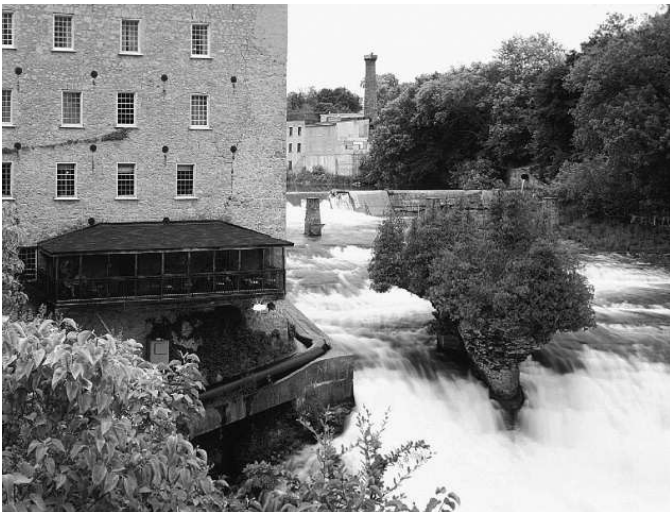


THE BUFFALO NEWS

One-Tank Trip/Fergus and Elora, Ont.

Start planning a weekend getaway for two

By MARIA CERAULO
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The Elora Mill Inn, located just outside of Toronto, offers a breathtaking view of the Grand River and the rushing Elora Gorge.



With the hustle and bustle of the holidays over, it's a good time to take a breath and stop thinking about the kids, the house and the job and consider a relaxing weekend getaway for two. And with Valentine's Day just on the horizon, the timing is also right for a bit of romance.

This is the first in a three-part "One-Tank Trip" series that will spotlight romantic getaways within a three-hour drive of Buffalo, destinations that are also perfect to celebrate a birthday, anniversary, wedding or any other special occasion. As an added bonus, all are located in architecturally significant buildings, dating to the 1800s in historic towns.

This week's feature is on two country escapes in Canada. Located about an hour west of Toronto and 10 minutes apart, Fergus and Elora are relaxing and quaint towns on the Grand River.

Breadalbane Inn

The Breadalbane Inn in Fergus was built in 1860 by a co-founder of the historic town. A magnificent example of Scottish architecture from the period, this charming stone inn features ornate ironwork, high ceilings, walnut banisters and an imported marble fireplace. Each of the 12 rooms, decorated with beautiful Canadian antiques, is named after a former owner. The deluxe suites, such as the Harrett Suite, feature a king- or queen-size bed, Jacuzzi and fireplace.

For fine dining, Maple Shade serves excellent gourmet cuisine and is set in a picturesque glass conservatory overlooking the garden where fresh herbs and produce are grown in season. Some guests find Maple Shade

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Restaurant reminiscent of Tavern on the Green in New York City.

Information

The Breadalbane Inn is located at 487 St. Andrew Street W., Fergus, Ont. Call (888) 842-2825 or (519) 843-4770 or visit www.breadalbaneinn.com.

Two-night Valentine's weekend getaways Feb. 12-13 range in price from \$399 to \$499 (all prices are Canadian) or Feb. 13-14 (\$460 to \$570). Packages include a rose, chocolate truffles, a bottle of Ontario champagne, chocolate-dipped strawberries, hot breakfast and two \$75 vouchers (one voucher per night) to be used in the dining room toward dinner. One-night packages for Feb. 13 or Feb. 14 are \$195 and \$245 and include all the above, with one dinner voucher.

Nearby

There are more than 200 examples of late 19th century stone architecture, now homes or shops, that evoke a Scottish heritage and echo the roots of the first residents. A walk along the banks of the Grand River can be like a stroll in a Scottish glen.

I Love That Chocolate (128 St. Andrew St. W., Fergus), offers a big selection of chocolates, including gift boxes and baskets that can be delivered to either the Breadalbane or Elora Mill inns. Its neighboring sister store is I Love That Gift.

Roxanne's Reflections Book & Card Shop (152 St. Andrew St. W., Fergus) stocks many fiction and children's titles as well as local travel books. Stop in at James Russell & Sons (227 St. Andrew St. W., Fergus) for casual clothing. Proprietor Doug Russell proudly displays some of the first photographs of the shop, which was established in 1888 as a dry goods store.

