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5 grand lodges of the East

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Mount Washington looms over The Omni Mount Washington Resort in Bretton Woods, N.H. (Credit: Handout)

The 19th century was a pivotal era for travel, when the railroad companies hoped to lure wealthy and influential travelers to some of the emptier mountainous expanses of North America.

Many of the grand lodges out West were constructed by the railroad companies in myriad architectural styles, but there also are spectacular Northeastern resorts of this era.

Those not lost to fire or the ravages of time are now designated national historic landmarks, and the sheer sweep of these almost-extinct species of hotel - magnificent, creaky and carved out of rugged wilderness areas - still attract guests seeking historic resonance and a vintage throwback to another era.

21ST CENTURY LODGES

Yes, these lodges have served some of the country's wealthier and more genteel families for generations, and many even have - save us! - a dress code, along with sometimes treacly tea parlors and musty sitting rooms full of overstuffed ottomans.

But what is lost in convenience is made up for in character. Each picturesque grand dame has a story; each survivor in what was once a region full of resorts offers a unique experience. Here we look at five.

Mohonk Mountain House, 1000 Mountain Rest Rd., New Paltz, N.Y., 845-255-1000, mohonk.com

RATES. From \$510 a night double occupancy, includes meals

THE SETTING. This rambling family-owned Victorian lodge sits atop a mountain in the Shawangunks, surrounded by pastoral valleys with a view of six states in the distance.

THE APPEAL. While some lodges strive for an advertisement | [advertise on newsday](#) imposing opulence, this lodge, with its architectural hodgepodge of styles, offers a soothing, contemplative experience, reconnecting those who stay with the simple pleasures of a parkland stroll or a row about the still waters of glacial Lake Mohonk. Built in 1869, the 265-room lodge, with its elaborate gardens and Victorian maze, sits among 26,000 acres of pristine forest. Rooms are attractively decorated, some with balconies or fireplaces.

DINING. The formal Mohonk Mountain House restaurant serves American fare in multiple cavernous dining rooms. Three meals daily plus afternoon tea are included in the room price.

AMENITIES. The mountain house, which is typically bustling, has indoor and outdoor pools and tennis courts, a fitness center, salon and spa, Scottish-design golf course and a lakeside bathing beach.

ACTIVITIES. If you choose, your vacation at Mohonk can be action-packed. Besides strolling to the Sky Top Tower, the mountain house includes such activities as boating, midweek golfing, tennis, movies, dancing and, in winter, ice skating, cross-country skiing and snow tubing are included in the price. Some activities are extra, such as fly fishing, horseback riding and weekend golf.

WHAT'S NEARBY. You'll find many quirky shops in New Paltz, plus restaurants, and a decent brew pub. The State University of New York nurtures its acting talents, and the school's theatrical productions are first-rate. Try a tour of historic Huguenot Street, dotted with stone homes.

Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, 1 rue des Carrières, Québec, Québec, Canada, 418-692-3861, fairmont.com/frontenac

RATES. From \$199 a night

THE SETTING. More of a turreted castle than a lodge, Fairmont Le Château Frontenac has perched on Québec's highest promontory overlooking the St. Lawrence River since 1893. Designed by New York Society architect Bruce Price, who created many residences in Newport, R.I., the château is renowned for its sumptuousness, and added a 20-story central tower in 1925.

THE APPEAL. More than 600 rooms vary in their size and views, with some a bit small. All are finely appointed, some with fireplaces and marble fixtures, and a capacious ballroom reflects the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. The château has hosted royalty and celebrities, from Queen Elizabeth and Ronald Reagan to Alfred Hitchcock.

DINING. The château has three restaurants. At the formal Restaurant Le Champlain, classic French and Québécois dishes made with regional produce are delivered by waiters in traditional French costumes. Try caribou medallions and triple foie gras with a sweet but complex glass of Sauterne.

AMENITIES. Broadband Internet, some in-room hot tubs, an indoor pool and a health club. You can try a massage at the spa or visit the elegant St-Laurent piano bar. While Le Champlain serves a full afternoon tea, there also are shops at the château's base.

ACTIVITIES. Tours of the palatial hotel are offered.

WHAT'S NEARBY All of Old Québec is right outside the courtyard. You can visit the bustling shops, restaurants and clubs of the three main tourist streets, or escape all that into the winding, cobblestoned byways lined with brightly colored homes and cathedrals.

Omni Mount Washington Resort, Route 302, Bretton Woods, N.H, 603-278-1000, omnihotels.com

RATES. From \$179 a night

THE SETTING. The Mount Washington, with its red flag-topped spires, is such a monstrously grand hotel, some believe it to be the inspiration for Stephen King's novel "The Shining." Though not, in fact, true, it might well have been. Located at Mount Washington's base, the hotel is so large, and its engineering so advanced at the time it opened in 1902, that it has its own post office. It's also a lovely example of Spanish Renaissance Revival architecture.

