

THE 2026 MADISON, WI PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE 50 Verified Locations - Permit Rules - Insider Tips

A Free Resource from PhotoVault

INTRODUCTION

Madison is one of the most photogenic cities in the Midwest. But if you've ever been kicked off a location mid-shoot, or arrived to find your "perfect spot" closed for a private event, you know the frustration.

This guide compiles everything Madison photographers need: - 50 verified locations with GPS coordinates - Current permit requirements and rules - Seasonal timing and best light - The "gotchas" nobody tells you about

Built by photographers, for photographers.

— Nathaniel Crowell, Founder, PhotoVault

LOCATION #1: WISCONSIN STATE CAPITOL

Address: 2 E Main St, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0747 N, 89.3842 W Best For: Weddings, engagements, senior portraits, architectural shots

The Shot: Grand white granite exterior, magnificent staircases, commanding dome. Inside: marble rotunda, mosaic floors, sweeping staircases. The Capitol offers timeless, elegant backdrops that photograph well year-round.

Permit Requirements: No permit needed for small portrait sessions (1-3 people) Permit required for weddings or large groups Contact: Wisconsin State Capitol Police (608-266-7541)

Best Times: - Exterior: Late afternoon (4-6pm) for warm light on west-facing granite steps - Interior: Weekdays 8am-10am (before tourist crowds) - Avoid: Weekends during legislative session (Jan-May) - very crowded

The "Gotcha": Security is strict. Don't bring large equipment bags, tripods, or reflectors without clearing it first. They WILL stop you.

Insider Tips: - The north-facing steps get beautiful diffused light all day - Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd side has less foot traffic than State Street side - Free 2-hour street parking on weekends

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Wheelchair accessible Restrooms: Yes (inside Capitol)

LOCATION #2: UW-MADISON ARBORETUM

Address: 1207 Seminole Hwy, Madison, WI 53711 GPS: 43.0390 N, 89.4251 W Best For: Engagement sessions, maternity, nature portraits, romantic shots

The Shot: 1,200 acres of diverse landscapes. Winding trails through tall trees, prairie meadows, Curtis Prairie in golden hour, secluded forest clearings. Romantic without trying too hard.

Permit Requirements: No permit needed for personal/small portrait sessions Permit required for commercial shoots or weddings Email: arboretum@wisc.edu or call (608) 263-7888

Best Times: - Spring: April-May (wildflowers, fresh green) - Fall: Late September-October (fall colors peak) - Golden hour: 1 hour before sunset (prairie glows) - Avoid: Midday summer (harsh light, buggy)

The “Gotcha”: Trails close at dusk. If you’re shooting sunset, you need to hustle out before they lock the gates. Security WILL find you.

Insider Tips: - Curtis Prairie (southwest section) = best sunset light - Longenecker Horticultural Gardens = manicured, less “wild” look - Free parking at multiple trailheads - Bug spray in summer is NON-NEGOTIABLE

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (some trails are uneven) Accessibility: Limited (main paths only) Restrooms: Yes (visitor center)

LOCATION #3: MEMORIAL UNION TERRACE (READ THIS)

Address: 800 Langdon St, Madison, WI 53706 GPS: 43.0769 N, 89.3987 W Best For: Iconic “Madison” vibe, colorful sunburst chairs, lake views

The Shot: Famous colorful sunburst chairs, Lake Mendota backdrop, sailboats, classic Wisconsin summer feel. Highly Instagrammable.

Permit Requirements: NO COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHY ALLOWED THIS IS THE BIG ONE: UW-Madison has a strict policy. If you’re shooting with a paying client, campus police will ask you to leave.

The Reality: You can shoot here with friends/family for personal use. But if it’s a paid session (engagement, senior, wedding), they WILL stop you. Multiple photographers report being kicked out mid-shoot.

Workaround: - Shoot at nearby Picnic Point instead (no restrictions) - Or get a UW Special Events permit (\$150+, 2-week lead time) - Contact: Union South Events (608-890-3000)

The “Gotcha”: Photographers get burned by this constantly. Every “best Madison photo spots” list includes the Terrace, but none mention the commercial policy. Don’t be that photographer.

Best Times (if you CAN shoot here): - Late afternoon (4-6pm) for golden light on chairs - Sunset over the lake (west-facing)

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Wheelchair accessible Restrooms: Yes (inside Union)

LOCATION #4: OLBRICH BOTANICAL GARDENS

Address: 3330 Atwood Ave, Madison, WI 53704 GPS: 43.1058 N, 89.3267 W Best For: Weddings, engagements, botanical elegance, tropical conservatory shots

The Shot: 16 acres of outdoor gardens + indoor Bolz Conservatory (tropical plants, waterfall, koi pond). Lush, romantic, magazine-worthy backdrops.

