

Escapes

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All Nothing, All the Time

Bears do it, bats do it, human beings in B&Bs do it – spend time in winter inactive and blissfully unplugged

By NEIL GENZLINGER

IF you're wearing a cast right now, this advice comes too late, but file it away for next winter: There's nothing wrong with doing nothing. And there's a bed-and-breakfast out there, framed in snow but with plush rooms and welcoming fires inside, that is made for helping you remember how.

A certain high-powered personality type, the kind that advertises itself with a ski rack on the car, doesn't grasp this concept. These folks may check into a cozy B & B on a chilly day, but then it's eat and run run run, to the slopes or the snowmobile trails or the icy sidewalks of some antiques alley.

People like this guarantee full employment for paramedics and anyone in the crutch or quick-set-plaster business. But we travelers who have attained more of what I like to think of as maturity — “slothfulness” and “decrepitude” seem like such harsh words — know that human beings are supposed to hibernate in the winter. A bed-and-breakfast or small inn is, to us, a well-appointed cave where we go with the goal of doing nothing. Not just a little bit of nothing between bursts of something. I'm talking about all nothing, all the time.

Innkeepers know us. “It's surprising how many we get,” said Al Granger, owner of the Glasbern Inn, a converted farm in Fogelsville, Pa. “A lot of people just come and vegetate.”

Debrah Mosimann, who runs Swiss Woods in Lititz, Pa., with her husband, Werner, sees the phenomenon, too. “I have couples who will come park on the sofa, and that's where you find them four hours later,” she said.

It's an art form, this aggressive inactivity, one that deserves a guide every bit as detailed as a Fodor's or Bradt. Here's a start, based on exhaustive research done on a recent weekend trip to the Inn at Lake Joseph in Forestburgh, N.Y., and a couple of phone calls to other B & Bs made while sipping winter ale in my pajamas.



Before You Go

Don't try a do-nothing getaway without first defining "nothing." Dictionaries offer some help — "the absence of all magnitude or quantity," Merriam-Webster says — but it's really up to the individual to decide what magnitudes and quantities he wishes to absent himself from.

I decided that for the purposes of this article, doing nothing would mean:

- Nothing that involves spending money.
- Nothing that requires strapping something to your feet.
- Nothing done with a device that can be purchased at Best Buy.

Where to Stay

For novices, a good way to explore the art of doing nothing is to go someplace where there's nothing to do. Fleischmanns, N.Y., in the Catskills, could make that claim, in a positive sort of way. Sure, skiing and antiquing are nearby, but the town is a quiet village that makes inactivity easy. And at River Run Bed and Breakfast on Main Street, there's an added incentive: lousy cell-phone reception.

"We actually have people who don't want to come here because we have limited cellphone service," said Melissa Fenton, River Run's innkeeper along with her husband, Ben. "It's like, 'How am I going to do this?' and 'How am I going to do that?' Well, you don't."

Another lovely spot for do-nothing beginners is **ECCE Bed and Breakfast**, on a promontory overlooking the Delaware River in Barryville, N.Y. The innkeepers, Kurtis Kreider and Alan Rosenblatt, have smartly picked a location that can leave you feeling as if you've done something even though you haven't. For instance, some people trek to eagle-watching posts along the upper Delaware at this time of year, but Mr. Rosenblatt said Ecce guests can get the same effect right from his deck, Cognac at the ready — eagle-watching without the effort.

And then there are the freight trains that snake across the vista a few times a week. "The track is a fair distance from us — 300 feet below us in the valley — and so the cars look like a toy train set." Mr. Rosenblatt said. When he asked one guest how he had enjoyed his stay, Mr. Rosenblatt recalled, "He replied that the most strenuous thing he did all weekend was to count the number of train cars that went by."

Once You Arrive

When you check in to your chosen B & B, you may find in your room a selection of pamphlets and magazines promoting local attractions. Burn these immediately, taking care not to read them by accident while doing so.

By not reading the pamphlets in the inn's foyer, we were not tempted to go to the Ferndale Antiques Marketplace, the Fort Decker Museum of History, the Gillinder Glass factory, the Catskill Pheasantry ("bird dressing and packaging available"), the Zane Grey Museum ("father of the western novel") or Earthgirl Pottery.

What to Expect

Innkeepers agree that, especially if you're one of those tightly wound urbanites, a weekend in the middle of nowhere can have a dramatic effect.

"It's a visible change," Ms. Dyer at the Inn at Lake Joseph said. "When people get here, they're usually pretty stressed out. By Saturday morning, you are physically watching them relax."

Ms. Mosimann sees the same thing in her guests at Swiss Woods. "They come almost irritated, some of them, with this angry edge to them," she said. "And when they're ready to leave on Sunday, they're some of the nicest people you'll meet."

And they may have made some new friends. Ms. Mosimann noted that relaxation isn't necessarily a solitary pursuit. "I find that when people are doing that kind of nothing, they're happy to do it in the company of others," she said. At Ecce, Mr. Rosenblatt and Mr. Kreider

have an afternoon reception at 5, made for mingling.

My own weekend at the Inn at Lake Joseph, booked in the lull between Thanksgiving and Christmas, was fairly solitary — the first night, we had the manor, the inn's main building, all to ourselves. But not really. Mr. Weinger told me that I was sleeping in the room used by Cardinal Patrick Hayes, archbishop of New York — which would mean that I was in the room where, according to news reports, he died in his sleep in September 1938.

Creepy? No, calming. With an archbishop's ghost hanging around, I knew there was no danger that my blissfully idle mind would become the Devil's workshop. ■

If You Go (Slow)

ECCE BED AND BREAKFAST

19 Silverfish Road
Barryville, N.Y.
(845) 557-8562
www.eccebedandbreakfast.com
five rooms, \$150 to \$285.

THE INN AT LAKE JOSEPH

162 Saint Joseph Road
Forestburgh, N.Y.
(845) 791-9506
www.lakejoseph.com
15 rooms, \$200 to \$405.

RIVER RUN BED AND BREAKFAST

882 Main Street
Fleischmanns, N.Y.
845-254-4884
www.riverrunbedandbreakfast.com
nine rooms, \$89 to \$169.

GLASBERN COUNTRY INN

2141 Pack House Road
Fogelsville, P.A.
(610) 285-4723
www.glasbern.com
35 rooms, \$145 to \$460.

SWISS WOODS BED AND BREAKFAST

500 Blantz Road
Lititz, P.A.
(800) 594-8018
www.swisswoods.com
seven rooms, \$150 to \$205.