

WINTER SPRING 2024

# WDT TRAVEL

WINE DINE + TRAVEL MAGAZINE

11TH ANNIVERSARY  
NEW WDT FEATURE "WINE TIME"



## DUBROVNIK'S GAME OF THRONES

BASQUE COUNTRY | THE GRAND TETONS | POSTCARD FROM DIJON | TREKKING IN PERU

THE MOUNTAINS ARE CALLING | THE POCONOS | CRUISING THE BRITISH ISLES | SWITZERLAND 007 STYLE



# THE POCONOS



Story & Photography by Margie Goldsmith

I opened the glass door to the verandah of my hotel room and froze. About ten feet away were three deer munching on the grass: two does and a fawn. Their heads shot up as they spotted me, but I didn't move. Neither did they. I'd never seen deer that close. In many cultures, the deer symbolizes spiritual authority, so I took this as a sign that my

weekend stay at The Lodge at Woodloch would be very special.

Eventually the deer ran off, but now there was another surprise: directly opposite my verandah was a ten-foot-tall waterfall cascading from a rock garden. Waterfalls symbolize letting go, cleansing, and energy flow. Surely this was a good omen.







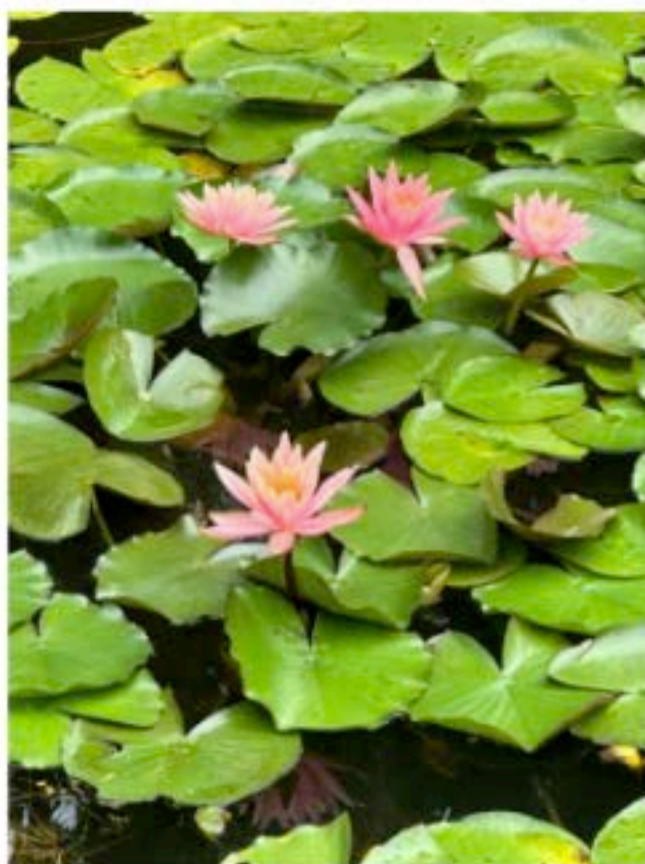


For many years, I'd heard about The Lodge at Woodloch in the Poconos, but I'd always associated the Poconos with heart-shaped bathtubs, water parks and giant casinos; so, no matter how great this resort might be, it wasn't on my go-to list. But a good friend had just returned and wouldn't stop raving about it, so I went online.

The photos said it all: 500 private acres of fern-carpeted forests, lush meadows, and ponds with blooming water lilies. Guests could choose from 35 daily activities such as archery, birding, hiking, biking, pickleball, kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding and a myriad of fitness classes. There were art classes, cooking, baking demos, and wine tastings. Woodloch had a farm with vegetable and herb gardens and an orchard. The rooms looked spacious, and the pool area was enormous. There were indoor and outdoor lounge areas, therapeutic soaking pools and a hydro-massage waterwall pouring down into one of the larger Jacuzzis. There was even a snow room with real snow, an Arctic shower (a wooden bucket of ice-cold water to be poured over your body), and a salt room. One of the main draws was the spa, offering 25 different facials and 45 body treatments daily. I was sold. I'd just have to stomach the fact that it was in the Poconos.

Turns out, I didn't know anything about the Poconos. The windy roads leading to the resort were surrounded by woods --- not casinos or water parks. And once I arrived, I was delighted to find that my bathroom did not have a heart-shaped bathtub. My accommodation was large and light-filled with a king-sized bed, comfy armchair, desk, and glass doors leading to the verandah. I turned the grass in front of my veranda into one of the deer's favorite spots because each morning, I'd throw out pieces of bread, enticing them to come closer.

The 13-paged weekly brochure of classes and activities had so many choices, I didn't know what to do first, so I decided to take a walk and get my bearings. Outside, I breathed in









the heady woodsy fragrance. Before I'd even hit the woodchip path, I spotted a meditating gnome. Nice touch. (I found out later there was an entire gnome trail – I'll have to return and find it).