Permit Requirements: Permit REQUIRED for all professional photography Fee: \$100 for 2-hour session Reservations: 2 weeks advance, call (608) 246-4550 Book early for May-September (prime wedding season)

Best Times: - Spring: May (tulips, flowering trees) - Summer: June-August (rose garden peak) - Fall: September (dahlias, fall foliage) - Indoor conservatory: Year-round (climate-controlled)

The “Gotcha”: They are STRICT about permits. If you show up with a camera and a couple in a wedding dress, they will stop you and charge you on the spot. Book ahead.

Insider Tips: - Thai Pavilion = most popular backdrop (book early) - Conservatory is \$2 admission per person (include in your pricing) - Outdoor gardens close at dusk - Weekend mornings = fewer crowds

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Wheelchair accessible (outdoor paths) Restrooms: Yes (garden center)

LOCATION #5: PICNIC POINT

Address: Picnic Point Ln, Madison, WI 53705 (off Lakeshore Path) GPS: 43.0865 N, 89.4194 W Best For: Sunset sessions, nature walks, lake views, casual/romantic feel

The Shot: Long, narrow peninsula jutting into Lake Mendota. Tree-lined path, Madison skyline views across the water, secluded feel despite being on campus. Classic “Wisconsin nature walk” vibe.

Permit Requirements: No permit needed for portrait sessions FREE and accessible to public This is your “Terrace alternative” with no restrictions

Best Times: - Sunset: 1 hour before sunset (golden light on water) - Spring/Fall: Best weather, beautiful colors - Avoid: Winter (icy, cold, brutal wind off the lake)

The “Gotcha”: It’s a 20-minute walk from parking to the point. Clients in heels? Bring flats for the walk. Also, it’s WINDY. Bring hair ties.

Insider Tips: - Park at Lot 60 (end of Lakeshore Path) - Fire pit at the point (cool prop for engagement shots) - Sunset timing: Check weather.gov (lake reflects golden hour beautifully) - Bring bug spray in summer

Difficulty: Easy (but long walk) Accessibility: Paved path (wheelchair accessible) Restrooms: No (use before you go)

LOCATION #6: TENNEY PARK

Address: 402 N Thornton Ave, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0907 N, 89.3732 W Best For: Engagements, families, seniors, winter sessions

The Shot: Stone bridges, calm lagoon, willow trees, and open shoreline along Lake Mendota. Easy to move around and find diverse looks in one session.

Permit Requirements: No permit required for small portrait sessions Large/commercial groups may require Parks permit Contact: Madison Parks (608) 266-4711

Best Times: - Sunrise = calm water + low traffic - Fall = blazing color + fog over lagoon - Winter = frozen lake + bridge shots

The “Gotcha”: Goose droppings everywhere in summer — choose footwear wisely.

Insider Tips: - Stone footbridge = best backdrop - Lagoon freezes early - great winter look - Golden hour hits willow tree clusters beautifully

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good — paved paths Restrooms: Yes (seasonal)

LOCATION #7: VILAS PARK + ZOO AREA

Address: 702 S Randall Ave, Madison, WI 53715 GPS: 43.0584 N, 89.4033 W Best For: Family sessions, kids, couples, urban-nature mix

The Shot: Lake Wingra shoreline, tall trees, quaint footbridge, charming older houses in surrounding streets. Massive seasonal variety.

Permit Requirements: No permit needed for small portrait sessions Zoo exterior areas okay without permit No photography inside zoo animal exhibits unless pre-approved

Best Times: - Morning - calm water - Fall - peak reds/oranges - Snow - postcard look

The “Gotcha”: Road + parking fills fast on weekends.

Insider Tips: - The little footbridge by the lagoon = ideal - Tree alley toward Monroe St = killer depth shots - Walk 3-5 blocks for charming white/brick homes

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Yes (seasonal)

LOCATION #8: OLIN PARK / OLIN TURVILLE

Address: 1156 Olin-Turville Ct, Madison, WI 53715 GPS: 43.0549 N, 89.3828 W Best For: Skyline portraits, engagements, seniors, sunset

The Shot: Best unobstructed Madison skyline view from land. Fields, paths, tall grasses, and oak groves.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions allowed Large paid groups may require permit Contact: Madison Parks (608) 266-4711

Best Times: - Sunset: Skyline glows - primary reason to come here

The “Gotcha”: Windy — hair control becomes a thing.

Insider Tips: - Shoreline grass gives nice depth - Great for silhouettes at sunset - Bring a longer lens to compress skyline

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Limited

LOCATION #9: BASSETT & WASHINGTON WAREHOUSE DISTRICT

Address: W Washington Ave & S Bassett St GPS: 43.0683 N, 89.3916 W Best For: Editorial, street portraits, branding

The Shot: Industrial brick, alley textures, loading docks, gritty urban tones rarely seen on Madison lists. Perfect for fashion + branding sessions.

