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Pampered in Nature: Savour The Wilderness Fare At Rustic Canadian Resorts, by Melinda Cylnes

After a few more days of solo skiing, night-time stargazing and an owl prowling on snowshoes, I rendezvous with my husband, Dean, in North Bay for the last leg of my Ontario journey. On the northbound drive from Lake Nipissing along Highway 11, we spot signs for Granny's Restaurant, Dad's Store and Gramp's Place. But we feel as though we're home when we reach Smoothwater Ecodge, north of the village of Temagami .

Maybe it's the smell of baking cinnamon rolls or the welcoming, laid-back staff. Or perhaps it's the cheerful, sea-foam blue guest quarters, where we plant our knapsacks among antiques, curiosities and Canadian-crafted twig furniture and quilts.

Our cozy, eclectic room is decorated with owner-artist Caryn Colman's watercolors and her mother's needlework. These comforting surroundings lure me to nap, and weariness from the long drive floats out the window past incoming dreams of frolicking in Temagami's old-growth forests.

Soon enough, we are literally beneath branches of ancient maple and yellow birch, having skied out our door onto the 37-mile network of groomed cross-country trails. No noisy snowmobiles are allowed, and after crossing James Lake and heading into the bush, we escape the hum of semis along the Trans-Canada Highway .

It's peaceful out here, and I feel nimble, energized by the zingy smell of white pine and the graceful shadows of hardwoods. The trail climbs then gleefully dips, passing places like Otter Pond, Ice Fall Lake and Moose pond. An occasional pine grosbeak or blue jay joins us, but aside from that we are thankfully alone in the legendary Temagami wilderness.

Back at Smoothwater, we drift away in the sauna, sipping brandy and drowsily daring each other to run out for a snow bath. Around the corner from the sauna house is the main lodge, an A-framed chalet that pokes out of the woods like the bow of a voyageur canoe. In this lodge we gather for dinner with Caryn, her family (husband Francis and daughter Emily), and six other guests at the 15-foot dining room table. A pleasant offshoot of the family's ecologically sensitive practices is the amazing organic feast spread out for guests each morning and evening.

Tonight we dive into roast goose with high bush cranberries. I don't hesitate

grabbing the thickest slice of homemade oatmeal brown bread because I burned enough carbs on the trail to eat without guilt. The food is lovingly created and incredibly wholesome and fresh, prepared with locally grown ingredients and organic products.

Over dinner, Francis talks passionately of the history and geography of the Temagami region and the practices that help protect it. Smoothwater staff minimizes the use of energy, paper products and water by reusing, composting and recycling. Thus we learn of the "Temagami napkin rule." We each choose a cloth napkin and distinct napkin ring, which we reuse at each meal throughout our stay in a fairly painless way to save on trees and water.

Smoothwater's famous 20-pound chocolate cake, layered with bananas and raspberries, is a real mazurka of the mouth and the grand finale of tonight's banquet. Caryn swears the name does not reference weight gain, but the dessert's weight and cost of ingredients. As each bite of heavy, scrumptious cake somersaults then dissolves on my tongue, I feel lighter and lighter, floating on a great chocolate high above the great Ontario north._