clients with no prior connection to the region choose Saratoga Springs as a destination because they love what it offers,” she says. “And it’s a close drive or Amtrak ride from several metropolitan areas.”

“Few cities can provide such amazing diversity of magnificent historical venues, picturesque natural landscapes and a great downtown nightlife. Saratoga is the perfect wedding destination. We see at least 30% of our couples booking their weddings in the Saratoga area from outside the local market; many travel from New York City or Boston, but a growing number are flying in from all over the nation.”

—Dave Bigler, Saratoga Springs photographer

Krissy Nelligan, a hairstylist and make-up artist who works at Vanity Salon & Boutique, began doing destination weddings a decade ago. “That’s when they first started in Saratoga, but in the last five years, they’ve really increased.”

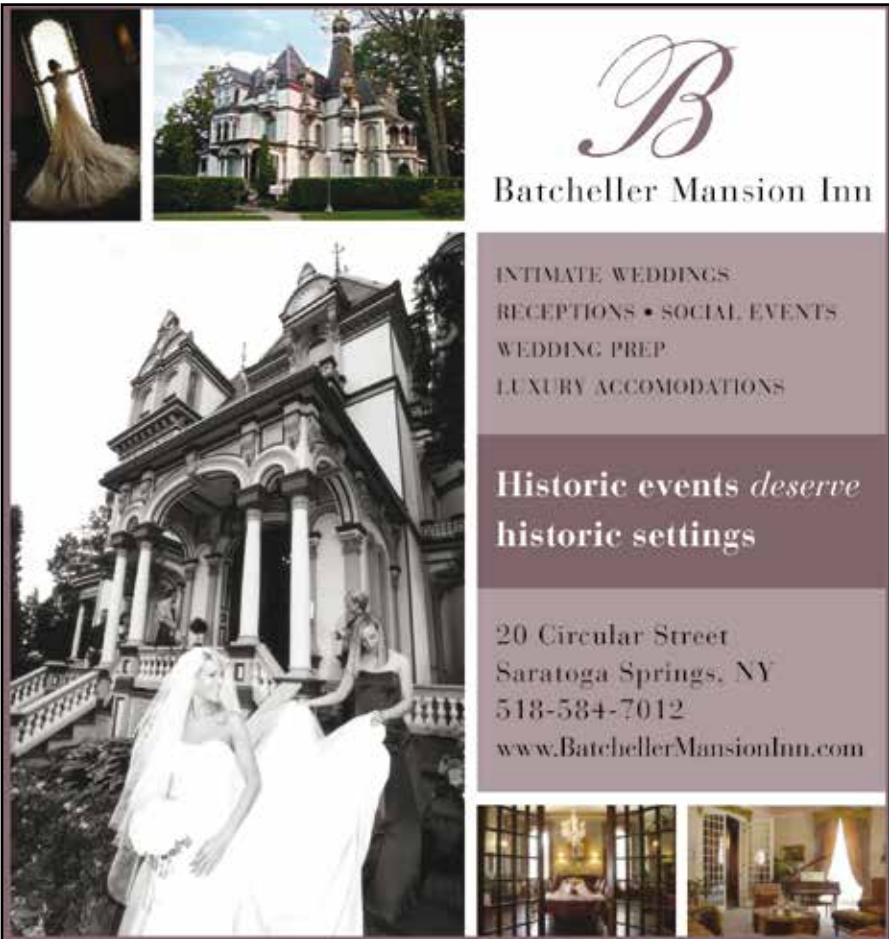
THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF POPULARITY

The Spa City’s universal appeal, enviable location, and relative newness to the destination wedding market has placed it in high demand. Light says the biggest challenge lies in demand exceeding venue availability. “Saratoga is the only location I’ve encountered where the wait list is a year or more. People who book destination weddings don’t want a hotel ballroom. They want private estates, barns, places with character. The Hall of Springs, National Museum of Dance, Canfield Casino, and Batcheller Man-



Andrea Pamadora, seen strolling by the leaves, and Richard Smyth from the Syracuse area were married on the steps of the Victoria Pool in the Saratoga Spa State Park on Oct. 19, with the reception and dancing inside the historic pool building.