Permit Requirements: No permit for sidewalks/alleys Private loading docks = ask permission

Best Times: - Late afternoon - soft reflective light - Cloudy days help soften harsh alley shadows

The “Gotcha”: Delivery traffic. Stay alert.

Insider Tips: - Great for film-style portraiture - Look for painted brick + rusted metal textures - Night shots with street lights = moody

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Paved Restrooms: No

LOCATION #10: MADISON CENTRAL LIBRARY (INDOOR)

Address: 201 W Mifflin St, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0737 N, 89.3901 W Best For: Headshots, editorial, winter sessions, modern/architectural

The Shot: Clean, modern interiors. Big windows for contemporary natural-light portraits. Interesting staircases + metal/wood details.

Permit Requirements: MUST request permission for professional/paid shoots Staff typically allows small, quiet sessions Contact: (608) 266-6300

Best Times: - Weekday mornings — fewer people

The “Gotcha”: Need to stay out of high-traffic reading areas.

Insider Tips: - Third floor stacks - warm tones + symmetry - Glass stair rails = sleek portrait backdrops - Winter-friendly option

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Yes

LOCATION #11: ALLIANT ENERGY CENTER GROUNDS

Address: 1919 Alliant Energy Center Way, Madison, WI 53713 GPS: 43.0448 N, 89.3763 W Best For: Seniors, branding, large-group portraits, industrial vibes

The Shot: Wide concrete spaces, long leading lines, metal structures, grassy buffers — a flexible hybrid of industrial + minimalistic outdoor looks.

Permit Requirements: Outdoor casual/small portrait sessions usually OK Professional shoots may require permission — case-by-case Contact: (608) 267-3976

Best Times: - Sunset — warm tones over open pavement - Cloudy = ideal soft industrial look

The “Gotcha”: During big events (concerts/fairs), access is limited or fenced.

Insider Tips: - The south end has clean concrete + metal backdrop - Great for full-body branding shots - Minimal foot traffic - stress-free shooting

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Event-dependent

LOCATION #12: JAMES MADISON PARK

Address: 614 E Gorham St, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0792 N, 89.3805 W Best For: Couples, families, seniors, lakeside portraits

The Shot: Gorgeous Lake Mendota shoreline + open lawn + historic Gates of Heaven building (stone synagogue) for classic, architectural contrast.

Permit Requirements: Small shoots OK Permit required for use of Gates of Heaven building interior Contact: Madison Parks (608) 266-4711

Best Times: - Sunrise - calm water + empty park - Afternoon - harsher but doable with reflectors

The “Gotcha”: Wind and lake spray — hair management needed.

Insider Tips: - Use the stone synagogue for vintage look - Long lens - compress lake beautifully - Great winter ice shots (when safe)

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #13: MONONA TERRACE ROOFTOP

Address: 1 John Nolen Dr, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0703 N, 89.3829 W Best For: Weddings, seniors, engagements, skyline shots

The Shot: Modern architecture + sweeping views of Lake Monona + curved lines + glass. Very clean, bright aesthetic.

Permit Requirements: Professional photography may require approval Events have priority - avoid wedding/event blocks Contact: (608) 261-4093

Best Times: - Sunset - gold on water + skyline - Blue hour - city glow

The “Gotcha”: Rooftop can be closed for private events — always check first.

Insider Tips: - Lakefront terrace walkway below also excellent - Curved walls create great negative space - Strong wind — minimal props

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Yes

LOCATION #14: LAW PARK (LAKE MONONA SHORELINE)

Address: 410 S Blair St, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0708 N, 89.3734 W Best For: Couples, seniors, small weddings, skyline shots

The Shot: Lake Monona boardwalk, skyline behind, grassy patches + bikeway minimalism. Clean + classic.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions allowed Traffic noise but manageable

Best Times: - Evening - skyline glows - Sunrise - soft, dreamy water

The “Gotcha”: Busy bike path — timing is key.

Insider Tips: - Bring longer focal length to compress skyline - Use retaining wall along path for clean lines - Great backup when Monona Terrace is booked

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: No

LOCATION #15: GARVER FEED MILL

Address: 3241 Garver Green, Madison, WI 53704 GPS: 43.0957 N, 89.3233 W Best For: Engagements, editorial, branding, rustic industrial

The Shot: Restored historic feed mill - exposed brick, black steel, glass, artisan spaces. One of Madison's hottest wedding + photo backdrops.

