



## CASE STUDY

# Alcott Weddings

A lakeside event field with dedicated hosts and a stellar preferred suppliers list

Having pulled off her own special event – a 30th birthday party – Lucy Poole set about transforming her family's farm into a summer season events venue with vast flexibility, investing in making the dry hire space fit for purpose with drainage, car parking and a dedicated service road for structure deliveries. We talk to Lucy.

### When did you start your venue business and what is its history?

Growing up at Alcott farm, which my parents have lived at for over 40 years, I knew that it was a stunning venue that needed to be shared. In 2014, I held my 30th birthday party there; I loved organising it and I have never looked back.

### Tell us about your location and site

We are ideally located in the middle of the countryside with unspoilt views yet are only a five minute drive from Junction 3 of the M42, which makes us very accessible to Birmingham International Railway Station and Airport. The site is a large field opposite very picturesque lakes surrounded by

rolling Worcestershire countryside. There is a hard-standing car park for approximately 100 cars and we are accessible for large coaches. We had dodgems in a huge lorry get in without a problem!

We have fitted a land drainage system in the field which prevents it getting boggy in the lovely British rain. There is a service road in the field too which leads from the car park so the vehicles delivering structures can drive on that and not put any wheel marks on the land, keeping it pristine for every event. Walkway matting can lead straight from this road into the entrance of a marquee/structure. We have not faced any challenges with setup, but we keep to the summer months only, operating between May and September.

### What facilities for outdoor functions do you offer?

We have a selection of preferred suppliers with a number of structures to choose from to make an event





completely unique and bespoke. There are clear-span marquees, capris marquees, sperry tents, tipis and a giant yurt, and we are always keeping our eyes on what new structures come to the market. Ceremonies are held via a wedding celebrant currently and most are held outside, if weather permits. Some couples have hired the yurt for their ceremony room, which is stunning, and then made use of it as a kid's cinema room later in the day.

There is an on-site B&B that sleeps up to nine guests and a bridal suite in a separate barn conversion. There are also two one-bedroomed holiday cottages. Camping and glamping is an option in the field. It is lovely for guests to wake up on-site; the main marquee/structure is then re-used with caterers coming back to make some breakfast while all the antics of the day and night before are discussed.

#### What services do you offer?

We can plan the whole event from the choice of structures to catering

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choices, including street food, BBQs, buffets, food served on boards, sit down meals and so on. A choice of fab bars, indoor and outdoor, coffee stands, prosecco carts and cocktail bars are also available. Every element can be taken care of if required. We can do as little or as much as couples/ companies want.

There is also an endless choice of games, inflatables, water activities etc. I will list a few to give you a flavour: crazy golf, ultimate inflatable obstacle course, sumo suits, human table

football, rodeo bull, fairground side stalls, laser clay shooting, archery, laser sniper, indoor shooting simulator and so many more. Water activities on the lake include kayaks, stand up paddleboards and canoes.

Companies have chosen us wanting to experience some great teambuilding games such as duck herding and initiative exercises with physical logic problems that can only be solved by a group of people working together. Such activities have been designed to promote teamwork and creative thinking as well as to provide leadership and communication challenges. Games may involve handcuffs, isotope, skis, and include Number Punch, Towers of Hanoi and Folding Square.

#### Describe how you researched and sourced your structures

All of our structures are temporary and we did a lot of homework on each company that makes it on to our



preferred suppliers list. We contact other venues that use them to check on their reputation, service, quality and reliability. Equally, we ask that each supplier visit our site to make sure they are happy with where the structures will be positioned. They are over the moon that we have a flat space, land drainage and the road in the field.

**How do you work with your customers to make their event unique?**

We get to know the couple or company very well and gain a very good understanding of their requirements. If there is something that they would like, that isn't on our preferred suppliers list, we will go and source it for them. We pride ourselves on not having an option A, B and C to choose from and provide unique and unusual ideas.

**How do you publicise yourself?**

Through many venue finding platforms such as Hitched, For Better For Worse, Bridebook, and Marquee Hire Guide, and our own website, social media, open days and word of mouth.

**How would you describe your style or unique selling point?**

We are a family run farm where you are made to feel very welcome and special. We offer a very quick response and look after our clients from the very start to the very end – we have become personal friends with lots of the bookings. The vast choice and flexibility we offer makes us very unique. We do not overuse our site and, once the setup of a structure is completed, we give a whole day's access for dressing and decorating.

**What challenges have you faced?**

We had initial negativity from the council when I enquired about a premises license, so I decided to start off with temporary events notices (TENS). 15 events a year is the maximum granted and it turned out to be perfect as the site isn't a conveyor belt and it feels very special to our customers as it is always in such great condition.

**Have you worked with any industry bodies or consultants?**

I have had initial chats with Kelly Chandler and found her very helpful. She recently recommended a book called 'Why Put a Bow Tie on a Llama?', which I have just started reading and it's full of insight and inspiration so far! Kelly works with the author and fellow venue owner Celia Gaze, and it goes to show how impressive she is.

**What are your plans for next season?**

Firstly, to look after each individual booking to the utmost of my capabilities! I also want to develop the woodland area next to the field for team building games, ceremonies and photo opportunities.

**Describe your average day mid-season**

Busy, filled with laughter, getting to know the clients, couples and their friends and families, turning to amazing suppliers for any questions that arise that need solutions and always making sure the customer is happy.

**What do you enjoy about the business and why?**

This is a vibrant happy business to be in. I am very much a 'people person'







and love gauging what is going to work well for each person, putting it together and seeing everything develop with the wedding or event that takes place. Some key suppliers have become like family as you spend so much time with them in the summer and this is such a special relationship.

One of my favourite parts is the dressing day for a wedding. Usually for a Saturday wedding the structure is set up on the Thursday and on the Friday the couple with their friends and family turn up with car and van loads of props to dress the structure. Each and every one of them has a unique style and it's so lovely to see it all come together.

#### What other outdoor hospitality sectors do you operate in?

We have had family fun days, team building days, a company mini festival, birthdays and charity events. These integrate perfectly well as we turn to lots

of our key suppliers to help create completely bespoke events. We only have glamping alongside a wedding or event.

#### What are you most proud of?

Turning an idea in my head into a reality and seeing how many people have had so much joy out of Alcott. As it's a family home, I have seen my parents turn it into what it is today, and I am so proud of them.

#### What advice could you give to someone coming into the industry?

Don't rush, spend lots of time researching, get to know other businesses that are similar (maybe not right on your doorstep) and ask them for advice; when I started, other venues loved helping me and gave me very valuable tips. Also, make sure to meet as many suppliers as possible and create good relationships - follow your gut and trust!



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