

Travel

Gay New Hampshire: A Luxurious Highland Fling

By Don Church & Tony Schillaci

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Everything old—and wonderful—is new again these days in New Hampshire's majestic Mt. Washington Valley. No matter how many times you visit this gay-friendly, four-season Shangri-la it's always *deja vu* all over again—only better. So much so, that some visitors never go home.

Over the past years, many gay men and lesbians have migrated from New York, Los Angeles and other urban hot spots to setup shop in this magnificent region of lush valleys and the towering White Mountains. The area is perfect for a quieter lifestyle with soft adventure options far from everyday city life.

Some of these entrepreneurs have bought historic properties and transformed them into 4-star boutique hotels that mirror in style and character the once grand old hotels of the Belle Époque era. Only one or two of those 19th- and early 20th-century timber treasures survived, but today's new smaller gems offer the same first-class ambiance, old-world service and superb food that attracted the luxury-seekers of yesterday.

One of the best is the award-winning Riverbend Inn, which *Yankee Magazine* called "a Hollywood-perfect inn mixing art and antiques without sacrificing comfort." The Inn has won many accolades, including an award for Best Interior Design and Décor by *Inn Traveler Magazine*.

That said, the owners Craig and Jerry are at the heart of all this well-earned praise. From making dinner and theater reservations and providing guests with directions to theaters, shopping, (200 outlet stores and no sales tax) restaurants and other attractions, the men prove themselves consummate hosts from the moment they greet visitors at the front door.

The first-rate hospitality at the Riverbend Inn continues as Craig and Jerry personally serve a superb complimentary breakfast on the deck overlooking the bend in the river or in the spacious indoor dining room with floor to ceiling windows. It provides the perfect view of the river and the beautiful grounds on these fifteen pristine acres of paradise.

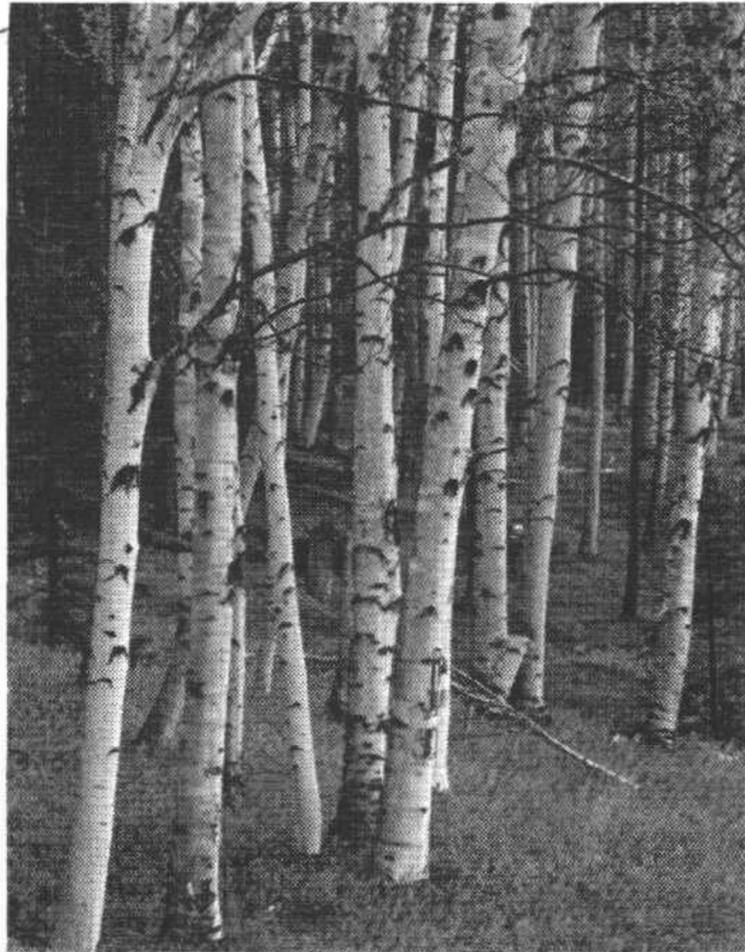
For a look at this boutique inn and all its individually decorated guestrooms (our favorite is the Chinese red room) and some of Craig's sumptuous cuisine, go to their Website listed below for a grand tour of a great country estate in Chocorua just south of North Conway.