Permit Requirements: Indoor professional photography requires permission Some outdoor areas public; others private tenant space Contact: info@garverfeedmill.com

Best Times: - Late afternoon - soft brick glow - Cloudy - perfect industrial mood

The "Gotcha": Indoor areas are tenant-controlled — don't assume access.

Insider Tips: - East side path behind building - dreamy evening light - Great winter option for indoor/outdoor hybrid - Parking fills fast on weekends

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Yes (inside vendors)

LOCATION #16: HENRY VILAS BEACH (LAKE WINGRA SHORE)

Address: Near 1601 Vilas Park Dr, Madison, WI 53715 GPS: 43.0562 N, 89.4136 W Best For: Couples, families, lifestyle, summer sessions

The Shot: Quiet, natural lakeshore tucked behind Vilas Park. Soft sand, willow trees, and clear sunset views. One of Madison's most underrated lakeside gems.

Permit Requirements: No permit needed for portrait sessions Avoid large paid groups (consider Parks permit if >6 people) Contact: Madison Parks (608) 266-4711

Best Times: - Sunset for reflections on Lake Wingra - Early morning for glass-still water

The "Gotcha": Mosquitoes at dusk — bring repellent.

Insider Tips: - Use the shoreline trees for natural framing - Hidden benches for intimate poses - Combine with nearby Vilas Park for variety

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate (uneven shoreline) Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #17: CAPITOL SQUARE / STATE STREET LOOP

Address: From Capitol steps down State Street to Library Mall GPS: 43.0749 N, 89.3867 W Best For: Branding, street, engagement, seniors

The Shot: Urban energy — brick facades, neon lights, storefront reflections, Capitol dome framing State Street. Perfect for downtown lifestyle shoots.

Permit Requirements: Public sidewalks OK Avoid private storefront interiors without permission

Best Times: - Golden hour - warm storefront reflections - Night - bokeh lights, cinematic look

The “Gotcha”: Heavy pedestrian traffic — plan off-hours (Sunday morning ideal).

Insider Tips: - Use telephoto lens to compress dome view - Mifflin and King streets = quieter cross streets - Great winter night shots with holiday lights

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Businesses nearby

LOCATION #18: WARNER PARK

Address: 2930 N Sherman Ave, Madison, WI 53704 GPS: 43.1290 N, 89.3654 W Best For: Families, kids, nature portraits, engagements

The Shot: Open fields, pines, shoreline trails, and the lagoon. Spacious, calm, ideal for golden-hour family shoots.

Permit Requirements: Portrait sessions OK Large paid groups - Parks permit Contact: Madison Parks (608) 266-4711

Best Times: - Evening golden hour over the lagoon - Autumn foliage = vivid orange tones

The “Gotcha”: Baseball games = full parking lots; plan around events.

Insider Tips: - Lagoon footbridge for symmetry shots - Pine grove near north end = dreamy back-light - Ample open space for long-lens depth

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #19: B.B. CLARKE BEACH

Address: 835 Spaight St, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0782 N, 89.3705 W Best For: Seniors, engagements, water-edge portraits

The Shot: Tucked-away neighborhood beach with wooden pier, willow canopy, and intimate feel. Looks like a Northwoods hideaway five minutes from downtown.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK No tripods blocking walkway

Best Times: - Sunset for soft lake glow - Early morning - mist over Monona

The “Gotcha”: Limited parking; come early.

Insider Tips: - Short pier perfect for symmetry compositions - Nearby Yahara Place Park = bonus greenery - Great quiet alternative to Law Park

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate (stairs) Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #20: GOODMAN COMMUNITY CENTER / ATWOOD CORRIDOR

Address: 149 Waubesa St, Madison, WI 53704 GPS: 43.0912 N, 89.3355 W Best For: Urban, editorial, family, lifestyle

The Shot: Converted industrial buildings with ivy-covered brick, murals, bike path, and cafe-style charm. East-side vibe meets clean textures.

Permit Requirements: Outdoor public access fine Indoor shoots require permission Contact: (608) 241-1574

Best Times: - Late afternoon light on brick walls - Morning - cool industrial tones

The “Gotcha”: Busy weekends — lots of bikers/pedestrians

Insider Tips: - Murals behind main building = excellent backdrops - Great coffee stops for lifestyle props - Walk the nearby Capital City Trail for extended looks

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Yes (inside center)

LOCATION #21: YAHARA PLACE PARK (RIVERWALK)

Address: 1300-1500 Yahara Pl, Madison, WI 53703 GPS: 43.0789 N, 89.3648 W Best For: Couples, families, seniors, quiet waterfront portraits

The Shot: A tranquil riverwalk lining the Yahara River with willow trees, short docks, and intimate grassy banks. Very serene — perfect for timeless, natural portraits.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK No blocking docks / paths

Best Times: - Early morning - still water + fog - Sunset - warm reflection across river

The “Gotcha”: Very limited shooting angles — small space.

