

# Outdoor Venues

## *Parks, Ranches and Gardens*

By Tamara Muldoon



© Destination Missoula

Caras Park, Missoula, MT

*Getting outdoors refreshes body and soul and is a welcome change from the typical convention center or hotel environment. Although many events require indoor space for meetings, outdoor venues add spice to meals and excitement to social functions. And, they make events like weddings, reunions, celebrations, teambuilding sessions, concerts and festivals much more memorable.*

*The Pacific Northwest enjoys a profusion of unique outdoor spaces for group functions, including public parks, estate ranches, wineries, botanical gardens and even college campuses. Check out this sampling of versatile outdoor venues to spark your curiosity and creativity.*

### **Urban Parks**

Public parks can be great options for private events. Many offer plazas or lawns that groups can reserve, including covered shelters for food service. Benefits may include proximity to meeting and lodging facilities, availability of parking and flexibility of the space.

The possible downside is that the public will likely be using other areas of the park, and some parks require a bit more effort to utilize due to required applications and permits. Costs vary widely, from inexpensive to on par with private conference venues.

## ◀ CARAS PARK Missoula, Montana

Conveniently located in downtown Missoula along the scenic Clark Fork River, 9,000-square-foot Caras Park features a tent-like covered pavilion holding up to 150, plus a 1,250-square-foot covered stage. Extensive lawn areas and a paved plaza accommodate festival-sized crowds.

Watch daring surfers and kayakers as they challenge “Brennan’s Wave,” a man-made water feature just off the park’s shoreline. Family-focused groups enjoy adjacent Dragon Hollow Playground and the lovingly-restored Carousel with ponies, chariots and gargoyles that whirl to cheerful organ music.

Rental fees for this affordable city park include tables, chairs, and picnic tables, along with power, water and restrooms, all of which make planning easier. Bring in food trucks or arrange catering through a local company. Parking at a nearby city lot is free evenings and weekends.

Missoula is located on I-90 in western Montana and served by Missoula International Airport. More than 450 hotel rooms plus indoor meeting facilities are available at several hotels within walking distance of Caras Park. The Missoula Community Theater ([mctinc.org](http://mctinc.org)) and Wilma Theater ([thewilma.com](http://thewilma.com)) also serve as out-of-the-ordinary indoor meeting venues. Discover more at [destinationmissoula.org](http://destinationmissoula.org).

### CONNECT

[missouladowntown.com/caraspark](http://missouladowntown.com/caraspark)

## ▼ DIRECTOR PARK Portland, Oregon

Secluded among downtown Portland high-rise buildings, Director Park is one link in a chain of public spaces known collectively as the South Park Blocks. You’ll find no grass here, instead a landscape architect’s showpiece featuring a city-block-sized plaza of white granite pavers, artfully arranged to create intimate, yet versatile, gathering places.

Event planners may reserve individual sections, several areas in combination, or the entire park. The



Director Park, Portland, OR

© MB98 / Creative Commons



McEuen Park, Coeur d'Alene, ID

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Bosque, a gently-sloping area measuring 1,350 square feet, is mostly enclosed by built-in wooden benches and shaded by trees. The Lower Terrace, a level platform of 2,100 square feet, sits beneath a soaring steel and glass canopy, providing some shelter from the elements. The Plaza, also 2,100 square feet, offers freeform open space that can be tented or arranged in endless ways. Then, there is Teachers Fountain—a 1,600 square foot splash-pad fountain surrounded by a low semi-circular wooden bench. The fountain can be turned off during events to provide additional space, or left running as a lovely focal point and source of ambient sound.

Dinners, receptions, fundraisers and food or beverage-focused events fit beautifully here. Director Park makes an ideal location for an off-site function for Portland-area conventions. It’s a short walk from

many large downtown hotels. A nearby MAX light rail stop and numerous adjacent parking garages ensure easy access.

Groups may contract with an outside catering service or the on-site Elephant’s In The Park Café. Better yet, reserve one or both of the adjoining streets and bring in a selection of food trucks for a truly Portland culinary experience. Visit [travelportland.com](http://travelportland.com) for additional information.

