

THE BUFFALO NEWS

One-Tank Trip/Finger Lakes

Wine, romance served on Finger Lake's journey

(This is the second in a three-part series on nearby romantic weekend getaways.)

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The Aurora Inn boasts 10 lovely rooms including this expansive room with two four-poster beds and a comfortable sitting area.

The Finger Lakes region, with its multitude of wineries, quaint shops and comfortable inns, is a great area to plan a quick - and romantic - getaway.

These two Finger Lakes inns, dating to the 1800s, were reopened to the public in June 2003 after undergoing extensive, multimillion-dollar restorations. Both inns create an atmosphere that inspires romance for Valentine's Day weekend or a birthday, anniversary or

wedding.

Esperanza Mansion

Drive up the hill to Esperanza Mansion, overlooking Keuka Lake, the "Y"-shaped Finger Lake. What awaits is a classic two-story Greek Revival style mansion, constructed in 1838 by John N. Rose, son of a wealthy Virginia family. The four majestic Ionic columns at the entrance are built around huge tree trunks, encased in brick and stucco.

Listed as a National Historic Landmark, Esperanza Mansion is rumored to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad. It served as a vineyard, poorhouse and an art gallery. In late 2002, Dave and Lisa Wegman (no relation to the Wegmans supermarket family) purchased the property and beautifully restored it. Six months later, Esperanza Mansion opened to the public and a 22-room inn was unveiled in late 2003.

Accommodations in both the inn and mansion offer a spectacular view of Keuka Lake. Rooms in the inn are decorated in a country-casual style; those in the mansion are more formal and feature antiques, decorative fireplaces and four-poster or sleigh beds. These rooms are named after wine varieties, such as the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Attention to detail enhances Esperanza Mansion and can be seen in everything from the china pattern to the period antiques. A spa is planned to open later this year.

Visitors have two dining options. The mansion's two front rooms house the Mansion Restaurant and have original fireplaces. In summer, guests can dine on the outdoor patios and verandas overlooking Keuka Lake and the surrounding hills. The Grill opened in November with "relaxed" prices, such as the Kentucky Hot Brown

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(\$9.95) which is listed as a sandwich but is more a delicious open-turkey casserole.

Esperanza will offer a Sweetheart Week special Feb. 1-14. The menu offers a choice of Filet Mignon and Lobster Tails, Chicken Valentino or Seafood Lovers Fradiavalo. Included in these selections is the signature Faith salad featuring a delicious champagne vinaigrette dressing. With advance notice, Esperanza's staff can arrange a table side (or room delivery) of flowers, chocolates or even a ring.

There is a small but delightful gift shop on site.

Information: Esperanza Mansion is located at 3456 Route 54A, Bluff Point. Sweetheart Week rates apply Feb. 1-14 and include dinner for two, a single rose on the pillow, tuxedo strawberries and breakfast. Costs range from \$214 for an inn room to \$369 for the Mansion's Rose Bridal Suite. (Mansion rooms also include the delivery of a bottle of Finger Lakes wine.)

Contact: (315) 536-4400; www.esperanzamansion.com

Nearby: There are a few special events blending romance and wine in the upcoming weeks.

The Keuka Lake Wine Trail, just out the front door of Esperanza Mansion, is hosting a special "Be Mine With Wine" event Feb. 12-13. During the event, expected to draw about 1,200 people to the area, each winery will prepare a special dish with wine, such as Mussels McGregor made with McGregor Pinot Noir at the McGregor Vineyard Winery or Romantic Hungarian Goulash made with Keuka Spring Crooked Lake Red at the Keuka Spring Vineyards. Tickets are \$16 per person. Participants are assigned a starting location and can make their way around the trail, tasting as they go along.

Contact: (800) 440-4898, www.keukawinetrail.com

Just 10 miles from Esperanza Mansion is the Seneca Lake Wine Trail, offering a "Chocolate and Wine" weekend Feb. 5-6. Enjoy a self-guided tour around Seneca Lake and pick up your commemorative wine

glass with a rose-colored stem at your assigned starting winery. In celebration of Valentine's Day, each winery will make a dish prepared with chocolate. For example, Lakewood Vineyards is serving peanut butter and chocolate truffle cookies and Atwater Vineyards is producing their very popular wine filled chocolates. Tickets are \$25 per person with designated drivers tickets available for \$18.

