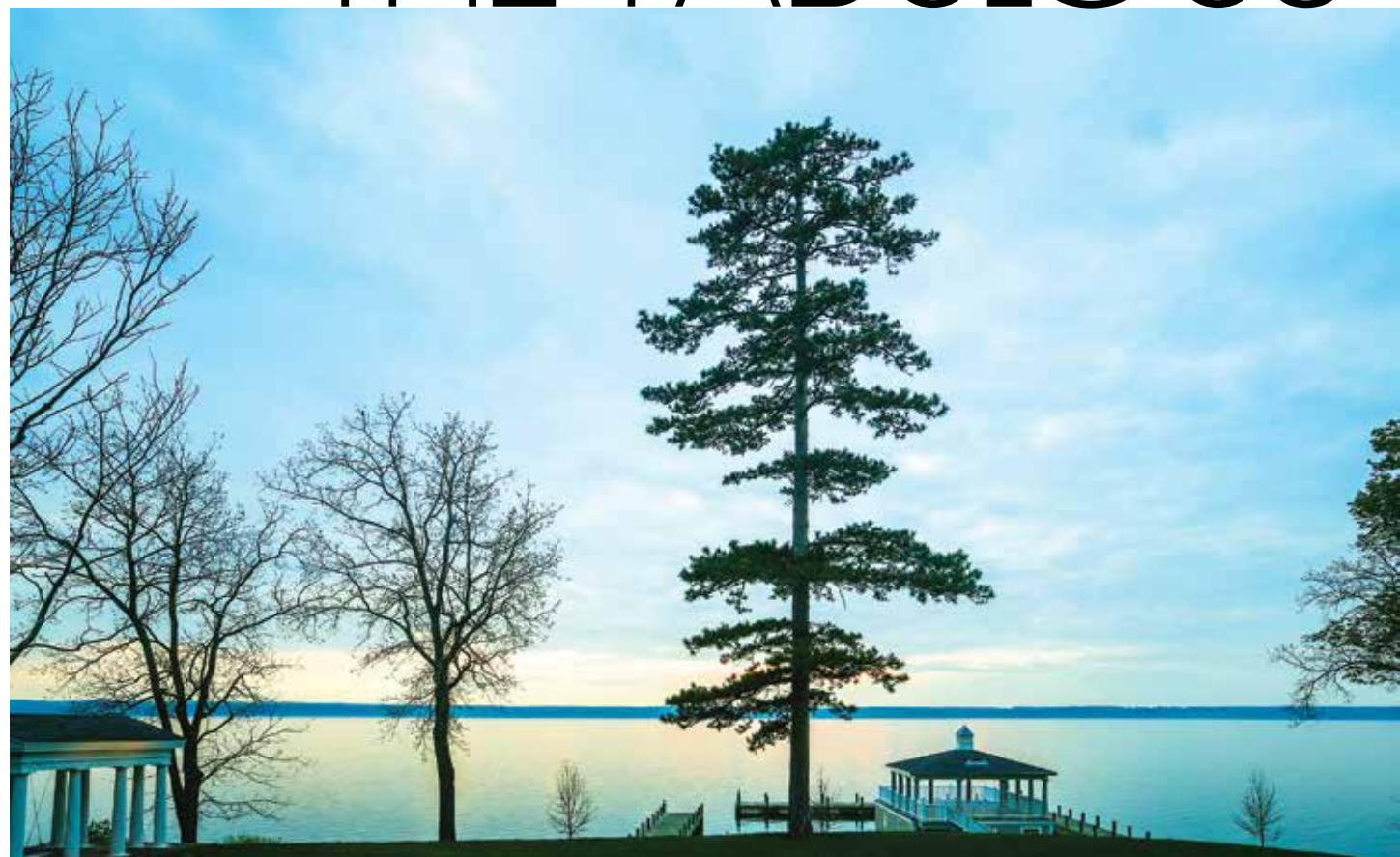


THE FABULOUS



FINGER LAKES

*Wineries, Waterfalls and
More in Central New York*

by Jill Fergus

PHOTO: THE INNS OF AURORA

New York's Finger Lakes, a scenic region of 11 lakes stretching across 14 counties, is vast. It's known for its many award-winning wineries but I quickly realized there is so much more to discover — and just as quickly realized that figuring out what to do on a short visit was going to be tough. I was able to narrow it down to a few pockets around some of the larger lakes and while my itinerary couldn't possibly cover all it has to offer, I thought it was a good start!