Insider Tips: - Short piers = leading-line compositions - Willows create beautiful soft backdrops - Combine with nearby BB Clarke Beach for variety

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: No

LOCATION #22: BURROWS PARK BOATHOUSE

Address: 25 Burrows Rd, Madison, WI 53704 GPS: 43.1004 N, 89.3643 W Best For: Engagements, seniors, moody lake portraits

The Shot: Historic stone boathouse jutting into Lake Mendota. Natural + architectural hybrid. Perfect for dramatic lake-edge images.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK Boathouse interior generally not accessible

Best Times: - Sunrise — lake fog = magic - Blue hour — reflection + structure silhouette

The “Gotcha”: Wind off Mendota can be intense — bring hair plan.

Insider Tips: - Shoot from side angle to feature stone textures - Trees behind building soften harsh frames - Winter - frozen lake = unique platform

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate Restrooms: No

LOCATION #23: ALLIANT ENERGY CENTER - WILLOW ISLAND

Address: 1919 Alliant Energy Center Way, Madison, WI 53713 GPS: 43.0466 N, 89.3750 W Best For: Families, couples, maternity, natural landscapes

The Shot: A quiet, scenic peninsula on Lake Monona — tall grasses, open water, peaceful walking paths. Nature feel without leaving town.

Permit Requirements: Casual portrait sessions generally OK Events take priority — check ahead

Best Times: - Sunset - warm glow + water reflection - Morning - mist

The “Gotcha”: Can be fenced off during events.

Insider Tips: - Tall grasses - dreamy backlit shots - Long lens to compress city shoreline - Bring blanket — wide nature looks

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Event-dependent

LOCATION #24: HILDALE SHOPPING CENTER - EXTERIOR + PARKING TERRACE

Address: 726 N Midvale Blvd, Madison, WI 53705 GPS: 43.0797 N, 89.4530 W Best For: Branding, lifestyle, fashion, editorial

The Shot: Modern open-air shopping center with upscale storefronts, string lights, clean lines, and parking-deck skyline peeks. Great for commercial branding & lifestyle shoots.

Permit Requirements: Technically private property Small, low-impact sessions often tolerated For formal paid sessions - request permission Contact: Hildale management (608) 238-6353

Best Times: - Golden hour - beautiful building bounce - Night - string lights + signage glow

The “Gotcha”: Weekends busy - go early

Insider Tips: - Sidewalk seating areas = relaxed lifestyle energy - Parking deck - skyline + negative space - Use storefront reflections for creative shots

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Yes (inside shops)

LOCATION #25: HOYT PARK

Address: 3902 Regent St, Madison, WI 53705 GPS: 43.0728 N, 89.4503 W Best For: Seniors, families, engagements, woodsy portraits

The Shot: Rustic stone shelter, winding wooded trails, tall pines, mossy stone steps — feels like a Northwoods getaway inside the city.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions allowed Shelter rentals require permit

Best Times: - Late afternoon - warm forest glow - Fall - golden canopy

The “Gotcha”: Low light in deep woods — fast lens recommended.

Insider Tips: - Stone shelter = dramatic backdrop - Pine stands provide tall, moody texture - Great foggy-morning location

Difficulty: Moderate (hilly) Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #26: LAKESHORE NATURE PRESERVE - FRAUTSCHI POINT

Address: 2002 University Bay Dr, Madison, WI 53705 GPS: 43.1011 N, 89.4478 W Best For: Engagements, outdoorsy couples, families

The Shot: Secluded woodland point overlooking Lake Mendota, with natural trails, evergreens, and unobstructed water views. Quiet + romantic.

Permit Requirements: Casual portrait sessions OK Large commercial setups discouraged

Best Times: - Sunset - glow over water - Dawn - quiet + mist

The “Gotcha”: Parking limited; trails can be muddy after rain.

Insider Tips: - Benches with lake views = intimate feels - Fallen trees make great posing elements
- Pair with Picnic Point for variety

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: No

LOCATION #27: ELVER PARK

Address: 1250 McKenna Blvd, Madison, WI 53719 GPS: 43.0394 N, 89.5097 W Best For: Families, maternity, nature sessions

The Shot: Madison’s largest community park: rolling hills, tall grasses, woodland edges, bridges, and surprisingly varied terrain.

