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THE ARTS ISSUE

TIME TRAVEL

For 250 years well-heeled visitors have retreated to the Omni Homestead Resort for cool weather, hot springs, and bygone pleasures.

by ALISON MILLER



Four hours north of Lake Norman, in verdant southwestern Virginia, sits a legendary resort where August overnight temps dip into the 50s and daytime pursuits range from archery to off-road Segway tours. Here, you can ride an American Quarter Horse or try your (gloved) hand at falconry, then sip scotch on the front porch as a horse-drawn carriage delivers well-coiffed visitors from a leisure ride. The resort is older than our country itself, and though modern amenities have been added over the years, its keepers have been careful to preserve its genteel roots.

Wander the grounds and you'll spot several stone gazebos shielding the naturally heated mineral water pools that put this place on the map. In 1761 Captain Thomas Bullitt, a militiaman in the French and Indian War, set up a rustic homesteader's camp here after receiving a land grant from George Washington. Five years later, Bullitt built an 18-room lodge—home base for the outdoor enthusiasts' playground that has evolved over the past two and a half centuries.

Hydrotherapy pioneer Dr. Thomas Goode took the reins in 1832, passionately promoting the healing hot springs. The resort's reputation and accessibility continued to grow in the late 19th century after prominent Cincinnati attorney M.E. Ingalls recruited a band of aristocratic cohorts to bankroll the hotel's expansion, along with a railroad spur that would ferry visitors from far and wide.

For a throwback soak, head to the historic Jefferson Pools, five miles up the road from the Homestead (a resort shuttle will take





you). Shaded from the sun by a 255-year-old pavilion, the men's pool—the very waterhole Thomas Jefferson basked in to ease the pains of rheumatism in 1818—is America's first spa building. A second women's pool opened in 1836. Still today, their crystal-clear waters remain a constant 98 degrees, year-round.

The hotel's 485 rooms are interconnected by hallways wide enough to drive a car through. Though the bulk of the resort was lost to a fire in 1901, it was quickly rebuilt, and over the years has expanded and grown ever more refined: It's still gleaming from a \$25 million renovation and expansion in 2014.

The serene, newly updated spa offers experiential showers, radiant-heated loungers, an aromatic steam room, and 28 treatment rooms. Outside, the adults-only Spa Garden sports a heated outdoor pool, reflexology walk, and of course, a geothermal soaking pool.

An on-site Adventure Center ensures no one—even kids—gets bored. By day, go fly-fishing, hiking, or play a game of croquet on the lush lawn. Kids won't want to leave Allegheny Springs, the two-acre pool complex replete with water slides, lazy river, and aquatic play zone. Next door, two nine-hole mini golf courses are a fine place to dry off.

The best view of the resort and its lush, undulating environs comes from the hill-top Shooting Club, a pristine facility with trap and skeet fields, a forested sporting







clay course, and a rifle range. As if that weren't enough, two championship golf courses and a gorgeous equestrian center round out the activities roster.

Old-school civility is alive and well here. If you've been waiting to bust out the white slacks and navy blazer, now's the time. Kick off the evening with Mrs. Virginia's whiskey sour in the lobby bar—a nod to Virginia Strasser, who this year celebrates her 67th year as a cashier at the resort.

Another longtime staffer, stoic maître'd Woody Pettus, stands watch over the formal main dining room. If you don't feel like dressing for dinner, kick back at Jefferson's Grill, a modern sports bar that segues into a handsome dining room where steaks and chops team up with decadent sides. The resort also shuttles visitors to two off-site restaurants—Rubino's, housed in the former summer home of 1920s playboy Jacob Rubino, and Sam Snead's Tavern, named for the pro golfer who called this area home.

Perhaps the most fitting way to celebrate the Homestead's 250th anniversary? Don your ball gown and reserve a spot at the black-tie-optional gala, held the third Saturday of every month in 2016. Think tuxedoed three-piece band, champagne toasts, and plenty of crab gratinée. Leave your iPhone in your room and party like it's 1766.

Weekend room rates from \$300, omnihotels.com; 800-838-1766; www.thehomestead.com **LNM**



**The resort is older
than our country itself;
its keepers have been
careful to preserve its
genteel roots.**

