

into the woods

Cozy winter destinations are calling

story by Anna Dubrovsky

WHEN THE SUBJECT OF WINTER ESCAPES COMES UP, TALK TENDS TO CENTER ON SKI SLOPES OR FARAWAY beaches. The forests of Northwestern Pennsylvania, which get ample press in autumn, rarely come to mind for the winter season. Amid the stately maple, white ash and black cherry trees are two lodges that greet visitors with crackling fires and homemade cookies, ply them with exquisite food and wines to match, and leave them without a trace of the winter blues. Gateway Lodge, two hours north of Pittsburgh, offers fireside Jacuzzis and a come-as-you-are vibe. The more exclusive Lodge at Glendorn, a Relais & Châteaux property just shy of the New York border, redefines "cabin." If the word conjures up bunk beds, you're in for a seismic surprise.

Gateway and Glendorn's restaurants are also open to non-guests, so keep them in mind for a day trip. While both lodges have award-winning wine lists, neither serves Pennsylvania wines. Round out your excursion with a visit to Flickerwood Wine Cellars, and the curiously engaging Zippo/Case Museum, dedicated to the handsome lighter that has appeared in more movies than John Wayne (who himself carried a Zippo). Be sure to take home a Griller. That's right, a Griller. Read on.



*Jumping Rocks Photography,
jumpingrocks.com*

GATEWAY LODGE

When John Georgvich told colleagues he was leaving Atlantic City and his job as executive sous chef at the Tropicana Casino & Resort to run the kitchen at Pennsylvania's Gateway Lodge, they got a good laugh. "Everybody thought it was a big joke," recalls Georgvich, who made the move in July, after 16 years at the casino resort. "My boss at the Tropicana couldn't believe it. He was like, 'No, you're not going to live in the woods.'" But living on the edge of Cook Forest State Park—crafting menus reflective of Western Pennsylvania—suits the 40-year-old chef. "I couldn't be happier," he says.

It's easy to see why. Cook Forest is among the most scenic swaths in the Northeast. It's particularly magical in winter, when its ancient trees—some as old as 400 years old—are weighed down with snow. Gateway Lodge, which opened its doors in 1934, has morphed into the picture of rustic elegance in the hands of owner Deb Adams since 2006. She stripped waiters of their colonial costumes and overhauled the wine list, earning *Wine Spectator's* Award of Excellence in 2009 and 2010. In 2010 she expanded the spa and undertook an ambitious project to turn eight original rooms into four spacious

ones, renovate the bar, and turn a shuttered indoor pool into an outdoor dining area. And let's not forget, she brought in a new chef.

Georgvich didn't discard his predecessor's menu. Longtime favorites like the portobello schnitzel, a breaded and deep-fried mushroom cap stuffed with artisan cheeses, are still on offer. But he infused the menu with a bit of Jersey Shore-ness, adding a crab cake entirely devoid of fillers. A saltwater taffy cheesecake and caramel corn torte are in the works. And he got his game on. "When I think of Western Pennsylvania, I think of duck, pheasant, deer, squirrel, rabbit—things like that," says Georgvich, who grew up in Armstrong County and graduated from culinary school in Pittsburgh. He introduced a salad tossed with grilled duck breast and an entrée of oven-roasted venison. "I'm slowly throwing things out there and seeing how they work."

Earlier this year he and Adams could be found on an organic farm a few miles from the lodge, picking the likes of cherry tomatoes and tri-colored carrots. They source breakfast sausages from Bell's Meat Market, about an hour away, where Jack Bell and his namesake son make roughly 20 types. "I've never seen anyone so excited about sausage in my life," Adams says of

Gateway Lodge

14870 Route 36
Cooksburg, PA 16217
800.843.6862
gatewaylodge.com
Lodging: rooms \$95—125; suites
\$199—225, cabins \$129—215
Dining: breakfast \$10; dinner
entrées \$8—45

