

SPECTATOR LIFE



Head upstate to the Adirondacks

The East Coast: head upstate for mountains and lakes

Olivia Grant swaps the clichés of Long Island for Lake Saranac and the peaks of the Adirondacks

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22 Jan 2019

It is always a strange experience reconnecting with a school friend after many years. Particularly when your most enduring image of them is their penchant for munching through industrial-sized bags of Quavers in your sixth-form Common Room in a stained lacrosse hoodie. Jessie, it turns out, is a somewhat more refined character now: she is a card-carrying member of a smart Park Avenue set which spends every summer weekend without exception wearing cargo pants and holidaying on the South Fork of Long Island. I listened to her describe her East coast life oscillating between Manhattan and the Hamptons between mouthfuls of Dover sole in West Village's Café Cluny. 'The trendier lot are all at Surf Lodge in Montauk to take pictures for Instagram,' she relayed, 'but I'm mainly smothering my son in sun cream and arguing with him about which Vilebrequin swimming trunks he's going to wear to Eagle beach.'

I concluded the Hamptons wasn't quite the escape I was looking for. And so, having recently moved to New York and having been warned about the difficulties of traversing the Long Island Expressway to the Hamptons, I decided to swerve queueing outside Bloomingdales on 60th Street for the Ambassador Jitney before setting off on a dispiriting five hour crawl in traffic to East Hampton. Instead I boarded the Amtrak train at Penn Station to explore the lakes of northern New York State and the peaks of the Adirondacks. A trip to fulfil that itch of itinerancy that I have never quite shaken, even in a place like NYC. A trip on which I could mutter to myself the words of Jack Kerouac, '...we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life,' and not have my romantic notions of American travel interrupted by the hum of coaches arriving in fleets from Manhattan.

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Head upstate to the Adirondack mountains

The concierge of 'The Point,' the eleven room, 75-acre luxury resort, booked me a car transfer from Westport station to their secluded location nestled on the stunning shoreline of Upper Lake Saranac where I was to stay for two nights. Despite this journey being of comparable length to traversing Long Island it definitely had a discernible sense of adventure to it. Arriving at dusk, the drive traces the edges of Saranac's remarkably silent waters whose sparkling greyness possesses a solemnity only highlighted by the wavering tremolo call of the male loons who glide across its expanse.



'The Point' itself, originally built as a private retreat and traditional Adirondack 'Great Camp' for William Avery Rockefeller and his family in the 1930s, is immediately striking for the rustic glamour of its original log cabins and boathouse complete with mahogany-panelled Hacker Crafts bobbing within. If the faces of the staff registered the slightest surprise at me arriving solo it was only momentary and I was soon escorted with my incongruous city-slicker wheelie bag to my own beautiful lake-facing log cabin complete with its own hearth, huge double bed piled high with chintz duvets, a perfectly appointed marble and tile bathroom and traditional Adirondack arts and crafts antiques. The city girl in me initially balked at the lack of mobile reception in my cabin but there wasn't much time to contemplate being technologically stranded as an invite was soon hand-delivered to my door for a black-tie nine course seated dinner at the Main Lodge preceded by champagne and hors d'oeuvres on one of their beautifully maintained boats.



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It is in this respect that 'The Point' is truly unique. Operating with a nod to the lavish holidaying experiences of the families of the Gilded Age magnates who built these rustic camps to 'rough it' in the upmost luxury with family, friends and visiting artists, the staff at 'The Point' acted from the moment of arrival as if we had joined their lake-side family and I was struck by the extremely seductive feeling of warm American inclusivity. I arrived at the boat house in evening dress feeling slightly anxious about what awaited me. A glass of champagne later, however, eleven of us were soon being sailed across the silent lake awed by the view of the other renovated 'Great Camps' glittering on the shoreline. Back at the Main Lodge, with the last vestiges of my British reserve long gone, I found myself extremely happily munching on Coho salmon with turmeric emulsion, deep in conversation with a couple of extremely jolly Texan ranchers about how they similarly avoid the Hamptons annually; travelling to the Adirondacks every year to hike the forty-six historic High Peaks. Self-proclaimed '46ers' my new friends described Mount Marcy, whose original name 'Tahawus' means 'cloud-splitter,' with the type of misty-eyed enthusiasm that made me feel like a painfully uprooted Londoner.



Nine courses passed seamlessly as gilt-embossed china was carried in and out under the glint of candlelight and the gaze of mounted deer heads. After an extraordinarily good white chocolate soufflé, my dining companions and I strolled out of the Main Lodge to the lean-to by the lake for toasted "s'mores" around the campfire whilst sharing local stories including one of Einstein who had to be saved from drowning in the lake in the forties after his boat capsized and it soon became apparent he couldn't swim. It was in this slightly blissful haze that only excellent food and wine induces I eventually climbed into a bed with a mattress pad and duvet so voluminous that it was akin to sleeping in a cloud. I reached for my forgotten iPhone out of habit before smugly tossing it aside. Drifting off, lulled by the lyrical call of loons, I smiled to myself at the thought of the distant exertions of New Yorkers battling the Long Island Expressway.