Photos by Dave Bigler



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sion Inn are all wonderful, but Saratoga needs more similar venues.”

With spring and summer weddings booked at full throttle, the experts agree that reserving in the off-season or on a weekday is a great idea, particularly if you want to plan the event within the span of a year or less.

“If people want some of the more popular venues in town, we’ll sometimes suggest a New Year’s Eve or Valentine’s Day wedding,” says Ellis. “It’s all on the table now.”

Though on the surface it seems like a destination wedding involves an inordinate amount of planning and money, experts say it’s borne of a desire for a milestone moment not to be over in a flash. “They spend all this time and money planning an event; it’s over in a day, and they’ve barely had time to say hello to friends and family they rarely get to see,” says Light. “With destination weddings, both sides of a family can get to know each other over a weekend, and it’s fun.”

“Destination weddings are often more enjoyable because of the intimate size,” says Baker, who estimates 20 percent of Mazzone’s wedding business is destination weddings. “The average is 80 to 100 people.”

“We chose the Canfield Casino because we felt as soon as we walked in that it had an ‘old Hollywood vibe’ to it that would tie everything in to our wedding. The decor in The Parlor with the large wooden chandeliers and the long bar was the perfect setting for the ceremony and the cocktail hour. [We felt] the Casino would envelope us in a rich Saratogian history.”

—Amanda Gabbard, who married at the Canfield Casino

COSTS AND EFFECTS

For better or for worse, experts say there’s no clear-cut rule as to who pays for destination-incurred expenses such as transportation and hotels, which makes Saratoga an attractive option for many. “There are people with the means to cover the travel expenses of their guests, but most don’t,” says Ellis.



Photo by Michael Gallitelli

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Photo by Michael Gallitelli



Amanda Gabbard and Michael McQuirk, actors from New York City, were married on June 14 at the Canfield Casino, followed by a stroll in Congress Park.
Photos by Dexter Davis



Sara von Ouhl braves the snow at the Hall of Springs at Saratoga Spa State Park. Photo by Dave Bigler.



“The nice thing about Saratoga is that it’s beautiful any time of year, including winter. A bad-weather day in peak season would include rain or high heat and humidity, and it’s hard to feel beautiful if you’re sweaty or drenched by rain. A bad-weather day in winter is snow, but it makes for a beautiful backdrop. I did a candle-lit winter wedding at the Canfield Casino and it was incredibly romantic.”

—Lisa Light, destination wedding planner and author of *Destination Bride*

“For a five-hour travel period you can be in Cancun, but it will cost you \$1,700 to get there. It’s much more affordable to jump in the car instead.”

Many caterers and hotels offer price breaks for weddings booked off-season or on a weekday. “We usually offer about a 15 percent discount for weddings booked off-peak and a 20 percent discount for weddings booked mid-week,” says Baker.

Ironically, some couples choose a destination wedding as a cost-cutting strategy, says Light. “Couples have told me that if they choose a location in proximity to a hometown, they may have 300 people show, whereas with a destination wedding, the guest list is often 100 people or fewer.”

“Destination weddings are lavish, but not as lavish as, say, staying home and doing Tiffany gifts for the bridal party,” says Ellis. “Weddings, especially destination weddings, are

“People love racing season, but it’s a busier, more expensive time to book a destination wedding. We sometimes recommend Labor Day Weekend because guests can still enjoy the track, and things get less expensive after Travers weekend.”

—Susan Baker, VP of Sales and Marketing at Mazzone Hospitality

signature moments; there’s a weight to them. People want a magical time that transcends their everyday life.”

Fortunately, the lavish-factor can be adjusted. “It’s a numbers game; the best way to save is keep the guest list down,” says Light. “If you invite 100 people to a \$100-a head reception, that’s already \$10,000, and doesn’t include the dress, flowers, photography, and music. The average wedding for 150 is \$30,000, and that’s a tight budget.”

Ellis said his aim is to make constructing a destination wedding less overwhelming for a couple. “I’m the

first point of contact. I don't provide wedding planning but help in the first steps of it," he says. "I'll take couples to site visits and introduce them to the parties involved." He notes that saratoganyweddings.com and discoversaratoga.org have comprehensive lists of venues, caterers, photographers, florists, disc jockeys, bands, make-up artists, and other vendors involved in the production and design of weddings.

