

SundayTravel

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE JUNE 13, 2021 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/TRAVEL

N

A cabin on a lake for
\$50 a night,

or a posh inn at
\$250 a night?



Scoping out the best way to experience Vermont

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER



ISLAND POND, Vt. —

The exterior of the cabin at Brighton State Park, not far from the Canadian border, looked absolutely charming in online photos. It was a sweet little place within spitting distance of Spectacle Pond in the middle of nowhere Vermont. I was excited to settle in, cook dinner over an open fire, and sit at a picnic table and enjoy the view. June is National Outdoors Month and I've always considered myself a bit of an outdoorsman, as long as your definition of outdoorsman is someone who enjoys drive-in movies and sidewalk sales.

When I drove into Island Pond, the town where the park is situated, I was wowed by scenery. At Brighton State Park, the exterior of the adorable cabin looked just as pictured. But when I opened the door, well, that's where my Vermont cabin-in-the-woods fantasy quickly deflated.

There was a distinct "Orange Is the New Black" vibe about it. I've eaten pizza crust thicker than the mattresses on the beds, and I'd describe the lighting as "interrogation chic." But the place was a bargain at \$50 a night. Or so I told myself.

I decided to spend a few days in Vermont and compare a \$50-a-night cabin against the \$250-a-night room at the iconic Woodstock Inn, which is 2 hours south of Brighton State Park and looks nothing like "Orange Is the

VERMONT, Page N14

Could the humble, bargain cabin compare to the gorgeous inn?



Left: the interior of a cabin at Brighton State Park in Island Pond, Vt. Right: the lobby of the Woodstock Inn in Woodstock, Vt.

He's with the inn crowd

►VERMONT

Continued from Page N11

New Black." I had never stayed at the Woodstock Inn, so I was eager to see if it lived up to all the positives I'd heard about it. Unlike the cabin, when I stepped inside the inn, I was not crestfallen. Could the humble, bargain cabin compare to the gorgeous inn? Here's a hint: No. But let me break it down for you in case you're planning a Vermont escape this summer.

Here are the pros and cons of each:

Brighton State Park pro: You're close to wildlife.

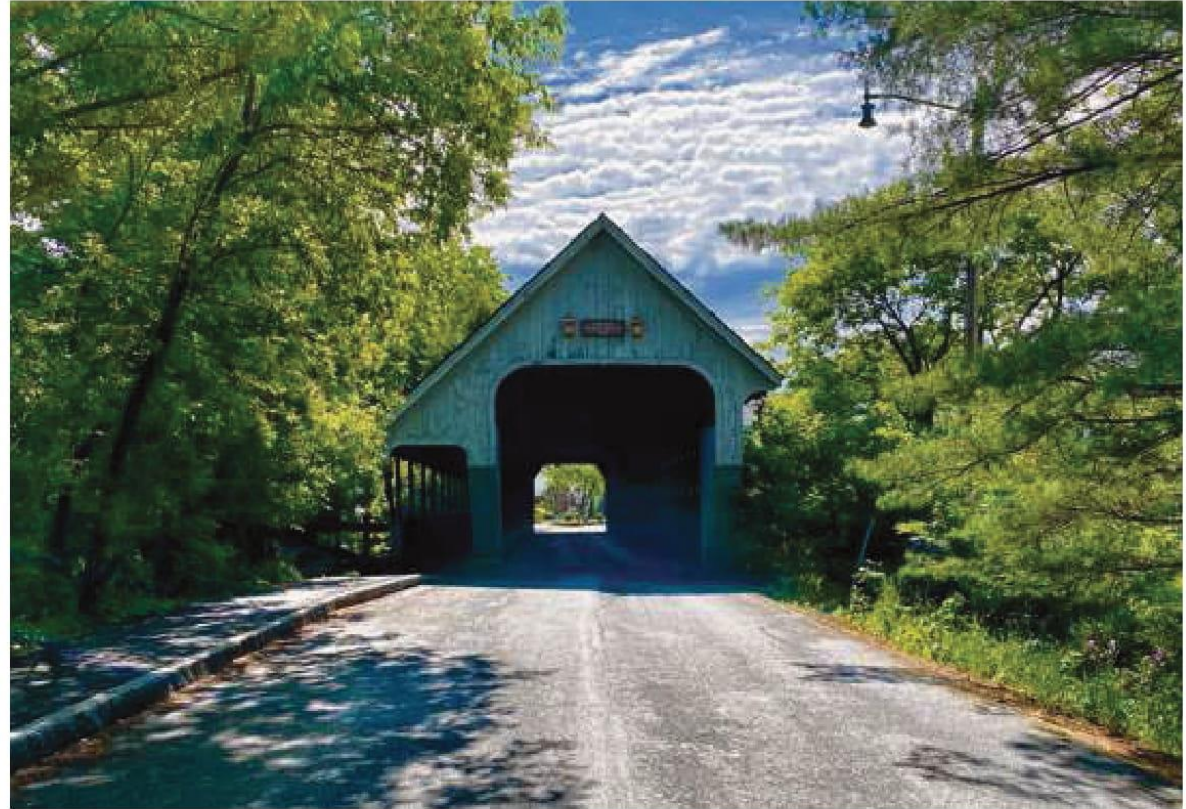
Brighton State Park con: You're close to wildlife.