THE APPEAL. The resort drew the Boston and New York upper crust to its 200 rooms, each with a bath (a first in the country), and French Renaissance-style Great Hall and Gold Room, which served as a site of the Bretton Woods finance agreement in 1944. Many of the stylishly decorated rooms have mountain views and the hotel has recently undergone a \$50 million restoration.

DINING. Mount Washington has dining options galore. The most formal is the octagonal dining room with Tiffany glass and soaring windows with commanding mountain views. It has a daily changing menu of New England specialties, such as lemon lobster ravioli with scallops and shrimp. The Cave provides rollicking entertainment in a former 1930s speak-easy.

AMENITIES. Wireless Internet, a large spa, indoor and outdoor pools, a gym and tennis courts.

ACTIVITIES. In winter, Mount Washington offers a large resort for downhill skiing and a Nordic center with miles of paths for cross-country skiing. There's also ice skating and snow tubing. In summer, tee up on the 18-hole Donald Ross golf course, designed in 1915, or go horseback riding or for a leisurely spin in a carriage. There's also hiking, fly fishing and mountain biking, among other activities. The hotel itself offers some shops, an arcade and playgrounds.

WHAT'S NEARBY. Some of the best activities in this area are outdoors, such as the Mount Washington Cog Railway, which chugs three miles up the west side of this towering mountain. There's also Storyland for children. The Bretton Woods canopy tour lets you traverse treetop zip lines and high-flying suspension bridges.

Skytop Lodge, One Skytop, Skytop (Canadensis), Pa., 800-345-7759, skytop.com

RATES. From \$325 a night double occupancy, includes meals

THE SETTING. This Dutch Colonial stone manor, with its gambrel roofs and prominent chimneys, opened in 1928 and overlooks the enchanting Skytop Lake on about 5,500 acres of pristine forestland in the Pocono Mountains.

THE APPEAL. From the time one strolls up to the lodge's rocker-lined veranda and into its mahogany-paneled public rooms, one is transported to another era of civility and gentility - or stuffiness, depending on one's point of view. The 125 guest rooms in the lodge are quiet and comfortable with a refined English-style decor.

DINING. Rates include three meals and several dining options include the Windsor Room, where gentlemen are asked to wear jackets at evening meals. Classic American cuisine includes such dishes as pork tenderloin with smoked Gouda mac and cheese, whiskey barbecue sauce and succotash.

AMENITIES. An indoor pool, fitness room, spa, golf course and lovely gardens.

ACTIVITIES. Skytop offers plenty of activities, many of which are included in the room price. They include downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, ice skating and snowshoeing in winter. In

summer, boating, tennis, hiking, shooting, fishing, lawn games, archery and paintball. There's an indoor mini-golf course and climbing wall.

WHAT'S NEARBY. Skytop is perched on a plateau three miles from Canadensis, a village with antiques stores and other shops. If you can't keep busy at the resort, there is the Mount Airy Casino nearby.

The Greenbrier, 300 W. Main St., White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., 800-453-4858, www.greenbrier.com

RATES. From \$275 a night

THE SETTING. The Greenbrier, a sprawling complex in the Allegheny Mountains with a classic Georgian mien, is one of the oldest resorts in the country, originating as a retreat where people "took the waters" at a sulfur spring in 1778. The Greenbrier has hosted 26 U.S. presidents.

THE APPEAL. Greenbrier is now a meticulously maintained resort on 6,500 acres with 721 rooms, all decorated in the vibrant floral-patterned chintzes of the country's first interior designer, Dorothy Draper. Known contemporarily for the immense fallout bunker on-site created to keep Congress alive in the event of nuclear attack, the Greenbrier offers tours of the shelter. The hotel's new owner is said to be investing in freshening the facilities.

DINING. Any hotel with 10 lobbies will likely have an assortment of restaurants and cafes: Greenbrier has eight. The Main Dining Room, with stately columns and arched windows, requires a jacket and tie. Greenbrier has its own culinary school; the fare is impeccable and thoughtful. There's also a steakhouse, sports lounge, cafes and a bar.

AMENITIES. Indoor and outdoor pools, a spa and health clinic, movie theater, fitness center, three golf courses, bowling alleys, many upscale shops, a museum, an art colony - and its newest amenity, a casino with table games and (soon) poker tables.

ACTIVITIES. It's difficult to imagine something that can't be done at the Greenbrier. There's hiking and horseback riding on grounds laced with trails, skeet shooting, tennis, a golf academy, white-water rafting, off-road driving, boating, falconry, an Alpine Tower to climb, carriage rides, ice skating and wine tastings.

WHAT'S NEARBY. If you are itching to do some skiing, try visiting competing resort The Homestead in Hot Springs, W.Va. Or check out nearby Lewisburg. Besides being home to the striking Lost World Caverns, it also has a 235-acre historic district with 18th century buildings bearing the scars of Civil War battles.

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