

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

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The coolest souvenir from Saranac Lake, N.Y.: a sweatshirt emblazoned with “Hot Sara.” Who’s Sara? Back in the day, the neon sign atop the derelict Hotel Saranac read “Hot Sara,” when its light-bulbs burned out. When the property re-opened this year, they illuminated the letters HOT SARA first, and then lit the rest of the name. The crowd went wild, says hotel general manager Michael Salyers, adding, “We can darken those letters at will.” So, if you’re planning to propose to someone named Sara, the Hotel Saranac would be a perfect place: You may be able to talk management into dimming the lights in her honor.

You’d be in good company. Proposals and weddings are commonplace at this hotel, as are prom parties and other major life events. “About eight times a day, someone will tell me, ‘I got married here!’” says Salyers. Built in 1927, the Hotel Saranac has been the heart of this small (population 3,300) village in the Adirondacks for decades. Hemingway, Einstein, Twain, and assorted US presidents vacationed here. It was the first steel-and-brick building in the area; all the wooden ones burned down. Owned by Paul Smith College for a time, the venerable property ultimately closed in 2013, and was shuttered for five years. This year, the Hotel Saranac reopened, revealing a stunning \$35 million dollar renovation.

How big a deal is this hotel to Saranac Lake? Some couples postponed their weddings for five years so they could get married in the same venue their parents or grandparents did, Salyers says. “People come back and share their stories.”

Saranac Lake has plenty of those. Surrounded by 6-million-acre Adirondack Park, this small community of woods, mountains, and lakes once served as a research center and haven for tuberculosis patients. Patients de-camped from the cities in the late 1800s to the 1920s to seek a cure in the balsam-scented mountain air. “Cure cottages,” homes with screened porches, still dot the town. (For a closer look, visit the Saranac Laboratory Museum, www.historicsaranaclake.org.)

Inside the hotel, designers retained many of the building’s historic, Gilded Age glamor while adding touches of rustic-chic Adirondack Great Camp style. The Great Hall Bar, the hotel’s former lobby, has a speakeasy feel, where it feels natural to order classic cocktails like Negronis and Sidecars. Original details, like an old phone booth and a brass mailbox, abound. The hotel lobby is a closed arcade that once featured a barbershop, a bakery, and a shoeshine shop. Now, those storefronts house the hotel’s Amper-sand Salon & Spa (named after a near-



CHECK-IN

HOT SARA is back

Historic Adirondack hotel reopens



PHOTOS BY DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Clockwise (from left): The Great Hall Bar, set in the hotel’s former lobby; a “Hot Sara” sweatshirt; tableside s’mores and a s’more-flavored cocktail at Campfire Adirondack Bar + Grill; a view of Hotel Saranac’s famous sign.

by mountain) and Academy & Main, a gift shop specializing in Adirondack-themed items that you can’t find elsewhere in town.

The hotel’s standout feature is the street-level Campfire Adirondack Bar + Grill, open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. With an open kitchen helmed by chef David Pittman, whose resume includes the White Barn Inn, Campfire offers locally sourced comfort fare. Nods to the theme include cornbread served in cast-iron skillet, mess kit-inspired speckled dinnerware, and DIY s’mores at tableside, but the food is seriously delicious. Favorites on the current menu include roasted rainbow trout with celery root puree, and buttermilk fried “picnic chicken,” served with an irresistible mac and cheese that everyone will pick at. A new “Explorer menu” is coming, according to Chef Pittman, featuring more adventurous entrees like roasted quail stuffed with ground pork and braised rabbit cassoulet.

The 82 guest rooms are located upstairs in this seven-floor tower. Dark woods are punctuated with orange accents and crisp white linens; modern must-haves include 55-inch TVs and efficient Wi-Fi. Bathrooms are tiny — for historic integrity, they couldn’t knock walls down — an annoyance if you like lots of counter space (or if you leave the seat up, since wayward towels can fall into the toilet.) If that’s too historic for your taste, there are 20 suites opening this summer in the modern Compass Point building, attached to the main hotel via staircase.

On a recent, bone-chillingly cold weekend, local folks and hotel guests mingled around the fireplace in the Great Hall in layers of flannel and fleece, making plans to ski nearby Whiteface Mountain or do some snowshoeing. Things were hopping in Campfire, too. It’s a buzzy scene, and mittened fingers are crossed that the Hotel Saranac’s reopening will bring new energy to this small town in the Adirondacks. “The community is looking at this hotel as a catalyst for growth,” says Michelle Hill, a long-time resident who runs the Academy & Main Gift Shop.