Permit Requirements: Small shoots OK Large commercial groups - Parks permit

Best Times: - Golden hour - tall grass glows beautifully - Early fall - peak color

The “Gotcha”: Big sledding hill = crowded on snow days

Insider Tips: - Grassy hills - wide scenic shots - Wooded edges = soft filtered light - Great space for kids to roam naturally

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #28: MONONA BAY BOARDWALK (BRITTINGHAM PARK)

Address: 701 Brittingham Pl, Madison, WI 53715 GPS: 43.0619 N, 89.3896 W Best For: Couples, families, seniors, shoreline portraits

The Shot: Wooden boardwalk along Monona Bay with skyline reflections, sailboats, open water, and grassy park space.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions allowed No tripods blocking walkway

Best Times: - Sunset - stunning water reflections - Blue hour - skyline lights

The “Gotcha”: Lots of joggers + bikers - off-peak best

Insider Tips: - Use the curve in the boardwalk for strong leading lines - Minimalist water compositions - elegant portraits - Bring longer lens to compress skyline

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Limited / seasonal

LOCATION #29: POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

Address: 8214 CTH M, Middleton, WI 53562 GPS: 43.0667 N, 89.5667 W Best For: Engagement sessions, families, nature portraits, sunflower season

The Shot: 105 acres of rolling hills, prairie restorations, and seasonally, massive sunflower fields. Wide-open pastoral beauty.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions generally OK Sunflower season often requires ticketed entry Contact: Middleton Parks (608) 821-8370

Best Times: - Late July-August: Sunflower bloom (confirm timing annually) - Golden hour: Prairie glows beautifully - Fall: Autumn colors on rolling hills

The “Gotcha”: Sunflower event is TICKETED and sells out fast. Plan months ahead.

Insider Tips: - Arrive early during sunflower season (crowds + parking) - Rolling hills create natural depth - Bring wide-angle lens for field shots

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate (gravel paths, hills) Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #30: PHEASANT BRANCH CONSERVANCY

Address: 3100 Century Ave, Middleton, WI 53562 GPS: 43.1167 N, 89.5333 W Best For: Nature portraits, families, adventurous sessions

The Shot: 160 acres with rivers, boardwalks, hiking trails, fields, and forests. A true nature escape just outside Madison.

Permit Requirements: Portrait sessions allowed Respect wildlife areas

Best Times: - Spring: Wildflowers, flowing creeks - Fall: Vibrant foliage - Golden hour: Fields and boardwalks glow

The “Gotcha”: Trails can be muddy — appropriate footwear essential.

Insider Tips: - Boardwalk sections = unique elevated angles - Creek areas perfect for adventurous couples - Less crowded than Arboretum

Difficulty: Moderate (uneven terrain) Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: Yes (at trailhead)

LOCATION #31: PAMELA WESTRIDGE PARK (MIDDLETON)

Address: 5250 W. Wyndemere Rd, Middleton, WI 53562 GPS: 43.1027 N, 89.5353 W Best For: Families, maternity, couples

The Shot: Wide meadows, tall grasses, woodland edges, and quiet walking trails with great depth. Feels pastoral without leaving town.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK Large groups - contact Middleton Parks

Best Times: - Sunset - golden meadow - Fall - strong foliage

The “Gotcha”: Parking is limited — plan ahead.

Insider Tips: - Trail curve = wonderful lead-in composition - Great long-lens compression through tree tunnels

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate Restrooms: No

LOCATION #32: LAKEVIEW PARK (MIDDLETON)

Address: 6300 Mendota Ave, Middleton, WI 53562 GPS: 43.1136 N, 89.5029 W Best For: Families, seniors, engagements

The Shot: Small lake with reflection, wooden bridge, tall pines, and open lawns. Good all-around portrait location.

Permit Requirements: No permit usually required for small sessions

Best Times: - Morning - quiet and clean - Fall - best color here

The "Gotcha": Geese = footing hazard.

Insider Tips: - Pine stands - gorgeous filtered backlight - Bridge + water = easy posing

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #33: PHEASANT BRANCH CONSERVANCY - NORTHSIDE (MIDDLETON)

Address: 4864 Pheasant Branch Rd, Middleton, WI 53562 GPS: 43.1204 N, 89.4975 W Best For: Engagements, maternity, seniors, nature

The Shot: Rolling prairie grasses, boardwalks, long sightlines, wooded edges, gentle climbs. Dreamy natural light.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK

Best Times: - Sunrise - magical prairie glow - Sunset - warm color

The "Gotcha": Can get windy on prairie flats.

Insider Tips: - Traces of fog in early AM - Great minimalism w/ long lens

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Limited in some areas Restrooms: No

LOCATION #34: FIREMAN'S PARK (VERONA)

Address: 200 Paoli St, Verona, WI 53593 GPS: 42.9866 N, 89.5341 W Best For: Families, seniors, couples

The Shot: Beachfront + stone wall + open water + shaded paths. A surprising variety in a compact area.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK

Best Times: - Golden hour at lake edge

The "Gotcha": Crowded on summer weekends.

