

# Emerson Inn invites real relaxation in the Catskills

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SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

MT. TREMPER, N.Y. — Recently restored to its original fire-engine red, an 1896 “park drag” coach parked in front of the Emerson Inn and Spa informs new guests that they’ve started on the road to luxury.

As you enter the yellow-and-white

## WEEKENDER

Victorian building that houses the inn, a host, who might be from South Africa or Germany, offers a glass of Champagne and a seat at an intimate round table surrounded by what could be the spoils of a wealthy family’s African safari. There are weathered trunks topped with a hunter’s hat, rifle cases and sepia portraits of anonymous pioneers. By the looks of this cozy check-in nook, this is not your typical Catskill Mountains resort.

+ Built as an inn and train station in 1874, what is now the Emerson recently underwent a \$7 million renovation, which shines through in the Wedgwood and Limoges china, Frette linen, Waterford crystal, 4,000-bottle wine collection and after-dinner cigar lounge with floor-to-ceiling humidor.

Each of the inn’s 24 guest rooms is uniquely decorated in one of five styles: Persian, Victorian, West Indies Colonial, Asian or African. We had an Asian junior suite. There is a burlap screen awash in Chinese characters separating the bed from the sitting area. A crimson paper lantern adds a seductive glow over the bed. Sounds of the CD “Oriental Sunrise” emanate from the stereo, which the host leaves on to greet weary travelers. Each room comes with Sol mineral water, fresh fruit, a welcome letter from the general manager, personalized stationery and rich, handmade chocolates with the turndown service. Every room also bears a copy of “Nature,” a collection of the 1836 lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the inn’s namesake.

The meticulous placement of Turkish towels and Hermes toiletries on the bathroom's marble counter, which generously accommodates two people, further reveals this inn's superiority. The steam shower and enormous spa bathtub are inviting after a chilly afternoon stroll in the snow, although they're a treat in any season.

High tea in the drawing room also offers warmth. Seated across from each other on restored Victorian sofas original to the building, we nibbled on tiny ham and cheese sandwiches and sipped tea as the fire crackled beside us. Guests can choose from an extensive list of teas, from the exotic Indian Darjeeling to the familiar chamomile. Cakes and petits fours provide a sweet finale. Afterward, guests can play the antique square Steinway or

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# Rest restored at Emerson Inn

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engage in a game of chess.

Expect to spend a couple of hours savoring your dinner. Start off with a drink and tasty hors d'oeuvres such as quail eggs and smoked salmon, in the African bar, which features a carved-oak bar and plush leopard-print chairs. Sample the handmade celeriac chips, made from celery root, but try not to eat too many or you'll ruin your appetite for dinner.

The dining room is intimate, with subdued lighting and a canopy dividing the center of the room from the sides. A seat by the window offers a view of the

bluestone terrace with a lovely fountain and garden. In our three days at the inn, we sampled almost every starter, entree and dessert. Our favorite starters were the Roosevelt salad (mesclun leaves drizzled with Verjus dressing, walnuts and tangy Roquefort cheese); tiger prawns wrapped in phyllo pastry dough and basil; and warm Hudson Valley goat cheese topped with apples and honey. Entrees of note were the lamb medallions (roasted to perfection), and Black Angus beef a la Strasbourgeois, which was so tender, we cut it with our forks. Our favorite dessert was the warm chocolate souffle with raspberry cou-

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lis, although the Irish coffee delicie with whisky sauce, praline and homemade Bailey's ice cream was an artistic achievement.

The Champagne breakfast also proved divine. Handmade pastries, including plump, buttery croissants, chocolate-and-banana muffins and apricot-and-cheese Danishes, delicately sliced fresh fruit, strong coffee and fresh granola put some pep in your step for the rest of the day.

Every dining experience is heightened by the perfectionism of the international staff, who were brought in from countries such as Belgium, Wales, Ireland, France and Germany. They have transformed service into a science and this inn into a European escape.

If you can tear yourself away from the main building, you can delight in the Emerson Spa's more than 40 treatments, including hydro- and aromatherapies, Vichy showers, algae and mud wraps and oxygen facials. In this Orient-inspired spa, we tried the hydrotherapy, algae wrap and Vichy shower.

After donning the spa's robes and slippers, guests are led to the relaxation room, which contains books such as "Reading Tea Leaves" and "The Tea Ceremony," and several varieties of the beverage. Then the treatments begin. A skin brushing with what resembles a mushroom brush begins the Vichy shower process. Then there's sea salt exfoliation to remove dead skin. The Vichy shower follows. It is simultaneously invigorating and stress-relieving. Guests lie under pulsating water jets at variable pressure and temperature as a masseur kneads the knots from the legs, arms and shoulders.

Along with eight treatment rooms, the spa houses saunas, a

cardio-exercise center, yoga classes, and indoor resistance pool and whirlpool, around which lie stones that were collected from the nearby Esopus Creek.

Venture farther afield. Drive 15 minutes to Woodstock and enjoy the mixture of antique shops, hip pie enclaves and gift shops inspired by the Tibetan Buddhist monastery Karma Triyana Dharma-chakra, which towers over the town. Tours of the monastery are offered regularly. Visit Woodstock Glassworks on the way to the monastery for a glass-blowing demonstration.

For dinner, try The Bear Cafe. With a view of the Sawkill Stream, this French-American bistro, offering everything from grilled chicken to steak sandwiches, is a cozy spot. The town of Saugerties, with a strip of antique shops and country stores, also offers a delightful diversion from workweek worries.

Or you can simply head across the street from the Emerson for distraction. Catskill Corners offers 15,000 square feet of shopping and dining in a renovated dairy barn. The Catamount Cafe provides a rustic dining atmosphere with a roaring fire, plaid carpets, moose antler chandeliers and a library of nature-related literature. Seven shops include an earthy furniture store, with ottomans fashioned after bears; a shop that offers fishing licenses and supplies and a kaleidoscope store with items ranging from \$4 to \$6,000. The shopping center's claim to fame is the world's largest kaleidoscope, the Kaatskill Kaleidoscope. Enter a cylindrical room and watch the colors abound on the ceiling. Guests of the Emerson view for free.

Children and adults can delight in Professor Von Kaleido's Starworks and Tom Chouteus' Crystal Palace, which are rooms full of galactic wonders and kaleidoscopic kitsch.

For sporty types, the area also affords horseback riding, skiing, hiking, mountain-biking, rafting, kayaking and golfing. You can fish in the Esopus Creek.

The Emerson is a wonderful place to enjoy natural beauty and luxury living. Rates start at \$320 for a deluxe room, without meals. The American plan — including breakfast, afternoon tea and dinner for two — starts at \$500 per night. Children under 13 cannot be accommodated. Spa packages are available.

For reservations, call (845) 688-7900. Visit [www.the-emerson.com](http://www.the-emerson.com) for more information.

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This story ran 1/14/01. Justin Kraft, my husband, helped review the male spa treatment.

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