

Animal Encounters



Photos courtesy Virginia Zoo

By Kristy Alpert

At first glance, the Virginia Zoological Park, aka the Virginia Zoo, may seem like a tame venue for strolling through the exhibits alongside tiger-loving tykes, but this 53-acre zoo is equipped with more than 10 indoor and outdoor event spaces that can turn an event or a meeting into a wild experience.

“With all of our different spaces that can be easily transformed, the zoo really is an event professional’s dream,” said Joshua Hillman, event manager for the Virginia Zoo in Norfolk, Virginia. “While we have multiple areas that serve as educational classrooms and meeting rooms, we have tons of outside areas that are versatile for any event needs. We have staged weddings, corporate events, charity walks, concerts, movies, date nights, as well as major fundraisers like ZooBoo or, my personal favorite, our ROARchestra concert with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra event. It was a wonderful collaboration that made some remarkable magic moments.”

The zoo in Norfolk has been delighting and entertaining guests for more than a century since it starting acquiring animals back in 1900 as the Lafayette Zoological Park. It wasn’t until 1987, just two years after the zoo was renamed the Virginia Zoological Park, that it received its accreditation by the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), a true testament to the staff’s dedication to preserving the beauty of the landscape as well as meeting the strict standards of the AZA for site maintenance.

“Not only do we provide a beautiful space and a diligent staff, but the attraction greatly relies on the animals,” Hillman said.

The AZA renewed the zoo’s title the same year the freshly finished lion exhibit was named “one of the best in the country.” The Virginia Zoo has become a Norfolk treasure over the past century, providing a home for more than 400 animals from across the globe and a memorable venue for meetings and events of 15 to 500 guests.



Virginia Zoological Park

All photos courtesy Foundry Art Centre

LOCATION

Norfolk, Virginia

TYPE OF VENUE

Off-site; Zoo

CAPACITY

15 to 500 guests

NEARBY ACCOMMODATIONS

Norfolk Waterside Marriott

CONTACT INFO

757-441-2374

www.virginiazoo.org

Meeting Spaces

The event staff at the Virginia Zoo always has fun crafting exciting event spaces around the 53-acre park, but the most popular are the set rentable spaces. The park offers four indoor venues that can accommodate 20 to 50 guests and 11 outdoor venues varying in size. The largest is the Event Pavilion, for up to 500 guests, with retractable walls perfect for seated dinners or live

concerts. Other spaces are the Event Field, an add-on for the Event Pavilion; the Burong Passage, Fountain Plaza, the Siamand Island Overlook, Riverbend and Flora Point, for up to 150 guests each; the Conservatory Garden, for up to 100 guests; the Garden Tent and the Rose Garden, for up to 75 guests each; and Goode Train Station, for up to 30.

Monkey Business

Whether it's an intimate gathering around the primate house or a gala celebration surrounding the lion den, hosting an event around wildlife adds a new dimension to an affair. The Virginia Zoo is famous for its Trail of the Tiger exhibit and its other exotic Asian animals, which include orangutans, moon bears, tapirs, otters and more. Groups

also love waving "g'day" to the brand new wallabies in the Australia exhibit or getting their pictures taken with Cita, the star of the zoo. The artistic African elephant, who likes to paint in her free time, has appeared in films including "The Color Purple," "Sheena Queen of the Jungle" and "Pee Wee's Big Adventure."

Entertainment

The zoo welcomes some 500,000 visitors annually, most of whom come to see the animals. But the venue offers more than monkeys and zebras; many event and meeting guests enjoy exploring the zoo's expansive parks and pavilions or even heading out to the adjacent Lafayette Park that borders the picturesque Lafayette

River. The staff is eager to jump in when needed as well and offers custom tours, themed scavenger hunts, and guided or nonguided train rides through the park. Zookeepers even offer up-close and exclusive animal feedings, where groups can get a behind-the-scenes look at the zoo's operations.

Catering and Dining

Along with the African Village Restaurant on-site that is open during normal zoo hours, the Virginia Zoo also offers full-service catering menus for private events, where the culinary team at the zoo works with the event host to either select an option from the catering menu or create

a custom menu that suits the event's specific needs. Options range from pizza and punch for kids to decadent desserts that wrap up the evening after a sumptuous soiree of multiple courses and handcrafted drinks. Alcohol is allowed.



Above: An outdoor banquet at the Virginia Zoo

Opposite page: Event attendees can begin a day at the zoo with breakfast (left) and end with an elegant banquet (right).

A large advertisement for the Lima/Allen County Ohio Convention and Visitors Bureau. The background is dark with white and yellow text. At the top, it says "Lima/Allen County OHIO" in a stylized font. Below that is a photo of a modern building. The text "EASY PARKING" is written in blue. In the center, it says "We Have It!" in a large, yellow, cursive font. Below that is the CVB logo, which is a stylized blue building. To the right of the logo, it says "LIMA ALLEN COUNTY CONVENTION + VISITORS BUREAU". At the bottom, there are two website URLs: "www.lima-allenevb.com" and "www.WeAreLimaAllenCounty.com", and a phone number "419.222.6075". There is also a small logo for "LIMA ALLEN COUNTY REAL AMERICAN STRENGTH".