Info: (877) 536-2717, www.senecalakewine.com

For additional tourist information on the region, visit www.fingerlakeswinecountry.com or call (800) 813-2958.

Aurora Inn

Sixty miles from Esperanza Mansion and tucked away on the eastern side of Cayuga Lake is the Aurora Inn, found in the center of the historic town of Aurora that has a population of just 400.

Built in 1833 by Colonel E.B. Morgan, a co-founder of the New York Times, the Aurora Inn is a three-story Federal-style brick building featuring white-columned porches and balconies which have been reproduced in the front and back of the building.

Following a complete restoration, the Aurora Inn now boasts creature comforts such as Bose CD players, DVD players, high-speed Internet access and plasma-screen televisions. Rooms are architecturally rich and graced with four-poster beds, duvet covers and antique furniture. Many have gorgeous lake views, fireplaces or balconies.

The lakeside dining room features wood banquettes, intimate booths and rich, red-cushioned chairs. Entree specials, such as chateaubriand carved tableside, will be offered for Valentine's weekend. The regular menu has entrees priced from \$16 to \$32. The menu includes the popular MacKenzie-Childs Chicken (\$18) which includes

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two plump honey garlic roasted breasts and the Aurora Inn Traditional Pot Roast (\$16), which features tender Australian beef slow cooked over five hours.

Music from a three-piece string ensemble or harps will add an extra touch for a truly romantic Valentine's evening. When making a dinner reservation, guests can request the popular pair of Scottish Orkney chairs. Their high backs envelope diners in the warmth of the nearby fireplace. In warmer weather, the French doors open onto a porch for al fresco dining.

Information: The Aurora Inn is located at 391 Main St. (State Route 90), Aurora. It has 10 rooms. Rates range from \$200 to \$300 nightly and do not include meals.

Contact: www.aurora-inn.com, (866) 364-8808.

Nearby: Since wine is one of the specialties of the Finger Lakes area, it's not surprising that there are two wineries close to the Aurora Inn: Long Point Winery, 1485 Lake Road, Aurora (315-364-6990, www.longpointwinery.com) and the King Ferry Winery, 658 Lake Road, King Ferry (800-439-5271, www.treleavenwines.com).

Several wineries on the Cayuga Wine Trail are individually celebrating Valentine's Day, with romantic dinners, chocolate desserts paired with wines or special Red Wine sales. A complete listing is available at www.cayugawinetrail.com or by calling (800) 684-5217.

Visitors should plan on spending some time at the nationally renowned MacKenzie-Childs home furnishings shop that offers two tours on weekends. One allows visitors to watch the artisans at work, while the other takes them through the farmhouse, a unique collection of MacKenzie-Childs whimsical creations.

Eat in the restaurant or just admire its eclectic decor and complete the tours by browsing in the tempting gift shop. MacKenzie-Childs is located at 3260 State Route 90. Tour times are available by calling (315) 364-7123 or by visiting www.mackenzie-childs.com.

Explore the picturesque village and quaint shops of Aurora, home to Wells College, founded in 1868 by Henry Wells of Wells Fargo stagecoach fame and American Express. For lunch or last-minute gifts, try Dorie's, which offers tasty soups, salads and sandwiches and hot drinks. A small gift shop offers cards, children's toys, penny candy and some gourmet's accessories. Dorie's is located at 283 Main St. Call (315) 364-8818.

Pizzaurora, directly across from Aurora Inn, sells tasty pizza pies and slices, such as the popular Greek pizza in a renovated, 1940's garage with a modern, artistic atmosphere.

Visit the women's designer fashion collection at Jane Morgan's Little House, 347 Main St., Aurora. Call (315) 364-7715.

Next to the Aurora Inn is Posies Flowers and Gifts, 381 Main St., a Victorian florist shop that specializes in delivering items to the Aurora Inn, such as flower petals on the bed, roses on the pillow or flowers in the room. Call (315) 364-8817.

With romantic escapes so close to home, it's easy to surprise that special someone with a weekend away from it all.

Next week: Western Pennsylvania

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