

Friendly North Creek is close to good skiing

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 4, 2011



Alpine Lodge in North Creek, N.Y., near Gore Mountain, may look like a motel from the outside, but it's attractive and accessible, and offers accommodation ranging from family-friendly to romantic, from comfortable to luxurious.

Photograph by: Alpine Lodge, Alpine Lodge

The hamlet of North Creek and the Gore Mountain ski and snowboard area are little-known treasures in the Adirondack region of upstate New York.

With a permanent population of 1,200, North Creek has an earnest, burgeoning tourism scene. The local entrepreneurs have a penchant for quality and style that makes a visit here very fulfilling. It's a friendly place, and intimate enough that you might share the chairlift at Gore Mountain with people and then say hello again at dinner in town. Plus, you know you're ahead of the tourist pack when you realize that the community is only getting its first cellphone service this winter.

"We're having a renaissance in North Creek," says Michael Bowers, whose family owns a few of the appealing businesses at the heart of Main Street. "Okay, it's a small renaissance, but we have new merchants, a wonderful atmosphere and a great lifestyle to add to our gorgeous surroundings."

The Adirondack lakes, mountains and rivers are terrific, drawing winter visitors for downhill and Nordic skiing and several other snow sports, and making the region irresistible in summer for hiking, fly-fishing, kayaking on tranquil lakes or rafting on the turbulent waters of the Hudson River.

The most visible Bowers business is barVino, a cool bistro and tapas bar with a chic, urban look. A building contractor during the day, Bowers is a wine and food aficionado at night, working at barVino alongside his daughters Anna, the manager, and Sarah, the beer expert, and his son, Luke, the executive chef. After a sojourn in New Mexico, Luke developed menus of tapas and small and large plates with Italian and American accents. You'll dine on antipasto, spicy mussels, homemade gnocchi, grass-fed braised beef, fried shrimp and hand-cut fries with truffle oil.

Acting as host, sommelier and brew master, Michael happily helps patrons choose from a remarkable selection that would impress even the most discerning connoisseur – 80 different kinds of craft-brewed beer and 30 wines by the glass. The bar is a delight for après-ski, informal suppers or periodic festivities, such as the next wine dinner, Nov. 21, and a feast planned around micro-brews, Dec. 5. Anna will give wine-tasting classes on Dec. 2, 16 and 30.

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There are other take-home treasures in North Creek. Mary Ann Bowers, Michael's wife, owns Poeima, a darling gift shop that stocks pottery, bath products and other appealing handmade goods at great prices. Christmas shopping will be a breeze.

In a few weeks, when the lifts roll for Gore's 48th season, downhill snow sports will be the main attractions.

This exciting mountain is a secret stash of edgy steep runs, intermediate cruisers, 21 glades, terrain parks and panoramic views from nine faces of four peaks. It has an impressive vertical drop of 773 metres (a shade longer than that of Le Massif, which is Quebec's longest) and the most terrain in New York State (almost the same as sprawling Mont Ste. Anne). With a multiple-day discount, an adult lift ticket costs \$57.50 U.S., per day, on a two-day visit. Gore runs a free shuttle on weekends and U.S. holidays with various stops along the five kilometres from North Creek's centre.

One of Gore's exceptional features is its in-town North Creek Ski Bowl, a lively face of the mountain that is only a short walk from Main Street.

The Ski Bowl is mostly an afternoon and evening affair, a combination of family fun for youngsters and a hip hangout where tweens and teens go for skiing, riding and snow-tubing under night lights.

Another couple is also making a big difference in North Creek. Innkeepers Greg and Sharon Taylor own two lodging properties: Fern Lodge, a posh lakefront B&B on a remote point in the woods on the outskirts of town, and the attractive, accessible Alpine Lodge on Main Street. Even though it looks like a motel from the outside, Alpine Lodge is much more. It has a sociable air, with a bonfire and marshmallow-toasting going in the courtyard during the evening, and an inviting lobby lounge with a fireplace.

The Taylors have rebuilt Alpine's interiors, creating a versatile series of rooms, suites and full apartments that range from family-friendly to romantic, and comfortable to luxurious. They all are decorated with handsome Adirondack furniture, but they range widely in size and price and some have features like king-sized beds, fireplaces, whirlpool tubs, pull-out sofas, DVD players and kitchens. The lodge does not serve food, but it's only one block to Café Sarah for breakfast burritos and warm scones in the morning or homemade soups and sandwiches at lunchtime.

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IF YOU GO

North Creek is a two-hour, 45-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 15 to the U.S. border at New York and Highway 87 south to exit 26 for Pottersville.

Alpine Lodge: 518-251-2451, adirondackalpinelodge.com, Main Street, North Creek, N.Y.

Price: Rooms cost \$139-239 U.S. for two people, per night, including wireless Internet. Extra person, \$ 15; one-bedroom suites with kitchens cost \$259 U.S., for two; two-bedroom apartments: \$290-495 U.S. Massages available. Ski-waxing room on site. Online specials come up.

barVino: 518-251-0199, barvino.net; 272 Main St. North Creek, N.Y.; dinner, \$20-40 p.p., U.S.; wine dinners, \$55; open daily at 4 p.m. except for Mondays.

Gore Mountain: 800-342-1234, 518- 251-2411; Peaceful Valley Road, North Creek, N.Y.; vertical drop, 773 metres/ 2,537 feet; 438 acres of terrain; adult day ticket costs \$68 U.S. on Mon-Fri.; \$75 on Sat.-Sun.; or \$79 during U.S. holiday periods. Children 6 and under ski for free. Watch for early-season specials.