One trail led to the lotus labyrinth, and I entered the maze, following the path leading to its center. I tried to stop my thoughts, but my mind chattered on and it was taking much too long so I simply cut across to the middle, where people had placed small rocks. I stood a few moments expecting instant enlightenment, but nothing happened. Frustrated, I cut back across the path and decided to try something less meditative.

I changed into a bathing suit at the spa, donned the robe and slippers the spa attendant handed me, and made my way to the indoor pool. An instructor was setting up for Splash Dance, an Aquatic Pole Dancing class placing weighted poles into the water. Waiting for the class to begin, I sat under the hot tub waterfall and relished the pounding hot water onto my shoulders and head. "Ok, let's go" the instructor said. We jumped into the pool, each of us grabbing a pole. Soon, we were dancing in the water, flinging ourselves around the poles – first left, then right, then circles, laughing hysterically as the music boomed around us. I kept trying to shimmy to the top of the pole, but never made it. It didn't matter because we were all having so much fun.

After that, it was time for something more soothing: Crystal Bowl Sound Meditation. The description said the healing sounds of Crystal Singing Bowls would help balance the body's seven Chakras and energize and re-vitalize. I am not a New Age-y person and I thought this might be dumb, but I love the sound of singing bowls, plus, I'll try anything once. We lay down on yoga mats with pillows for our heads and knees, covered with blankets. As the instructor explained where each chakra was anatomically located, she rang a bowl and the sounds vibrated right into my body. For each chakra, she rang a different bowl with a very





different sound, and I lay there peacefully in a trance.

Totally relaxed, I headed off to dinner, torn between miso marinated black cod, Green Goddess Risotto and five other choices. The cod won. All the meals were delicious – from breakfast (my favorites were sweet potato pancakes and sweet Italian sausage omelet) to lunch, where I kept ordering the fish tacos because they were so delicious. Unlike other destination spas, Woodloch offered mixed cocktails, beer, a 200-selection wine list, and even alcohol-free tipples. All meals were included in the price (the alcohol was extra). As if those meals weren't enough, every day from 3pm to 5pm sweet and salty snacks were set up in the coffee/tea room. It could be caramel popcorn, cucumber bites or mini cupcakes. A

lovely touch.

Just before falling asleep, I'd study the schedule for the next day and choose the most zany classes offered. Besides water pole dancing, my other favorites were "Drums Alive," in which we were all handed a pair of drumsticks, stood behind a large physio ball, and, as the music blasted, drummed on the left side of the ball, squatted, drummed on the right side, grape-vined to the next ball, repeated the drill, grape-vined back to our own ball and kept on drumming. It was a tough workout on both arms and legs, but so fun, the class felt as though it were two minutes long.

The most unique class for me was The Great Wall of Yoga – not just yoga against a wall, but the entire room had a series of hooks which held straps in various positions so, anchored





by the support, you could fly straight out like Superman or stand on your head without fear of falling. By using gravity, the straps helped achieve a much deeper stretch. It sounds scary, but the instructor helped us if we felt in the least bit uneasy.

I always wanted to try pickleball, and they had a beginner's class. A perfect place to see if I'd become addicted like a few of my friends. I quickly learned that pickleball is not my thing, I much prefer tennis. Next, a pool class called W.A.V.E. used trampolines placed under the water. More bouncing and lots of laughter. And at sunset, I kayaked on the lake with four other adventurers. We paddled through the reeds looking for the ubiquitous beaver dam – but never found it. It didn't really matter.

Probably my most favorite activity was the massage I'd chosen, "Blues be Gone." It was a 90-minute deep tissue massage, so relaxing and therapeutic that afterwards, I went back to my room and sat mesmerized on my verandah, watching the deer.

It was my last day – I planned to start the day with the Nordic Walk using walking poles, so I was surprised when the instructor showed up with no poles. We started up the trail. "This is the Nordic walk, right?" I asked after a few minutes. She said it was the Labyrinth Walking Meditation. Oh no. I'd joined the wrong class. Too late to back out now.

As we walked, she explained that the labyrinth is a sacred place for you to reflect, look within, and negotiate new behavior. "Remember," she said, "Before walking the labyrinth, be thankful for your life. This is the time to quiet the mind and release your troubles. When you get to the center, pause and stay as long as you like, then walk out the same path you followed in. Experience the sense of well-being, healing and calm."

I started out on the path, thinking about how I'd cut straight through to the center a few days ago. Now I walked slowly, listening to the



rustling leaves in the trees, asking myself what I needed to do to feel this peace more often in my life. I arrived in the center and stood there. And then I realized that I was the one who could make the choice to race through every day or pause and take the time to reflect, like now. And as I walked back out around the path, I didn't cut through. I gave myself permission to take my time. Not just at that moment, but hopefully from now on.