The Lodge at Glendorn

1000 Glendorn Dr.
Bradford, PA 16701
800.843.8568
glendorn.com
Lodging: rooms \$199 and up; suites
and cabins \$449—1249
Dining: breakfast \$15, three-course
lunch \$29, three-course dinner \$75,
tasting menu \$105

Flickerwood Wine Cellars

309 Flickerwood Rd.
Kane, PA 16735
814.837.7566
flickerwood.com
11 a.m.—6 p.m. Monday—
Thursday, 10 a.m.—9 p.m. Friday—
Saturday, noon—6 p.m. Sunday

Bell's Meat Market

401 N. Fraley St.
Kane, PA 16735
814.837.7321
jackbellsmeats.com
9 a.m.—6 p.m. Monday—Saturday,
9 a.m.—5 p.m. Sunday

the elder Bell, who has been in the sausage business since 1971, and may go down in culinary history for an invention he calls the Griller: a ready-to-cook round of sausage meat, Virginia ham, and Swiss cheese wrapped in boneless chicken breast and topped with bacon.

Gateway will offer a five-course chef's tasting menu (\$50 per person, \$75 with wine pairings) on December 11 and 18. Be sure to ask about a horse-drawn carriage ride when making a reservation.

THE LODGE AT GLENDORN

Pull up to the all-redwood main lodge at Glendorn and a staff member or two will be waiting outside to greet you. Sink into a velvety couch and another will offer you a drink. Come dinnertime, a seasoned server will produce a menu written just for you. Prefer to have Executive Chef Joe Schafer cook for you in the privacy of a hilltop cabin? Just ask. The effect is rare and priceless; you'll feel like you own the place.

Indeed, for almost 70 years, Glendorn was a private estate, an idyllic retreat for the oil-rich Dorn family. They opened it to the public in 1995, and it quickly earned a reputation as one of the nation's premier hideaways. The fenced 1,280-acre property, which abuts the Allegheny National Forest, is so secluded that many area residents don't know what or where it is—all the better for guests like Denzel Washington, who stayed there during filming of the runaway-train thriller *Unstoppable*. In 2009 Glendorn went on the auction block and was purchased by Cliff Forrest, owner of Kittanning-based Rosebud Mining Company. A former guest, Forrest wasted no time expanding the resort's recreational menu, especially its wintertime offerings. He brought in horses and

a riding instructor, a 33-foot fishing boat, a fleet of snowmobiles, and a pair of Jeep Wrangler Rubicons for off-roading. Winter options now include everything from snowshoeing and cross-country skiing on the resort's vast trail system to curling, ice skating and ice fishing on its frozen lakes. A spa is slated to open in the spring.

Schafer's kitchen, built for feeding the Dorns, is in line for a renovation that will help it meet the needs of Glendorn's acclaimed restaurant. What won't change is his penchant for changing the menus daily. "We have guests that stay here two, three, five, seven nights, and we try to make sure they never eat the same thing twice," he says. "We're not at the mercy of a menu. When I order food, I don't say, 'Here's my menu: I need halibut, monkfish, and salmon.' I just say, 'What's good? Send me the best of what you have right now.'" As a result, he adds, Glendorn gets better fish than any restaurant he worked at previously. That's saying a lot, given that his last gig was head chef of the five-diamond White Barn Inn in coastal Maine.

Shafer is equally jazzed about the tomatoes, Swiss chard, white eggplants, bell peppers, and other vegetables he buys from a local biodynamic garden during Northwestern Pennsylvania's painfully short growing season. "They are the very best vegetables I've ever tasted," he says. So luscious are the tomatoes that the gardener-in-chief refuses to sell them to Shafer if he doesn't promise to serve them raw. "If I cook them, he won't sell them to me anymore," says the chef. But one suspects that if a guest asked, he just might break that promise. "What we do really well is make all of our guests feel like they're the only ones here," he says. "I don't keep hamburger meat around because we don't do hamburgers here, but if someone wants burgers, we'll run down to the store and get burger meat."