Given that it was early June, I was one of the few people staying at Brighton State Park, so I was surrounded by solitude and the sounds of the wild. One of the sounds was the plaintive cry of the loons that live on the expansive pond. But the novelty quickly wore off. Well past midnight the loons were still yammering on about something while I was trying to sleep on the thinner-than-pizza-crust mattress. Then I heard something outside my cabin. Was it a giant beetle buzzing against the screen, a serial killer, or a bear? Probably a beetle, but I'm sticking with bear.

Woodstock Inn pro: You're close to the great shops and restaurants of Woodstock and Quechee.

Woodstock Inn con: Shopping and restaurants can be a tad pricey.

Previously, I had only driven through Woodstock on my way to go skiing, or stopped in nearby Quechee to see the gorge and



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

Middle Bridge in Woodstock, Vt.

eat at Simon Pearce on my way to Montreal. I knew that Woodstock was as adorable as a barrel of kittens, but when I had a chance to walk around and explore I was smitten with the shops and restaurants. I bought a Vermont pennant at Woody's Mercantile, and a hipster-ish T-shirt at Vermont Eclectic Company. But the pennant was \$68 and the tee was \$30. My dinner at the Woodstock Inn wasn't necessarily a bargain, but it was very high quality.

Brighton State Park pro: Cooking over an open fire.

Brighton State Park con: Cooking over an open fire.

I hadn't cooked over an open fire since, well, I'd never cooked over an open fire. But here was my chance. I made beef skewers with veggies and threw them in the aluminum baking pan that I picked up at the grocery store. The cabin's fire pit had a grill on top, and I popped the pan on and waited for those skewers to start sizzling. I waited, and waited some more. My logic was that fire is hot, and things should cook on a surface that's hot. Instead, the mosquitos made a meal of me. The insect repellent appeared to be a mosquito aph-

rodisiac. I spent the night trying to feed the fire until my dinner started cooking, eventually about half the skewers were burnt, half were raw, and I smelled like campfire and burnt beef for the next three days.

Woodstock Inn pro: The room was comfortable, tastefully decorated, and had everything I needed.

Woodstock Inn con: I got spoiled because the inn was too nice.

Perhaps it's unfair to compare the Woodstock Inn to a cabin in a Vermont state park, but I'm going to do it anyway. The bed at the inn was the kind that you sink into and doze off immediately. The artwork gave a nod to the area, but wasn't too Vermont-y. Taxidermied butterflies were displayed in frames, unlike the live moths that snuck into my cabin at the state park. There was a comfortable library and a huge green lawn to enjoy. There are also lots of programs at the inn, like falconry. How posh is that?

Brighton State Park pro: The park ranger was incredibly nice and could exchange dollar bills for quarters.

Brighton State Park con: The showers required quarters.

I may have failed to mention that the Brighton State Park cabin didn't have its own bathroom, and instead featured a short walk to a public restroom that serviced my section of the campground. I didn't have many people to share it with, so I suppose that goes in the pro column. But the con was that I needed to feed the shower quarters. Also, why is it that the bathroom at every campground has gnats? The park was BYOE (bring your own everything), so my car was stuffed with blankets, sheets, pillows, groceries, toiletries, and several changes of clothing. It was helpful because there was no heat in the cabin, so I slept in a few layers of smoke-scented clothes while I cursed the local loon population for staying up late and partying.

Woodstock Inn pro: Woodstock is filled with gorgeous scenery and is near lots of natural attractions.

Woodstock Inn con: I've run out of cons for the Woodstock Inn.