### CONNECT

[directorpark.org](http://directorpark.org)

## ▲ MCEUEN PARK Coeur d’Alene, Idaho

Tucked between Coeur d’Alene’s downtown business district and the shoreline of Lake Coeur d’Alene, McEuen Park’s 22 acres are well-suited for group activities. The Avista Grand Pavilion holds up to 400 people under cover, while the adjacent four-acre lawn accommodates as many as 5,000. The Grand Plaza presents a wide-open paved space suitable for any number of activities. With a large playground, splash pad fountain and sports courts, McEuen Park is perfect for family-oriented events.

Corporate and convention groups requiring indoor meeting space need look no further than Coeur d’Alene Resort ([cdaresort.com](http://cdaresort.com)) right next door, offering 32,000 square feet of flexible space. With its own golf course (featuring a famous floating green), luxurious spa, and lake cruises departing from the connecting marina, Coeur d’Alene Resort is a destination unto itself.

Coeur d’Alene is located along I-90, just a 40-minute drive from Spokane International Airport. A 430-space underground garage plus nearby surface lots make parking as easy as a lakeshore breeze. Contact a local catering company to arrange food and beverage service. See [coeurdalene.org](http://coeurdalene.org) for event planning information.

### CONNECT

[cdaid.org/751/departments/parks/all-parks/mceuen-park](http://cdaid.org/751/departments/parks/all-parks/mceuen-park)



© Ranch at the Canyons

Ranch at the Canyons, Terbonne, OR

## Country Ranches

Wide open spaces, grand vistas and a relaxed atmosphere are all characteristics of ranch venues. While you'll feel like you've escaped to the country, many ranches offering event space are near a city with lodging, catering, transportation, equipment rental and entertainment services.

### ▲ RANCH AT THE CANYONS ▲ Terbonne, Oregon

Ranch at the Canyons might just be Central Oregon's most special, yet least known, event venue. This private residential community has only 46 home sites, while the majority of the 1,700-acre ranch is farm land plus a 500-acre nature preserve. It's location at the base of Smith Rock State Park, with frontage on the Crooked River and numerous small lakes, affords unparalleled scenic beauty.

"Most of the area here is preserved in conservation, so it's almost like being in your own private park," says Melanie Thomas, in-house Events Manager. "The exclusivity of it, the privacy and the natural beauty, it is hard to top."

At the Ranch's heart are the Old Winery Clubhouse and Guest Villa, and Tuscan Stables, two indoor facilities that support extensive outdoor event space. Their Tuscan-style architecture blends well with the surrounding landscape and makes a delightful setting for meetings, retreats, reunions, weddings, social events and musical performances. Tables and chairs for up to 100 people are included; however, the facility can accommodate several hundred. Catering and additional equipment are provided by outside vendors.

Don't let its rural setting fool you. Ranch at the Canyons is only a half-hour drive from Bend and minutes from Redmond Municipal Airport with daily direct flights to major Western cities, plus car rental and taxi services. Redmond offers more than 700 hotel, motel and resort guest rooms, along with craft breweries, wineries, and restaurants. You'll find planning resources at [visitcentraloregon.com](http://visitcentraloregon.com).

#### CONNECT

[ranchatthecanyons.com](http://ranchatthecanyons.com)

### ▼ HACKETT RANCH ▼ Yakima, Washington

Imagine sipping wine on a patio outside a winery barrel cave, while the rosy sunset bathes vineyards, fruit trees, rows of lavender and distant arid hills. You may feel you are in the French countryside, but you're at Hackett Ranch in Washington's fertile Yakima Valley.

Home of Gilbert Cellars winery, Hackett Ranch offers two intimate indoor venues, the Winery building and a World War II-era Quonset Hut described as "rustic chic." Outside, the Cave Patio accommodates 150 with the barrel room's stone-walled entrance as a backdrop. The Amphitheater's gently-sloping lawn and covered lakefront stage is memorable for concerts, weddings and other festivities for up to 400 guests. Plans for spring of 2017 include additional parking and a 250-person event lawn next to the Winery.

Located 20 minutes west of Yakima and only 2 hours southeast of Seattle, Hackett Ranch is easy to access, yet feels remote. Winery partner Laura Rankin Schlect explains, "You really are so close to Yakima, but you feel like you are miles away, far out in the country."