For now, the return of “Hot Sara” is a heating it up in this outdoorsy outpost.

HOTEL SARANAC 100 Main St., Saranac Lake, N.Y.; 518-891-6900; rates from \$199. www.hotelsaranac.com.

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HERE

J.P. WALKING AND EATING TOUR

Sometimes the best way to know a city or neighborhood is by experiencing its local restaurants, cafes, bakeries, and other food offerings. But how to decide where to go and what to eat? Off the Beaten Path Food Tours — known locally for its tours of Union and Davis Squares in Somerville, and Harvard Square Food and Chocolate tours — is debuting a new walking tour this spring. The Jamaica Plain tour focuses on this Boston community’s best and tastiest spots along popular Centre Street, home to a variety of independent eateries often owned by local residents. The tour runs approximately two hours and stops at four to six places. There is an optional extension to tour nearby Turtle Swamp Brewery, a micro-craft brewery with a dedicated fan following. \$60 per person includes all food tastings; \$10 additional fee for additional brewery tour. www.offthebeatenpathfoodtours.com

NEW HERITAGE TRAIL IN VERMONT

This spring, the launch of the Vermont in the Civil War Heritage Trail aims to highlight the Green Mountain State’s little known but crucial contributions made to preserving the United States. The majority of the trail’s museums, historic sites, exhibits and more are found on the western edge of the state, along the Route 7 corridor. Fifteen sites (with more to come) include historic connections to Abolitionist John Brown, Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Stephen Douglas, General George Stannard (who made the decision to flank Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg), as well as documented stops on the Underground Railroad, and the site of the Northernmost land battle of the Civil War. View sites online, or download the free map and brochure. The trail also aims to connect history-oriented visitors with other art, culture, and recreation attractions in nearby towns. www.vtcivilwarheritage.net

THERE

FAMILY TRAVEL AND LEARNING TRIPS

The family that travels together, has fun together and — sometimes — even learns together. This summer, families seeking culturally rich travel can explore six planned trips from Smithsonian Family Journeys by Perillo’s Learning Journeys. The multi-generational tours (to Iceland, Europe, Japan and Costa Rica) include hotels with local character, most meals, airport transfers and on-tour transportation, excursions, activities, talks by local experts, a top travel director throughout, gratuities, and emergency medical insurance. Itineraries are tailored to adults with children eight years and older. As example, the Discover Ireland itinerary (June 29 – July 7) includes Gaelic language lessons; two-night stay in an Irish Castle; lesson in Gaelic football; visit to a local sheep farm; cruise

along the Cliffs of Moher; and much more. Prices from \$4,800 per adult and \$2,850 per child. 855-215-8691, www.learningjourneys.com/family-journeys/smithsonian

TUSCAN LUXURY ON SALE THIS SPRING

Who doesn’t love Italy? In the rolling Tuscan hills, just 15 minutes outside of Florence’s city center, the luxurious Il Salviatino recently opened for season with a cost-saving deal for spring. The restored, 15th century, 44-room villa — with original frescoes, lush organic gardens, and terrace with views the famed Duomo — is touting its Spring Offer that includes 20 percent off the best available rates (from \$449), valid for stays of three nights or more. Valid for travel through June 21. Signature add-on experiences include private wine tastings; hot-air balloon rides; horseback riding; Vespa tours and more. salviatino.com



EVERYWHERE

WEARABLE PHONE CHARGERS

Keep your smartphones charged while traveling with the new Bracelet Phone Charging Cables offered by Everything Tech Gear. Fashion and tech combine when this micro USB charger is worn as a stylish silicone bracelet. Compatible with Android and iOS brands. Available in six colors. Perfect gifts for the tech-savvy young travelers in your life. \$4.99. everythingtechgear.com

FLOATING COOLER DEBUTS WITH A SPLASH

Keep your favorite beverages and food chilled to perfection while kayaking, canoeing, or rafting with the new CreekKooler. Designed like a small kayak hull, the floating cooler navigates behind your vessel, offering easy access when you pause for a picnic or a refreshing drink. Features include dual-wall construction and top quality insulation for superior ice retention; four drink holders on deck; threaded watertight lid; and mini flag holder. Thirty quart capacity holds 30 12-ounce cans and 20 pounds of ice. Available in five colors \$179.95. kanoolerproducts.com
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