Elora Mill Inn

Just down the road from Fergus' Breadalbane Inn in Elora, is the Elora Mill Inn, a historically renovated grist mill that was built in 1859. The four-building inn offers a dramatic yet tranquil setting overlooking the Grand River and the Elora Gorge. There are a total of 32 rooms, including 22 rooms in the main building and 10 in the equally historic buildings adjacent to the property. Of the 10 rooms located outside the main building, three are in the Cottage, six are in the Granary and one is the James Ross House, a two-story Ontario cottage complete with galley kitchen, dining room and loft bedroom.

The Elora Mill Inn's rooms are inviting, with earth-colored fabrics, antiques and local artwork that create a simple yet beautiful ambiance. Each room is distinctively decorated, with romantic touches such as a four poster or canopy bed. Vaulted ceilings make some rooms especially spacious.

The inn's massive walls create wide window wells that are sunny nooks for reading or enjoying the view over the Elora Gorge. Many rooms overlook the Grand River and Elora Gorge and some have fireplaces and kitchenettes. You'll also find unique adaptations of original mill equipment, such as pulleys and levers.

Dining

With exposed stone walls and antiques throughout, the Gorge Dining Room has an earthy and historic atmosphere. You might dine near the large windows with a view of the Elora Gorge or near a cozy fire.

The dining room will offer a five-course, candlelit Valentine's dinner celebration from Feb. 11-14, featuring such items as pan-seared scallops and roasted lamb tenderloin. The regular dinner menu, which includes tableside preparation of Caesar salad or chateaubriand, is also available. In addition, the popular monthly senior's supper club runs on Feb. 15 with a special Valentine's menu including a three-course meal and

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musical entertainment (\$18.95 per person).

Information

The Elora Mill Inn is located at 77 Mill Street W., Elora. Call (866) 713-5672 or visit www.eloramill.com.

Valentine's Romantic Escape Package includes two nights accommodations, a bottle of champagne, chocolate-dipped strawberries, candlelit dinner and full breakfasts each day. Rates range from \$610 to \$760 per couple. One-night bed and breakfast only rates may also be available, ranging from \$185 to \$265.

Nearby

Tiny Elora's secret finds include a Swiss-born chef who has worked in the best kitchens around the world including those in Paris and Rome. Hailed by House and Garden magazine as "the most romantic of chefs," Alex Sgroi, owner of Alex's Kitchen (14 Mill St., Elora, reservations (519) 846-8247) retired in Elora and then developed a yearning to create his kitchen masterpieces again. He bakes his own bread and prepares homemade pasta daily. The locals rave about him so get a table while you can.

Plan on spending some time wandering through the quaint shops of Elora. Notables include (5 Mill Street E., Elora), a fine craft gallery selling mainly locally made upscale crafts and jewelry; Estate of Mind (11 Mill Street E., Elora) selling antiques, art and gifts; and Drimmie Florist (95 Metcalfe St., Elora) which specializes in delivering to both inns. Sweet Trash Vintage Clothier (69 Metcalfe, Elora) sells original fashions from the 1930s to 1950s.

"Couples love shopping here," says Lee-Ann MacKenzie, owner of the vintage clothing store. "Men will sit on the sofa while the women try on things they have picked out together."

In addition, the Elora General Store & Cafe (15 Mill St. E., Elora) offers gifts, accessories and a small cafe that

serves lunches of homemade soup, sandwiches and salads.

For something different, take in a movie in Gorge Cinema with an exposed massive stone wall and restored seating from the 1930's. The 30-year-old theater is the longest running repertory cinema in Canada. Located at 43 Mill Street W., Elora, the Gorge Cinema can be reached at (519) 846-0191. Schedules are available outside the lobby. Valentine's weekend features include Andrew Lloyd Webber's "The Phantom of the Opera" and "A Very Long Engagement."

Mapping it out

For tourist information on Fergus or Elora, contact www.ferguselora.com or call (877) 242-6353 or (519) 843-5140.

The Breadalbane Inn and Elora Mill Inn are members of Ontario's Finest Inns, a regional association of historic properties. Information: www.ontariosfinestinn.com, (800) 248-1797.

Directions: While both inns are easy to find, the most direct route includes traveling the QEW to Guelph and then roads through Guelph to Fergus or Elora.

Next week: The Finger Lakes

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