It's hard not to be charmed by the tiny village of Aurora on the eastern shore of 37-mile Cayuga Lake, the longest of the Finger Lakes. There are a few wineries in the area including Long Point Winery, overlooking the lake and Bet the Farm, a small tasting room and market selling New York State products like cheeses and chutneys. Design fans can visit the MacKenzie-Childs studio, shop and gardens, while the idyllic campus of Wells College is just down the road. After a day of touring, have a gourmet sandwich at Dorie's Bakery (it turns into a pop-up pizza place and wine bar in the evenings).

The village is also known for its many historic mansions, several of which have been turned into a AAA Four Diamond luxury collection called the Inns of Aurora (owner Pleasant Rowland is the creator of American Girl dolls and a Wells graduate). The lakeside Aurora Inn, housed in an 1833 Federal-style building, has just 10 rooms — mine featured a balcony overlooking Main Street. Steps away are the E.B. Morgan House and Rowland House (the newest, Wallcourt Hall, has the most modern decor). That evening, I dined on delicious charcuterie and scallops at the inn's restaurant, helmed by executive chef Patrick Higgins. The wine list has plenty of Finger Lakes offerings, including a terrific sparkling wine from Heart & Hands Wine Company.

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Another scenic spot I explored was Cayuga Lake's northwestern corner. At Knapp Winery, I sampled dry riesling and meritage in its rustic tasting room. I enjoyed a cheese tasting (cheddar, gouda, blue, etc.) at Muranda Cheese Company on a dairy farm owned by Tom Murray, a great ambassador for the Finger Lakes' growing cheese-making industry. I rounded out my afternoon with a visit to Seneca Falls, home of the National Women's Hall of Fame, which celebrates everyone from Sacagawea to Sally Ride (it's long since outgrown its space and will move to a state-of-the-art restored mill by year's end).

Nearby is Wesleyan Chapel, where the First Women's Rights Convention was held in 1848. It was organized by pioneering women including suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton (contrary to popular belief Susan B. Anthony did not attend, though abolitionist Frederick Douglass did). To be at the birthplace of the women's rights movement in this country was truly a profound experience.

After my Cayuga Lake adventures, I hit the southeastern shore of Seneca Lake. Around Hector is a cluster of wineries, including Chateau LaFayette Reneau. Perched on a hillside with vines sloping down to the water, it's



“Another scenic spot I explored was Cayuga Lake's northwestern corner.”

Opposite Page: A view of Cayuga Lake from the Rowland House in Aurora.
Top: The red pier house on Seneca Lake.
Bottom: A bronze statue in Seneca Falls commemorating the first time Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Susan B. Anthony.

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one of the prettiest settings imaginable to sample wine. Atwater Estate Vineyards, next door, has pretty sweet views, too. Nearby is Note Fragrances, a lovely boutique perfumery where you can create custom fragrances. I had a ball creating my own scent (who knew vanilla and musk went together?). And from Hector, it's a quick ride down to Watkins Glen on the southern tip of Seneca Lake — be sure to pull over to snap a photo of the cascading Hector Falls along the way.

I had one of the best meals of my trip at Graft wine + cider bar, which has a farm-to-table small plates menu (the Brussels sprouts salad and the roasted carrots with dates, almonds and yogurt are to die for). The restaurant was a few minutes' walk to my hotel, the AAA Four Diamond Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel on a prime lakefront location. The rooms are spacious, comfortable and well-equipped. Many feature lake views, including the little red house at the end of the pier that's become the town's symbol. The outdoor patio is the best spot to catch the sunset — sit by the fire pit and simply ... relax.

My last stop was an impossibly adorable village on the northern tip of Skaneateles Lake. I stayed at the AAA Four Diamond Mirbeau Inn & Spa, one of the Finger Lakes' most lauded properties. The 34 rooms, with gas fireplaces and wood-beamed ceilings, face onto a flower-filled central garden and koi pond, creating a Zen-like vibe — the spa with indoor/outdoor soaking pools and Vichy treatments helps, too. Borrow one of the inn's bikes to explore: Browse the shops, visit the historic Sherwood Inn, and brave the lines to lunch on a fish sandwich at the mom-and-pop Doug's Fish Fry.

At The Krebs restaurant in a meticulously restored 1899 home with several fireplaces, I had a sublime meal of oysters and duck with bok choy, along with local wine (several nights a week it offers a raw bar in the lounge that's popular with locals). Before heading



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Left: Hector Falls. Above: The relaxation room at Mirbeau Inn & Spa.

home, I visited nearby Anyela's Vineyards. It was a perfect, cloudless day, and as I sipped a glass of chardonnay and gazed at the rhythmic rows of vines and calm blue waters of the lake beyond, I made sure to take a moment to savor all of the wonderful things I experienced during my all-to-brief foray into the fabulous Finger Lakes. ■

BOOK NOW!

There is so much to do and see in the Finger Lakes. For more itinerary suggestions visit AAA.com/FingerLakes.

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