I took a walk around Woodstock to see the covered bridge, because that's what one does in

Vermont, and then strolled to expansive and lovely Faulkner Park, which has a 2½-mile hiking trail which snakes through some lovely nature. Following Faulkner I went to the town's newly-opened Village Butcher shop for a sandwich. Did I mention how much I adore downtown Woodstock? Before I left town I stopped by Quechee Gorge, and over to Simon Pearce to look at lovely glass that I can't really afford.

Brighton State Park pro: The park and surrounding towns have fantastic hiking and natural scenery.

Brighton State Park con: There's a cult in the same town as the park. (Seriously, there's a cult.)

Not only does Brighton State Park have multiple trails that circle the pond for an escape into the woods or a walk along the shore, but pretty much everywhere you drive in this corner of Vermont there's scenery with a capital "S." I took a day to drive to up to Westmore, a small (and I mean small) town that rings gorgeous Lake Willoughby. The lake is so lovely Robert Frost mentions it in a poem. The area felt like Hallstatt, Austria, if you squinted enough and used your imagination. My plan was to hike Mount Pisgah, but it started raining, so I restricted my visit to various scenic spots around the lake and took a peek at the 356-acre Sentinel Rock State Park.

I felt less confident walking around Island Pond. The town is home to the Twelve Tribes, a Christian Fundamentalist cult (locals call them "moonies"). I won't go into details about the cult here, but the idea of a gay man running into a Christian Fundamentalist cult that is vocal in its dislike of gays in a remote Vermont town sounds like a sequel to "Get Out" that practically writes itself.

But, aside from the cult, the showers that require quarters, the late-night loon parties, and the pizza crust mattress, Brighton State Park was lovely. However, the next time you need to find me in Vermont, I'll be at the Woodstock Inn.

Christopher Muther can be reached at christopher.muther@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @Chris_Muther.

off the scenic Kancamagus Highway. From there, it's up, up, up, climbing to the summits of Mount Flume (4,327 feet) and Mount Liberty (4,459 feet). You'll cross the stunning Franconia Ridgeline across Little Haystack (4,760 feet), Mount Lincoln (5,089 feet) and Mount Lafayette (5,260 feet). You'll continue across the Garfield Ridgeline, crossing Mount Garfield (4,500 feet), South Twin Mountain (4,902 feet), and Mount Bond (4,698 feet), before looping back down to your car. Still have energy? Next time, you could add side trails, bagging an additional five mountain summits and adding 14 miles or so to the trek. Or take it easy and in pieces.

"If you don't want to hike the whole thing, doing a 'semi-Pemi' gives you the best of both worlds," says Rachel Cheatham, AMC backcountry campsite outreach coordinator. "I spent the first two days climbing mountains and walking ridgelines, and then I hiked down through the forest to 13 Falls Tentsite and spent the rest of the evening swimming and enjoying the company of other campers."

The Connecticut River

It's the longest river in New England, snaking more than 400 miles through New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, from the Canadian border to Long Island Sound. And we heard from several people in the know that spending days paddling it and nights at primitive campsites is a bucket list experience.

"An entire day and night on the Connecticut River highlight how moving water brings life into the valley, touching every piece of the habitat and every city and town," says Faith Salter,

present, all part of the wilderness experience, he contends. Don't take the challenge lightly: Learn how to pole, line, and portage so you can make the trip upstream to Allagash Lake, and then travel according to the wind and weather.

"Allow the wind to adjust whatever 'plans' you think you might have," says King. "Bring a good book that helps keep you immersed in the wilderness experience and a small journal to record a few reflections. Learn to move to the rhythms created by daylight."

And bring a fly rod. "Fresh trout from the frying pan is nothing short of miraculous," he says.

If that sounds a bit overwhelming for a DIY trip, there are several outfitters who offer guided excursions.

10 more bucket list adventures

Kayaking portions (or all) of the Maine Island Trail.

Hiking Mount Katahdin (and the Knife Edge) in Baxter State Park.

Taking a glider flight over Acadia National Park.

Hiking the Presidential Traverse in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Kayaking the Lake Champlain Paddlers' Trail.

Hiking end-to-end on the Long Trail.

Exploring swimming holes and remote lakes in Vermont.

Fly fishing the world-class Farmington River in Connecticut.

Sailing on a windjammer cruise along the coast of Maine.

Hiking the Cohos Trail into Quebec.

Diane Bair and Pamela Wright can be reached at bairwright@gmail.com.



A scenic overlook on Kancamagus Highway in Lincoln, N.H.