Although the Ranch is a popular wedding venue,

it is also well-suited for dinners, parties, fundraising events, group wine tastings, and concerts. Yakima offers plenty of hotel rooms, meeting space, restaurants, caterers, equipment rental and other services. For more information, go to [visityakima.com](http://visityakima.com).

#### CONNECT

[gilbertcellars.com/hackett-ranch-rentals](http://gilbertcellars.com/hackett-ranch-rentals)

### FLYING M RANCH Yamhill, Oregon

Since 1971, the Mitchell family has welcomed guests to their Flying M Ranch, a sprawling property of valley meadows and forested hills in the Oregon Coast Range's eastern foothills. The ranch has been home to the Mitchells since 1922 and 24 family members still reside there. Visitor activities include horseback riding, hiking and camping. Every Sunday morning, private pilots fly in to the ranch's airstrip for a home-cooked breakfast prepared by family matriarch, Barbara Mitchell.

Among the Flying M's outdoor event spaces are Pond Camp. Its covered shelter with picnic tables and grassy expanse along the North Yamhill River makes a lovely gathering place for group picnics, family reunions, team-building outings, equestrian events and more. Come for the day, or set up camp and stay awhile. In summer, take a dip in the swimming pond. Nearby Homestead Camp also provides a riverside setting for group functions and camping.

Tucked away in the woods along Petch Creek, Bear Camp includes a covered shelter, picnic tables and campsites. This site hosts the Flying M's Steak Fry Rides—an evening trail ride followed by a satisfying barbeque dinner, campfire and music. Groups can pre-arrange catered meals with Barbara Mitchell, cook their own or contract an outside service.

Adventurous small groups ride horseback to Trask Mountain Cabin for an overnight stay. The cabin features a wood stove and sleeping loft, and the adjacent bunkhouse offers sleeping space for about 25 persons.

Also located on the ranch, Rebers Riverside provides yet another outdoor venue, accommodating up to 300 guests. A covered pavilion, scenic riverfront lawns and children's play area make it ideal for weddings, reunions, company picnics, and other celebrations.

The Flying M Ranch is just over an hour's drive



Hackett Ranch, Yakima, WA

© The Hackett Ranch

from Portland and Salem. For information on area lodging, restaurants, wineries and other services, see [travelyamhill.com](http://travelyamhill.com).

**CONNECT**

[flying-m-ranch.com](http://flying-m-ranch.com)  
[rebersriverside.com](http://rebersriverside.com)

**Gardens**

Botanical gardens come with built-in décor and music in the form of lush greenery, colorful blooms and bird-song symphonies. Garden venues offer enchanting and memorable settings for all types of events, whether educational or celebratory.

**>> UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON BOTANIC GARDENS**

*Seattle, Washington*

The University of Washington Botanic Gardens offers two amazing venues: the 74-acre Center for Urban Horticulture and 230-acre Washington Park Arboretum. Both facilities border Lake Washington near the university campus. Its Seattle location means all necessary services are just minutes away.

At the Center for Urban Horticulture, indoor space includes a large dividable hall (capacity 300) plus smaller breakout rooms for 12 to 60 people. But, the outdoor space is the star here. The Event Lawn provides a multipurpose area for up to 350 while Goodfellow Grove beckons for farm-to-table dinners or other celebrations under shady trees. McVay Courtyard frequently plays host to dinners and receptions, while Merrill Commons—a glass atrium—provides outdoor ambiance under cover. Guests



UW Botanic Gardens, Seattle, WA

enjoy strolling paths through fragrant Soest Garden.

At Washington Park Arboretum, Wisteria Hall accommodates up to 95 people inside. Its doors open onto a patio beneath a wisteria-covered arbor and two connecting courtyards with space for up to 120 combined.

“It’s a little gem in the middle of the city,” claims Maureen Black, Marketing and Events Manager. “There isn’t anywhere else [in Seattle] that has this much green space, that makes you feel that you’re


completely away from the city, and yet we’re five minutes from I-90.”

Both facilities include tables and chairs and a catering kitchen. Food and beverage service and additional equipment are arranged through outside vendors. Check out the Meeting Planner Toolkit at [visitseattle.org](http://visitseattle.org).


**CONNECT**

[botanicgardens.uw.edu/about/rental-space](http://botanicgardens.uw.edu/about/rental-space) 


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