

Girls getaway to Canada becomes experiment in art

Recently I joined a group of girlfriends to spend a week exploring northern Ontario, www.ontariotravel.net.

We stopped at a couple of upscale lodges on the way and spent several days



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Online & in print

learning watercolor painting at an eco-lodge in the Temagami area, www.temagami.net, the world's largest old-growth red and white pine forest.

We flew into Toronto and stayed for a night at the romantic old hotel, the Fairmont Royal York, www.fairmont.com/royalyork, which would be a great place to go for an anniversary. Sipping wine in the rooftop herb garden, we could see firsthand the resurgence in building in that city.

As we drove north, we noticed art has made its mark on this part of Ontario. Even the highway signs for moose crossings are elegant.

The Group of Seven, inspired by woodsman and artist Tom Thomson, was a famous collective of artists painting in this area in the early decades of the 20th century. We stopped to see their work at the rustic lodge-like gallery of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, www.mcmichael.com. Their subjects were often nearby landscapes and clouds, just like those we were seeing as we drove.

We stayed for the night at a rambling lakeside getaway built in 1896, Deerhurst Resort, www.deerhurstresort.com, near Huntsville. It was Canada Day and the celebration included a 4-foot-wide cake in the lobby and lots of champagne. We took a float plane trip from the resort's dock and were amazed at how many lakes there are in this area, plus dairy farms and many quarries.



Creating art in the wilds of northern Ontario.

We arrived in Temagami at Smoothwater Outfitters and Ecolodge, www.smoothwater.com, late the next day to find host Caryn Coleman, an award-winning artist and gourmet cook, about to set out to collect wild greens for dinner.

She also serves local cheeses, beer she makes herself, local wines and a delicate local white fish seasoned with St. John's wort and sweet fern. Meals are served in her soaring home, full of her art and local artifacts, such as snowshoes.

For three days we painted in her studio and on field trips to an island and an old mining town called Cobalt. Caryn is a fine teacher, no matter what your artistic level, and she encouraged all of us to experiment and enjoy the painting process. One lesson was painting a landscape using no green. Another was painting a landscape at night.

We met other guests who were setting out on canoe trips organized by Caryn and her staff, which included organic gourmet meals she makes ahead and packs for them.

Lodging here is rustic, but the amenities include the loan of torso-covering mosquito jackets, which come in handy.

After days in the woods, on the way back to Toronto, we stopped for the night at the elegant Inn at Manitou, near McKellar, www.manitou-online.com, a tennis and golf resort with 36 upscale suites where we leapt right from the car to the spa for heavenly massages. The lodge and restaurant are full of fine old paintings and antiques, and its candle-lit gourmet restaurant that evening served wonderful lamb and local vegetables. It was sheer heaven — and a great way to end an Ontario vacation.