The village is a bustling and beautifully gentrified town in the shadows of Mt. Washington in a region that is on the cutting edge of a new generation of boutique hotels. Here, in the surrounding greenery of Mt. Washington Valley, you can unwind and be unwired in pampered luxury and have an infinite number of fun things to do.

Another good choice of boutique chic is the Inn at Crystal Lake, a magnificent example of Greek revival architecture with guestrooms decorated in 19th-century style, but with all the comforts of the 21st-century. Bobby and Tim's excellent restaurant, with chef Trevor Tasker in charge of the kitchen, turns out exceptional contemporary fare Wednesday through Sunday. And check its Web site for seasonal menus, including what's happening in the clubby pub with its great grub and just-right prices. For musiclovers, don't miss opera night when Tim sings full out with his classically trained voice, and for foodies, Bobby's Blueberry muffins and luscious cookies will make your day.

From the inn, you can take the perfect country stroll to the lake, or a stop at Jennifer's goat farm, Garden Dreams, on Village Road in Eaton Center. She makes goat milk soap, massage oil, herbal tea bags and a host of other toiletries including a natural insect repellent. They





make unique gifts as well as personal toiletries to sooth the soul.

We don't have space to cover all the exceptional boutique properties in the valley, but we have to mention a rare, one-of-a-kind country retreat called Brookhill B&B. It is, in fact, a luxury two-bedroom suite with a secluded private stone terrace in a sprawling home overlooking the Saco River valley below, Mt. Washington and the Presidential Range. It's truly awesome.

The suite's luxurious bathroom is two magnificent areas: the main section is style and function at its best, and the other part has a claw-foot soaking tub with the latest in 21st-century plumbing and a view of the mountains. The well-appointed living room can hold up to fifty of your closest friends for cocktails and dinner, commitment ceremony celebrations or other important occasions. The owners, Susan and her husband, a Universalist minister, have performed many gay and lesbian ceremonies in this magnificent setting over the years. And there's a full-size and well-equipped kitchen, which Susan stocks with crackers, cheeses, fresh fruit, sodas and teas for her guests. She also prepares and serves guests a delicious gourmet breakfast in the suite or on the terrace. This B&B represents the very peak of luxury and hospitality.

No matter where you stay in the valley, if you don't want to go out for a meal or cook, we highly recommend calling Anita Burroughs at Everyday Gourmet. She'll deliver signature dishes or one of your favorites to where ever you're staying in the Mt. Washington Valley.

For gay parents there are a host of attractions for children in the area. You'll find everything from Story Land to the Conway Scenic Railroad. There are plenty of waterslides, adventure parks, mini-golf and much more to thrill and delight children of every age. For a night's entertainment there's the 77 year-old Barnstormer Theater in the pretty village of Tamworth. It's one of the oldest summer theaters in the country and certainly one of the most charming with good sightlines from every seat. There are several quality restaurants nearby that are listed on the theater's Web site. And for a complete online travel guide, the gay-friendly Mt. Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce is always willing to go the extra mile to help visitors plan a getaway. It has one of the best search engines in the travel business. This is largely due to the dynamic and visionary head of the local chamber, Janice Crawford. If you need something done, Janice's motto is, "ain't no mountain high enough."

If you want to add to the poshness of your getaway, leave the driving to theaters, restaurants, sightseeing, shopping or scaling up to the peak of Mt. Washington to Sutton Luxury Limousine Service. It's owned and operated by Charles Sutton, who is not only a great driver but has been known to stop traffic faster than a local moose crossing the road because of his exceptional good looks and easy charm. The same goes for the many marvelous women in the travel trades in this American Shangri-la.

Need we say more to convince you to have your next luxurious highland fling in the mountains of New Hampshire?

Comments? Contact travel journalists Don Church & Tony Schillaci at outandtravelin@snet.net. Copyright © 2007. All rights reserved. Outandtravelin' gay & lesbian travel news syndicate.

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