

A Rejuvenating Winter Escape

Crystal Springs Resort and Spa

BY LOUISE B. HAFESH

The frantic holiday whirlwind is finally winding down. Yes, it was fun – magical even, but all that wonder and feverish pace, can take its toll. Before jumping back into the fray and demands of everyday life, why not consider treating yourself to a well-deserved dose of TLC?

Take heart! One of the advantages of living in the Garden State is its glorious natural beauty. And that is no more evident than in the environs of Sussex County's Crystal Springs Resort and Spa. Nestled in an idyllic mountain setting, it is the perfect backdrop for a dreamy, rejuvenating winter getaway, and so close to Bergen, you could be lounging by a cozy fire with hot toddy in hand within an hour. So, what are you waiting for?

In that frame of mind, hubby Joe and I cleared our schedules, packed a suitcase and hit Highway 208 on course for a mini retreat. On route, stress levels seemed to dissipate with every gently rolling hill of the Kittatinny Mountain Range, and upon arrival, the resort's peaceful ambiance synced in.

We had booked a suite and were taken back by its spaciousness, including a full kitchen, comfortable seating and dining area, indoor and outdoor gas fireplaces and a jacuzzi. There's so much more on the offing at this year-round property. And, having viewed its extensive list of daily activities beforehand, we quickly ditched our bags and set about getting the lay of the land.

One of Crystal Springs' main attractions is its six championship golf courses. Not golfers per se, but our balcony faced the self-guided, natural grass-putting course, which enticed us to give that a go first (complimentary putters and balls are at the front desk). Forget regular miniature golf – this is 18-holes with the feel of professional greens. And with a running stream and beautiful native flora at every turn, the scenic, meandering stroll alone is worth it.

Just for the record, I won! My reward awaited at the Clubhouse Wine Cellar, which has won Wine Spectator Magazine's Grand Award every year since 2006. Suffice it to say, its many-chambered catacombs hold wines from around the world. We had an opportunity to taste (a misnomer – glasses were well filled) three distinct sommelier-chosen wines and enjoy a 45-minute round table, lively Q&A session (\$25 per person). Great info and camaraderie!

Feeling no pain, hubby and I tromped over to the on-premises, freshwater quarry to tackle a little fishing. Embraced by an 80-foot impressive limestone cliff, the quarry is stocked for fun to accommodate its "catch & release" program (a small fee includes the use of rods and bait). After a fair number of near misses, encouraged by a few experts in the group, we happily ended up with a catch. Content with that, warmed by our crackling patio fireplace when back

at home base, we savored every moment of the delicious slower pace.

Homegrown Eats and Spa Treats

We opted to have dinner at the Crystal Tavern. After a full day of activities, it felt good to dress casually and relax in an unpretentious setting. Featuring farm-to-table cuisine, service was excellent and the panoramic sunset views were a wonderful backdrop to a delicious meal with my favorite person. Beef lover Joe ordered the tomahawk steak. It was perfectly cooked, succulent, juicy and huge. Even after sharing, there was still a large portion left. My choice, organic salmon, was also cooked to perfection. However, the crowning glory was dessert – a delicious apple crumb ice cream confection. Well-satiated, and back at our suite, we topped off a perfect first day with a fireside nightcap before retiring in clouds of white billowy comfort.

A Balancing Act

Day two was all about pampering and wellness. Reflections Spa was calling! That translated into a luxurious Signature Facial for me, and a relaxing massage for Joe. My service began with an expert analysis to determine the best protocol for my sensitive skin. And then, lathered and lulled into serenity by the healing hands of my aesthetician, I dozed off. Well rested upon waking, my skin was glowing.

Continued on page 54



As for Joe, who was hesitant about his first massage post recuperating from rotator cuff surgery, he couldn't say enough about his masseuse's expert care and knowledge. She listened, assuaged his concerns and, in his estimation, gave one of the best massages he has had. After our treatments, we met up in the adjoining lounge, and indulged in a rose petal foot soak, enjoyed complimentary pink champagne and specialty chocolates. Nice touch.

Dinner that night was off-site at Kites' Restaurant. Located about 5 miles away, at Crystal's sister property, Minerals Hotel in Vernon, we loved the eclectic vibe at this casual hot spot. A huge, striking floral mural covers an entire wall. Opposite that, near where we were seated, are a massive fireplace and cozy nook, a great place to enjoy drinks and a little privacy. In yet another section, the bar is humming with friendly locals conversing and enjoying a live music scene. We were hankering for burgers and fries, which were good. However, the crispy Brussel sprouts appetizer with sweet peppers, parmesan and chipotle lime mayo was the standout.

Driving the winding way back, as Crystal Resort came into view, we were struck again by its picture postcard, serene setting. Aware that our winter adventure was ending, we chatted about the wonders it had worked on us. Had we relaxed? Yes, and then some. Refreshed and energized, we had reentered the world of the living and were ready to take on whatever lay in store back home.

**Crystal Springs Resort & Spa is located
at 1 Wild Turkey Way in Hamburg.**

**Learn more at
www.crystalgolfresort.com.**

*Louise B. Hafesh is an award-winning artist and
freelance writer who lives with her husband in
Bergen County. She can be reached at
www.louisebhafesh.com.*