"You have to be willing to wait if you want a wedding during peak season in Saratoga Springs, especially track season. Some of the more popular venues are booked two years in advance."

—Gretchen Schrade,
owner of The Posie Peddler

A BRIGHT FUTURE

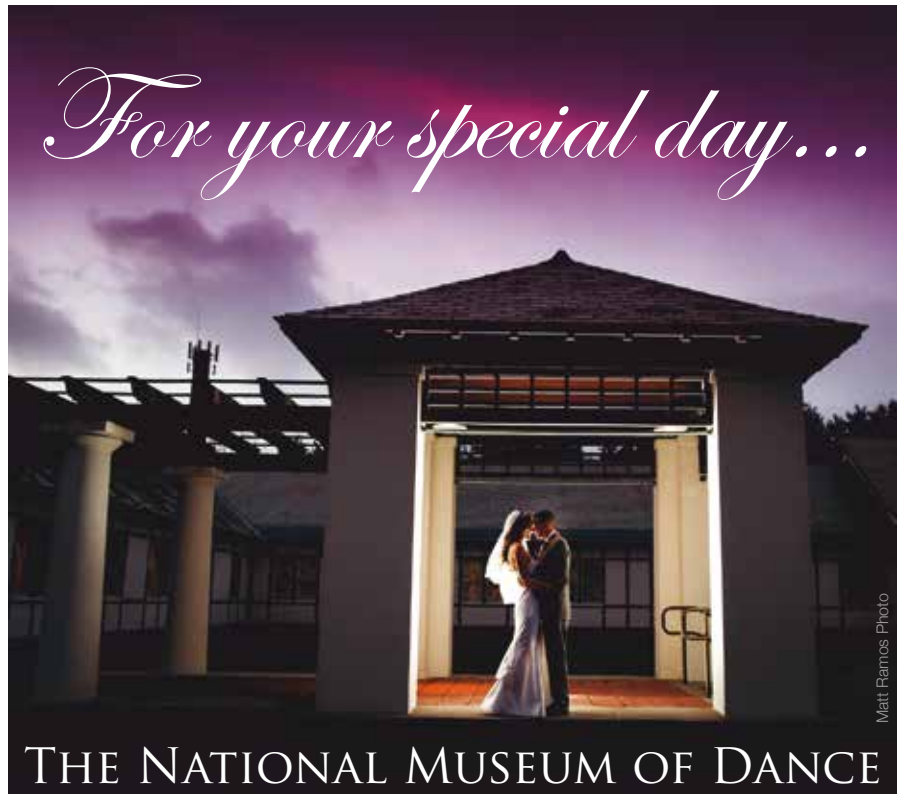
Saratoga Convention and Tourism Bureau President Todd Garofano said that based on feedback he has received from members in recent years, the destination market in Saratoga is lucrative and growing.

"Nationwide it's a \$10 billion-dollar industry and climbing. But in order to fully realize our potential, we had to develop a marketing plan," Garofano says. "Tom brings more than 20 years' experience with weddings and special events. We're thrilled with the results we're seeing."

This past fall, Baker attended the Wedding Salon show in New York, a major industry event where Saratoga Springs was represented in the destination line-up for the first time, competing head-to-head with cruise lines and global resorts such as Aruba and Cancun. "Destination weddings are great for the area economy," she says, "because people are staying the weekend and not just driving away after the wedding reception."

"Saratoga's no longer dead after Labor Day," says Ellis. "It has always been a destination, and now it's becoming a place for destination weddings."

Stacey Morris has been writing travel, food, and lifestyle features for more than 20 years. Her writing has appeared in Saratoga Living, The Boston Globe, Huffington Post, Montreal Gazette, The Times Union, and Better Homes & Gardens. staceymorris.com



Matt Ramos Photo

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Even in landlocked upstate New York, it's still possible to have a wedding surrounded by water. **Mohawk Maiden Cruises** operates historical sightseeing tours along the upper Hudson River-Champlain Canal waterway, from the waterfalls in Northumberland to the Saratoga National Historical Park in Stillwater. The 60-passenger sternwheel riverboat M/V Caldwell Belle is available for private charters, including weddings.

