

# North Country

*A wonderful summer escape at a fraction of the cost of the Hamptons*



A ROOM WITH A VIEW AT THE THOMPSON HOUSE. Photo by Kurt Goettsche.

By Eric Uhlfelder

For decades, when I ventured to the Catskills it was to ski. When the temperatures turned hot and humid, I would head to the East End of Long Island to pleasant hotels and B&Bs. My photography hung in local galleries, and for a long time I felt a part of the place.

But increasingly, over the years, I've felt like I didn't belong as the crowds got prettier and snootier and local establishments turned in kind. So, I gave the Catskills a try during the summer. Despite being 50 miles further away than the Hamptons, it's been well worth the effort.

The Catskills has a long list of admirers. They inspired the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Washington Irving, and the painters of the 19th century Hudson River School. During that time and well into the 20th century the region was a major summertime destination of New Yorkers.

Back in the day, if you couldn't afford a car, you could get to the Catskills from the city by large paddle wheel boats or railroad. While the boats have long stopped operating, Amtrak's ride along the Hudson is one of the great scenic rail trips in the country and gets you close—to the town of Hudson. Rent a car, and in 45 minutes you're in Windham—my favorite destination.

And while there are many fine places to stay in the town, the one that makes me feel most at home—whether I'm with a friend or on my own—is The Thompson House. Owner Eric Goettsche, his wife Deb, their son Kurt and his wife Darya, learned this way of inn-keeping from generations of their family that managed the five-building resort over the past 140 years.

Windham itself is a close-knit village melded together by a strong sense of community and civic responsibility. "Everyone volunteers," explains Eric. And this was never more evident than when Hurricane Irene broke a lo-

cal dam and caused massive flooding. Being on higher ground, The Thompson House became a rescue center for some who were unable to be in their homes, and for first responders who came from far away to help.

Eric has seen a change in clientele over the decades. "Generations of families used to gather here annually, some coming from hundreds of miles away." These days, most guests are single families and individuals like myself who are looking for a few days of escape.

I'm happy just reading and working in my large well-adorned room, hanging out on my spacious balcony with a drop-dead view, or going out for a bike ride, especially on the nearby Windham Path that takes you around a beautiful nature preserve.

There's tennis, a heated pool, and a golf course right next door. Not far away there are scenic train rides, lakes for swimming and canoeing, and horseback riding. And for those who want to go vertical, walk down the road to the ski lift at Windham Mountain and ride to the top, hike down, or mountain bike if you're so inclined. In the evenings the hotel has movie nights, a recreational room and gym, and an outdoor firepit.

"We're following CDC guidelines to the T," says Eric. "The staff all wear masks, rooms are thoroughly sanitized, no one enters your room during your stay, and guests pick up their meals and eat on their balconies or in many of our wide-open spaces."

So while we feel shortchanged by a summer of Covid, where beaches and much of the city don't feel particularly safe, head up north for an experience worth having.

*The Thompson House is located on Route 296, just off of Route 23 in Windham. Website: thompsonhouse.com.*

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