



Poconos Vacations: from Adventure to Romance

July 13, 2012 by JOHN NEWTON. Special to Newsday

The introduction of the heart-shaped tub at Caesars Cove Haven in Lakeville in 1963 changed the history of the Poconos forever.

The northeastern corner of Pennsylvania was soon redubbed the "honeymoon capital of the country" and newlyweds began arriving en masse.

But the Poconos have been a summer destination since the 19th century, and vacationers have long appreciated the unspoiled wilderness of the Delaware Water Gap and the 150 lakes that dot the Poconos' four counties. You can still bathe in a heart-shaped tub (or in a Champagne glass tower at Cove Haven, if you prefer), but weekend visitors to the region are as likely to be found hiking and biking the region's wooded trails or rafting down the Delaware River.

GEOGRAPHY

The four counties that make up the Poconos sit along Pennsylvania's border with New York and New Jersey -- it's easy to get there from New York, a two- to three-hour drive, depending on your exact destination, though the region extends over 2,400 square miles (that's about 1,000 square miles more than Long Island). The northern end is the most rustic; at the heart of the Poconos, between Milford and Stroudsburg, the Delaware River is the principal attraction; at the southern end, ski resorts and former mining towns dot the hills.

JIM THORPE

One of those mining towns, originally Mauch Chunk, had fallen on hard times in the 1950s when town fathers decided to rename it Jim Thorpe, after the Olympian and football player. (Though he was a native of Oklahoma, his remains are in a memorial in the town center.) It took a while, but the attempt to lure travelers eventually worked and, fittingly, many are athletes drawn to the miles of mountain biking trails.

Blue Mountain Sports can fit you out with a bike and point you to the nearest trail, or set you up with a two-day bike/boat package, with one day riding and one day kayaking (34 Susquehanna St., 570-325-4421, bikejimthorpe.com; bike rentals from \$28 a day, kayak rentals from \$49 a day). Jim Thorpe River Adventures' inflatable kayaks and easy rafting trips are recommended for families with younger kids (1 Adventure Lane, 570-325-2570, jtraft.com, daylong rafting trips from \$40.95). While Pocono Whitewater's moonlight rafting, which includes wine and goes till midnight, is for those with later bedtimes (1519 State Rte. 903, 800-944-8392, poconowhitewater.com, night rafting \$89.95).

After working up an appetite, Flow at the Carbon County Cultural Project takes advantage of summer's bounty and serves up locally sourced produce and fish, accompanied by a carefully curated wine list (268 W. Broadway, 570-325-8200, thecccp.org, entrees \$16 to \$27). At night, the Inn at Jim Thorpe is the most atmospheric hotel in a historic district crowded with 19th century buildings from the town's mining days. Note that the inn, like many hotels in the region, has a two-night minimum on summer weekends (24 Broadway, 800-329-2599, innjt.com, doubles from \$99 midweek and from \$139 weekends).

GONE FISHING

Finding a place to cast a line in the Poconos is not unlike, well, shooting fish in a barrel. There's an abundance of choices, from streams to stocked lakes, as well as the Delaware River. Pocono Fishing Adventures is based on Beltzville Lake, not far from Jim Thorpe, though they can arrange charter trips on other lakes and the Delaware (Deer Lane, Beltzville Lake; 570-620-6620, one-day fishing charters start at \$59.95). Anyone older than 15 must have a fishing license from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, but you can apply online, and your license will be sent to you within 7 to 10 days (877-707-4085, fishandboat.com; one-day licenses for non-Pennsylvania residents are \$26.70, one-year licenses are \$52.70.)

DELAWARE WATER GAP

Just over an hour from Jim Thorpe is the highlight of the Poconos in summer, the Delaware Water Gap. En route, you may want to make two detours. First, make a quick pit stop at Whitewater Challengers in Weatherly, where the zip line offers a treetops view of part of the Poconos. They also can set you up on a white-water adventure on the Lehigh River (288 N. Stagecoach Rd., 800-433-7238, zip line \$10 a ride, daylong rafting trips from \$39.95). Continue to Stroudsburg for a stop at Sweet Creams Café. As the name hints, homemade ice cream is a specialty (with both conventional and adventurous flavors, such as rose petal), but the gourmet sandwiches are perfect for picnics at your next stop (429 Main St., 570-421-7929, sandwiches \$6.95 to \$8.95).

After another half-hour of driving, you'll reach the Delaware Water Gap. The National Recreation Area lines 40 miles of the Delaware River, and it's also home to 27 miles of the Appalachian Trail. While the Delaware is the main attraction, hiking trails range from easy two-mile walks to the 32-mile McDade Trail. Most of the McDade is open to mountain bikers, as well as cross-country skiers in winter. Whether you decide to walk the entire McDade Trail or only a segment of it, there are beaches manned with lifeguards at each end, so bring your towel. If you want to raft or kayak the river, Adventure River Sports can set you up with a canoe, kayak or raft (Route 209, Marshalls Creek, 800-487-2628, adventuresportinc.com, canoes and rafts from \$42 a day, kayaks from \$46 a day). The National Park website below lists other adventure companies licensed to operate within the park. Armchair historians may want to stop in at Millbrook Village within the park. The restored buildings capture the flavor of American farm life in the late 19th century (570-828-2253, nps.gov/dewa, free).

MILFORD

Activities in Milford, at the northern end of the Delaware Water Gap, tend to be more low-key: antiquing and gallery hopping along the streets of its Victorian-era historic district. After exploring the Water Gap, you may want to pay a visit to Grey Towers, the home of Gifford Pinchot, the father of the Forest Service and former governor of Pennsylvania.

Pinchot may be less remembered today than Teddy Roosevelt or John Muir, but the museum and short hiking trails on 100 acres are a fitting tribute to an early leader in the conservation movement (151 Grey Towers Dr., 570-296-9630, fs.fed.us/gt, \$6). The dining room at the River Rock Inn and Restaurant, just two blocks from the Delaware, is a local favorite for lunch (the signature dish is the mushroom bisque), while the 10 rooms are a good value for the area (210 Second St., 570-296-7177, doubles from \$110).

About as far from roughing it as one could get, Milford's Hotel Fauchère has been lovingly restored. The hotel, which first opened in 1880 and has welcomed three U.S. presidents, as well as Mae West, now has flat-screen TVs, Kiehl's amenities and the elegant Delmonico's restaurant (401 Broad St., 570-409-1212, hotelfauchere.com, doubles from \$285, including breakfast).

SPA LIFE

Less than two hours from New York City, the Lodge at Woodloch is a destination spa in an unexpected corner of Pennsylvania. There's a pond for canoeing, trails throughout the 70 wooded acres, a busy schedule of classes from Aqua Boot Camp to Zumba, and a sprawling spa. Don't worry, though, the cuisine at Tree is healthy but not Spartan, and there are even wine-tasting classes in the lobby on weekends (109 River Birch Lane, Hawley; 866-953-8500, thelodgeatwoodloch.com, doubles from \$578 midweek, \$678 weekends, including three meals and all spa and fitness facilities).