Lauren Meath and Andy Ohrin on the dock by the Minnehaha in Lake George.

Photo by Niki Rossi

Story by
KIRSTEN FERGUSON

A romantic couple is shown in profile, kissing on a wooden pier. The woman is wearing a blue dress with white horizontal stripes and white sandals. The man is wearing a green polo shirt, khaki pants, and brown shoes. In the background, a large white ferry boat with a black and red smokestack is docked. The scene is set on a body of water with a hazy, mountainous background.

BARNS, BOATS & BEYOND

A GUIDE TO ALTERNATIVE
WEDDING LOCATIONS





Residents and visitors from near and far have no shortage of options for wedding venues in Saratoga Springs. Popular scenic wedding spots include SPAC's Hall of Springs, Canfield Casino, Congress Park, and Saratoga National Golf Club, to name just a few. Local museums—including the National Museum of Dance, the Saratoga Automobile Museum and the National Museum of Racing—are fashionable wedding locales. And the city and surrounding area have a number of beautiful hotels, inns, restaurants and B&Bs that can be enlisted for the special day.

But for those looking for venues a little more off the beaten path, we've put together this list of suggestions for distinctive, if less traditional, wedding options.

Above: The Mansion Inn

Opposite top: Lauren and Rich Harding at the Saratoga Polo Fields

Opposite bottom: Brian and Kiley Kaplan of Wilton stroll under the arbor of roses at Yaddo.

Photos by Niki Rossi Photography



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Celebrate Culture

A number of venues allow you to celebrate the arts while also celebrating your nuptials. **Yaddo**, the famous artist’s retreat founded in 1900 by financier Spencer Trask and his wife Katrina on their 400-acre estate in Saratoga Springs, allows wedding ceremonies (but not receptions) in its Italianate Rose Garden for a suggested, but relatively minimal, donation. Overlooking the Hudson River in the city of Mechanicville, the **Arts Center on the Hudson**, a nonprofit space dedicated to diversity in the arts and located in a beautifully restored 19th century Gothic Revival church, can be rented for both ceremonies and receptions.

Head to Nature

Absent a friend or relative with a pastoral piece of land on the outskirts of Saratoga Springs, the “city in the country,” there are other options for hosting a wedding that is integrated with nature.

Saratoga Spa State Park, a National Historic Landmark distinguished by its classical architecture, mineral springs and forested trails, is a popular spot for weddings, particularly for people on a budget. Pavilions of various sizes can be rented relatively cheaply; many come with grills and fire-pits and have nearby fields for kids to run around in (note: guests must pay per vehicle to enter the park). **Moreau Lake State Park** includes a sandy beach, camping and picnic grounds, hiking trails and forested scenery, but also has picnic pavilions and tents available for rent.

“Over 50 percent of my clients are destination wedding couples. Many couples choose Saratoga Springs or Lake George for their wedding because it’s a great weekend getaway with many things to do. Saratoga has one of the best downtowns in the country and is close to beautiful lakes and the Adirondacks. From the amazing mineral baths at Roosevelt Baths to the racetrack, there is really something for everyone.”
 —Tracey Buyce,
 Saratoga Springs photographer

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Having fun at Dina and Lisa Parla's reception.
Photo by Niki Rossi

"The farm-to-table movement and country chic have definitely affected the way receptions are catered. The idea of a wedding in a barn used to be the cheap way out, but now I know people renovating barns for receptions. The wedding magazines have made it very fashionable, and the Saratoga region's perfect for it."

—Tom Ellis, Destination Wedding and Social Market Specialist at the Saratoga Convention and Tourism Bureau

Get Historic

Locations with historic significance can add gravitas to a wedding—and provide stellar backdrops for wedding photos. **Universal Preservation Hall**, a donor-supported performing arts venue in the restored Universal Baptist Church on Washington Street, is a fairly well kept secret as a wedding venue in the heart of downtown Saratoga Springs. With a balcony and Great Hall on the second floor, guests can soak up the stained-glass beauty and atmosphere of the historic building.

Seven miles west of Saratoga Springs in Rock City Falls, the **Mansion Inn** hosts weddings and other gatherings in an impressive Italianate mansion built in 1866 by Hon. George West and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. West, who served in the United States Congress from 1881 until 1889, made his fortune as the inventor of the flat-bottom paper bag.

