

Travel | posted: 3/20/2015 6:00 AM

Plan a spring getaway that's out of the ordinary



The Baker House in Lake Geneva, Wis., is quite a sight when it's all lit up.

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By Jacky Runice
Daily Herald Correspondent

Looking for a unique trip this spring that doesn't involve chain hotels and restaurants? If you want to escape to a cozy inn or rustic cabin, here are some options. And, even better, they're all within driving distance (or a short flight).

New look at an old friend

In summer, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, is hopping, but spring brings a sense of serenity. And some unique lodging options. Plus, it's only a few hours away from the Chicago area.

Situated right on the lakefront, Eleven Gables Inn (lkgeneva.com (<http://lkgeneva.com>)) is a charming Carpenters Gothic Victorian Inn circa 1852 that offers six rooms with private baths -- request one of three rooms that have private entrances.

Some of the amenities include century-old iron and brass beds, fireplaces, goose-down comforters and Lake Geneva views. The cottage building has the look of a country cabin and is separated into two units, each with two bedrooms. And

you can even bring your dog along.

Another option is Maxwell Mansion, the first mansion built in town (1856), that has five guest rooms, a library, a receiving room with a fireplace, a ballroom and a 1920s speak-easy lounge as well as an 1880s apothecary-themed bar. Reborn in 2013, the mansion, right in downtown Lake Geneva, boasts bathrooms with original claw-foot tubs, rooms with antique iron beds, crystal chandeliers, one with a working Victrola, and rooms with Jacuzzis in the newly constructed Carriage House adjacent to the mansion. See maxwellmansion1856.com (<http://maxwellmansion1856.com>) for rates.

One block from Maxwell Mansion (and sharing the same owners), the 1855 Queen Anne Baker House (on the National Register of Historic Places) is a tad less cozy with 30 rooms, but it offers a Sunday brunch amid the Gilded Age splendor as well as dramatic lake views. Find details at [bakerhouse1885.com/](http://www.bakerhouse1885.com/) (<http://www.bakerhouse1885.com/>).

One dining option is Ristorante Brissago, which is located in the Grand Geneva Resort & Spa, one of only five AAA Four Diamond resorts in Wisconsin. It's dimly lit with attentive waitstaff, and the Italian cuisine and wines are exceptional. Make reservations for the restaurant, which is open for dinner from Tuesday through Saturday, at (262) 249-4788 or opentable.com/ (<http://opentable.com/>).

If you're looking for a more interactive dining experience, see what classes the Lake Geneva School of Cooking is offering during your stay. Make reservations at lakegenevacookingschool.com (<http://lakegenevacookingschool.com>).

Smokin'

It's true that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is America's most visited national park, and the 60-minute or more vehicular crawl into it during autumn might be a bit trying. The park is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and offers a calming quiet in the spring. Stay in Sevierville, Tennessee, (hometown of Dolly Parton), which is less congested than Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge and less than an hour from Knoxville's airport (or make the drive part of your adventure). Hidden Mountain Resort (hiddenmountain.com (<http://hiddenmountain.com>)) is tucked away and tranquil, yet just a few minutes from a multitude of activity. Choose from cottages or a one-bedroom cabin. Some have hot tubs, others have wood-burning fireplaces and porches and all have access to the stillness of the surrounding woods. Until May 20, Hidden Mountain is offering \$50 off every two-night stay in 1- to 3-bedroom cabins, cottages and villas. This excludes holidays and holiday weekends, applies to new reservations only, and cannot be combined with other discounts or special offers.

There's more to explore than just the park. Shop at Tanger Outlet Center; check out Adrenaline Park (adrenalinepark.com (<http://adrenalinepark.com>)) where you can zip line across the French Broad River and see views from the Glass Bottom Sky Bridge; take a Scenic Helicopter Tours (scenichelicoptertours.com (<http://scenichelicoptertours.com>)), which flies over Greenbrier Valley, Newfound Gap, Clingman's Dome and Cades Cove. Take a break at Hillside Winery (hillsidevine.com (<http://hillsidevine.com>)) for some perky sangria and popular Zin and pinot grigio.

Experience the Smoky Mountain Opry, a show that ranges from cornball comedy to Vegas-style vocalists and spirited country music. When it's time for victuals, try some regional flavors at Tony Gore's Smoky Mountain BBQ & Grill ([tonygore.com/tony-gores-smoky-mountain-bbq-grill/](http://www.tonygore.com/tony-gores-smoky-mountain-bbq-grill/) (<http://www.tonygore.com/tony-gores-smoky-mountain-bbq-grill/>)). You'll learn that Tony has two loves -- Gospel music and cooking -- and his menu is brimming with fried green tomatoes, barbecue, hand-battered catfish, fried chicken and Tony's homemade pies. Staff oozes Southern charm, and you'll have plenty to take back to the cabin for another meal. Other sure bets are The Chop House for reasonably priced and expertly finished steaks and The Diner (thediner.biz (<http://thediner.biz>)) a locally owned, '50s-themed diner where you can get a hearty breakfast, country-fried steak and two-fisted sandwiches.

Hot in Cleveland

Cleveland? You better believe it. This Ohio city, which is about a six-hour drive from the Chicago suburbs, is ready for its close-up and comeback (hey, even LeBron returned). It was named a Top Destination to Visit in 2015 by Travel + Leisure,

No doubt Cleveland is getting spiffed up to host the Republican National Convention in 2016, and the facelift is looking good for locals and tourists -- nine new hotels; the new Museum of Contemporary Art; and the revamp at the Cleveland Museum of Art. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (rockhall.com (<http://rockhall.com>)) houses plenty of artifacts, exhibits and emotion for an entire day of browsing. Don't miss the exhibit, "Paul Simon: Words & Music," which provides a fascinating interactive trip through the singer-songwriter's life and various musical incarnations. Plus, there are tons of concerts and activities happening during Rock Week (April 11-18) leading up to the 30th annual Rock and Roll induction ceremony at Public Hall on Saturday, April 18.

It's not just the new restaurants and venues holding sway in this town, but the historic nooks are beguiling, too. Cleveland's oldest public market, West Side Market, is fun for foodies to browse the wares of 100 vendors. Take home baked goods, ready-to-eat foods, spices, nuts, ethnic treats, flowers and more. This neighborhood, Ohio City, is just over the Cuyahoga River and is attracting millennials with a craft brewery and indie boutiques. See a show among the theaters in Playhouse Square, the second largest performing arts center in the country, or check out the Music Box Supper Club for an evening of live blues, Zydeco, honky tonk, soul and rock music. Stroll 4th Street for uber hip bars and consider dinner at hometown chef Michael Symon's spot, Lola.

Places to stay include the French Gothic Glidden House (gliddenhouse.com (<http://gliddenhouse.com>)), which is on the National Register of Historic Places, or head 20 miles east to Frank Lloyd Wright's Louis Penfield House (penfieldhouse.com (<http://penfieldhouse.com>)), a fully equipped home designed by the famous architect. It's surrounded by woods and the Chagrin River runs through the property, which adds to its natural beauty and poetics. The home, built in 1955, is frequently compared to Wright's Fallingwater.