Insider Tips: - Stone retaining wall = easy posing platform - Nice reflections on calmer days

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Yes

LOCATION #35: BADGER PRAIRIE COUNTY PARK (VERONA)

Address: 4654 Verona Ave, Verona, WI 53593 GPS: 42.9875 N, 89.5299 W Best For: Families, engagements, outdoor lovers

The Shot: Tall, open prairie w/ mowed paths. Gorgeous golden-hour landscape, perfect for warm, airy sessions.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK Large events - Dane County permit

Best Times: - Sunset - unbeatable

The “Gotcha”: No shade - avoid midday

Insider Tips: - Prairie grasses - instant depth + framing - Bring bug spray in summer

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate Restrooms: Limited

LOCATION #36: WINNEQUAH PARK (MONONA)

Address: 1055 Nichols Rd, Monona, WI 53716 GPS: 43.0647 N, 89.3458 W Best For: Seniors, families, couples

The Shot: Large open park, willow trees, lagoon, classic small-town vibe. Very approachable.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK

Best Times: - Evening by lagoon

The “Gotcha”: Ball games = crowds + cars

Insider Tips: - Lagoon bridge - great symmetry - Willow trees = natural diffusion

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Yes

LOCATION #37: SAN DAMIANO (MONONA)

Address: 4123 Monona Dr, Monona, WI 53716 GPS: 43.0644 N, 89.3418 W Best For: Couples, families, lakeside romance

The Shot: Quiet Lake Monona shoreline property with lawns, trees, and bay views; under development as a public space - current look is raw + gorgeous.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK

Best Times: - Sunset - soft lake color

The “Gotcha”: Limited infrastructure, still developing.

Insider Tips: - Bring blanket + long lens for compressed lake shots

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate Restrooms: No

LOCATION #38: ANGELL PARK (SUN PRAIRIE)

Address: 315 Park St, Sun Prairie, WI 53590 GPS: 43.1795 N, 89.2160 W Best For: Seniors, families, vintage charm

The Shot: Fairgrounds backdrop + oak trees + rustic fencing. Slightly gritty with character.

Permit Requirements: Small outdoor shoots OK Event days off-limits

Best Times: - Sunset

The “Gotcha”: Closed off during racing events.

Insider Tips: - Rustic bleachers = cool editorial shots

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Event-based

LOCATION #39: WETMORE PARK (SUN PRAIRIE)

Address: 555 North St, Sun Prairie, WI 53590 GPS: 43.1832 N, 89.2179 W Best For: Families, kids, casual outdoor portraits

The Shot: Open lawns, playground architecture, and smart landscaping. Simple and flexible.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK

Best Times: - Evening shade

The “Gotcha”: Playgrounds busy at peak hours

Insider Tips: - Lawn corners = easy natural backdrop - Great family “movement-shots”

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Yes

LOCATION #40: PRAIRIE ATHLETIC CLUB ATRIUM (SUN PRAIRIE) - INDOOR

Address: 1010 N Bird St, Sun Prairie, WI 53590 GPS: 43.1891 N, 89.2280 W Best For: Winter portraits, headshots, branding

The Shot: Modern interior spaces = clean contemporary looks. Great alternative to hotel atriums.

Permit Requirements: Must call ahead Quiet, small sessions often permitted Contact: (608) 837-4646

Best Times: - Midday - prime window diffusion

The “Gotcha”: Avoid busy fitness times

Insider Tips: - Neutral backdrops = branding gold - Great winter option

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Yes

LOCATION #41: RIERSON WOODS (STOUGHTON)

Address: 1376 Collins Rd, Stoughton, WI 53589 GPS: 42.9332 N, 89.2251 W Best For: Couples, maternity, seniors, woodland sessions

The Shot: A quiet oak forest with filtered light, winding footpaths, ferns, and dreamy backlit evening glow.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK

Best Times: - Golden hour - dreamy backlight - Spring - fresh greens + ferns

The “Gotcha”: Mosquito-heavy in June/July

Insider Tips: - Shallow-DOF portraits look magical here - Bring bug spray + comfortable shoes

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: No

LOCATION #42: MANDT PARK (STOUGHTON)

Address: 801 S 4th St, Stoughton, WI 53589 GPS: 42.9128 N, 89.2209 W Best For: Families, seniors, casual portraits

The Shot: Beautiful open park w/ interesting bridges, riverside paths, and a classic Americana vibe.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK

Best Times: - Evening for river glow

The “Gotcha”: Baseball/softball events = crowds

Insider Tips: - Use the bridge for symmetry - Tall grass pockets - dreamy backgrounds

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Good Restrooms: Yes (seasonal)

LOCATION #43: LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK (STOUGHTON AREA)

Address: 2405 Door Creek Rd, Stoughton, WI 53589 GPS: 42.9721 N, 89.3009 W Best For: Couples, families, wilderness romance

The Shot: Beachfront, tall pines, woodland paths, lake overlooks — excellent natural diversity.