Get Hitched Around Horses

For racing fans, **Saratoga Race Course** offers multiple options for wedding ceremonies and receptions at the track, including the At the Rail Pavilion, various luxury suites, Big Red Spring and the Paddock Tent. Couples have even said their vows within the Winner's Circle. It can be arranged. And the elegant clubhouse and white outdoor tent of the **Saratoga Polo Club** make for classy spots to soak up the sport of kings while celebrating a wedding in style.



Dina and Lisa Parla of New Jersey proclaimed their vows during a ceremony in a barn at the Mansion Inn in Rock City Falls, with a reception and dancing in the tent afterward. Family and friends stayed at the historic mansion.
Photos by Niki Rossi





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SARA VON OUHL BRAVES THE SNOW AT THE HALL OF SPRINGS AT SARATOGA SPA STATE PARK, DURING A PHOTO SHOOT BY DAVE BIGLER.

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HONORING AND INCLUDING FAMILY IN YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY

Your wedding ceremony is not only about uniting two lives, it is about uniting two families. Are you eager to find a way to honor and involve family members in your wedding ceremony? Certain family members already have a traditional role—like the bride’s father, who often escorts the bride down the aisle. Considering how other equally important family members (especially the bride’s mother and the groom’s parents) might have a special role in your big day can make your day even more personal and special—and it can score you a few points with your future in-laws! Involving a professional wedding officiant can help you create just the right way to incorporate your family. Here are a few ideas:

THE SEATING OF HONORED GUESTS Before the Wedding Party processes, this simple gesture is an opportunity to highlight the importance of your family to you. Unless you are having a very small ceremony or are in significant conflict with some members of the family, seating honored guests is a way to say “thank you” for all they have done to help you achieve your dreams.

READINGS AND PRAYERS Other than to pronounce you as legally married, your officiant does not need to be the person who leads each part of the ceremony. Readings and prayers can all be done by family members. As long as family members are comfortable taking on a speaking role, experience is secondary. Words offered in heartfelt love will shine. (Just be careful with very long readings that your chosen speaker is energetic.)

WORDS OF REFLECTION The most dynamic ceremonies often involve those who know and love the couple best—especially parents—offering words of affirmation and wisdom. At one recent ceremony, the bride’s and groom’s mothers had everyone laughing and crying as they shared what it meant to them to see their children, high school sweethearts, marry after dating for ten years. At another ceremony the bride’s and groom’s fathers, each of whom were happily married for over thirty years, spoke eloquently about how to create a lasting marriage. If your parents or other family members want to offer words of reflection, give them the microphone to create a truly magical moment.



The presentation of rings: Maigen and CJ Beaulieu with their fathers. Photo courtesy of Janelle Rodriguez.

UNITY RITUALS AND MEMORIALS Another wonderful way to involve family—especially those who are reluctant to take on a speaking role—is participation in a unity ritual and/or memorial. Using candles, sand, flowers or other symbolic items, these rituals can express not only the strong connection between the couple, but also the wider connection to family, including treasured family members who have died. Naming deceased loved ones near the beginning of a ceremony can powerfully demonstrate your awareness of the ways you will continue to be strengthened and inspired by the enduring gifts of love you have received from family.

THE QUESTION OF INTENT After Bride and Groom say “I do” in a Protestant ceremony, it is traditional for the officiant to ask the guests for their promise of support. Whether or not you are having a religious ceremony, asking your guests for support is a way to actively involve them in

the ceremony and to encourage them to be an important part of your lives in the future. When you hear your guests affirm, “We do!” you will feel their love and happiness for you.

***THE EXCHANGE OF RINGS** The Best Man traditionally presents the rings, but this is not a “hard and fast” rule. You can invite two family members (one from “each side”) to come forward with the rings. At a recent ceremony, the bride and groom asked their fathers to present the rings, acknowledging the importance of their relationships.

Your wedding ceremony will mean even more to you and your family if you create novel ways for them to participate. Involving your family is a way to say “thank you” for everything they’ve done for you and can help make your ceremony even more personal and touching, something to be remembered for the rest of your lives.



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