Permit Requirements: State Park sticker required Small portrait sessions OK Large setups - contact DNR

Best Times: - Sunset lakeshore - Fall - stunning color

The “Gotcha”: Mosquito season is real

Insider Tips: - Pine stands = clean verticals - Prairie + lake combo - rare look

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Moderate Restrooms: Yes

LOCATION #44: MCFARLAND CONSERVANCY (MCFARLAND)

Address: 5406 Fust Rd, McFarland, WI 53558 GPS: 43.0113 N, 89.3057 W Best For: Seniors, couples, nature lovers

The Shot: Boardwalks, swamp grasses, wetlands, and long tall-grass corridors — dreamy at golden hour.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK

Best Times: - Sunset - golden grass

The “Gotcha”: Limited shade; avoid midday

Insider Tips: - Backlit shots — guaranteed magic - Bring off-road shoes

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: No

LOCATION #45: MARSH WOODS (MCFARLAND)

Address: 5700 Exchange St, McFarland, WI 53558 GPS: 43.0188 N, 89.2971 W Best For: Seniors, couples, dreamy nature

The Shot: Mature forest w/ gorgeous filtered light and side paths that create depth + intimacy.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK

Best Times: - Morning - soft + quiet

The “Gotcha”: Can get wet after rain

Insider Tips: - Fern beds - excellent ground texture - Earth-tone wardrobe works well

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: No

LOCATION #46: NORWAY GROVE PARK (WAUNAKEE)

Address: 5029 Grace St, Waunakee, WI 53597 GPS: 43.1887 N, 89.4589 W Best For: Families, kids, casual portraits

The Shot: Wide lawns, prairie edges, and a quiet neighborhood backdrop make for easy, versatile portraits.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK

Best Times: - Evening - best light

The “Gotcha”: Limited shade - avoid harsh midday

Insider Tips: - Prairie edge = best frame depth

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: No

LOCATION #47: RIPP PARK (WAUNAKEE)

Address: 213 Dorn Dr, Waunakee, WI 53597 GPS: 43.1983 N, 89.4457 W Best For: Families, seniors, athletic/editorial

The Shot: Open athletic fields + soft natural edges + broad pathways make for clean lines + minimalist looks.

Permit Requirements: Small shoots OK

Best Times: - Sunset - tall grass glow

The “Gotcha”: Ball games = crowds

Insider Tips: - Corners of park - best golden backlight

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Excellent Restrooms: Seasonal

LOCATION #48: COTTAGE GROVE CONSERVANCY (COTTAGE GROVE)

Address: 350 Limestone Pass, Cottage Grove, WI 53527 GPS: 43.0820 N, 89.2117 W Best For: Seniors, couples, nature lovers

The Shot: Tall prairie grasses, oak savanna, and trails that create simple, elegant compositions.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK

Best Times: - Sunset - warm prairie glow

The “Gotcha”: No shade; avoid harsh light

Insider Tips: - Shoot long lens for dreamy compression

Difficulty: Easy Accessibility: Moderate Restrooms: No

LOCATION #49: GLACIAL VALLEY PARK (CROSS PLAINS)

Address: 2011 Bourbon Rd, Cross Plains, WI 53528 GPS: 43.1138 N, 89.6559 W Best For: Seniors, families, couples

The Shot: Rolling prairie hills + oak trees + gorgeous soft light. Surprisingly scenic.

Permit Requirements: Small sessions OK

Best Times: - Sunset - outstanding glow

The “Gotcha”: Hills = walking workout

Insider Tips: - Hilltop silhouettes = dramatic portraits

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: No

LOCATION #50: FESTGE PARK (CROSS PLAINS)

Address: 4895 County Rd F, Cross Plains, WI 53528 GPS: 43.1137 N, 89.7028 W Best For: Couples, seniors, dramatic landscapes

The Shot: Scenic forest + cliffs + tall pines + dramatic terrain. Excellent for adventurous portraits.

Permit Requirements: Small portrait sessions OK Large events - Dane County permit

Best Times: - Late afternoon - warm tones through pines

The “Gotcha”: Uneven terrain - wear good shoes

Insider Tips: - Dark pine forest = moody portraits - Use cliffs for epic framing

Difficulty: Moderate Accessibility: Limited Restrooms: Seasonal

END OF GUIDE

For the full 100-location guide and more resources, visit photovault.photo