

# An enchanting inn on Vermont's Willoughby Lake

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 16, 2012



The WilloughVale Inn, which has an idyllic location on the shore of Lake Willoughby in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, includes four lakefront chalets that provide comfortable accommodations for families and friends.

**Photograph by:** WilloughVale Inn

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Montreal businessman and hotelier David Gameroff owns a secret gem.

Gameroff is the proprietor of the enchanting WilloughVale Inn on the shores of pristine Willoughby Lake in Vermont, an accessible two-hour drive from Montreal.

Both the lake and the inn are among the star attractions of the Northeast Kingdom, a large swath of Vermont's magnificent forested mountains and lakes, due south of the Eastern Townships. It's an unspoiled, rugged, beautiful area that has been a muse for novelists Wallace Stegner (*Angle of Repose*) and Howard Frank Mosher (*A Stranger in the Kingdom*) as well as poet Robert Frost, who penned his impressions of the lake: "a pretty sheet of water, our Willoughby" (*A Servant to Servants*).

Gameroff, too, was inspired by the Willoughby region. He bought the WilloughVale after being seduced by the outstanding hiking on Mount Pisgah, Bald Mountain and Mount Hor, and by the remarkable scuba diving in the sparkling lake, which plunges as deep as 100 metres and yields crystal-clear views of the rocky underside of the mountains.

"I developed the WilloughVale because I love the area and I wanted to introduce Montrealers to it, but now we have people coming from California and Europe," said Gameroff, who also co-owns the landmark Green Mountain Inn in Stowe, Vt. with his brother Simon.

The WilloughVale is a connoisseurs' secret with inviting accommodations, appealing dining and an idyllic location, with views of loons diving in the early-morning light and boaters returning home as the sun sets.

At the heart of the estate is a rambling, moss-green New England lodge with 11 super-sized guest rooms decorated in an upscale country style with sturdy, traditional furniture, plaid bedspreads and richly patterned dhurrie rugs over dark barn-wood floors.

The rooms are outfitted for supreme comfort with air conditioning, satellite televisions and DVD players, and many with whirlpool tubs and fireplaces. And get this: Some suites have telephones on both sides of the bed so you don't have to lean too far over to make calls, which just happen to be free throughout the United States and Canada.

Apart from the main lodge, WilloughVale encompasses four snug lakefront chalets that are great for families and friends, and four romantic, private hilltop lakeview cottages that struck me as perfect love nests, but they're also popular with families because they have two bedrooms. They're well equipped with full kitchens and some have dishwashers, washer-dryers and barbecues.

"We want people who come from the city to enjoy a remote, near-wilderness setting, but still have comforts," Gameroff said. "Plus, people sometimes have to bring their work with them to get some vacation time. And, after an exhausting day of touring or sports, it's a pleasure to be spoiled with conveniences."

The Willoughby's dining room is Gil's Bar and Grill, run by chef Julian Borje, who is from Hawaii and trained at the New England Culinary Institute. He cooks up a fusion of French, Asian, American and Italian cuisine with such appetizers as fried calamari or steamed mussels, and main courses like Chilean sea bass encrusted with cashews, Angus steaks, grilled salmon or hefty pork chops with homemade chutney. He also does vegetable dishes — artichokes and spinach dip, lasagna and veggie burgers with hummus — and recently added a casual pub menu of baby back ribs, creative flatbreads, juicy wings in a ginger sauce and classic fish 'n' chips.

At first glance at this tranquil countryside, you would think there is little to do around Lake Willoughby, but it is full of action. Even if you are not a water person, you are drawn irresistibly to the lake. The WilloughVale has a water trampoline and small craft, or you can bring your own paddle-boards, windsurfers and scuba tanks. Consider sporting a wetsuit.

The lake is chilly, because it is fed by mountain springs. All the better for fishing, it seems. Perch and salmon are plentiful, and a local fisherman claims the U.S. record for the largest lake trout caught during one winter — nearly 20 kilos.

On land, the nearby Kingdom Trails mountain-biking network is considered one of the best in the United States. Jay Peak's Pump House Waterpark, a wildly popular year-round attraction, is a 45-minute drive from the WilloughVale.

In winter, within a short drive are the Craftsbury Nordic Center and Burke Mountain, a downhill ski area recently bought by Jay Peak. Snowmobile trails criss-cross the hilly Vermont landscape, with one trail leaving directly from the inn. And Mount Pisgah draws ice-climbers from all over the world who come to scale its ragged, sharply vertical cliffs.

"Even with all the outdoor sports and our restaurant, it is undeniably quiet," says WilloughVale's manager Roy Clark. "If guests need more to do, I call my wife."

Roy figured out that innovative solution because his wife, Patti Clark, runs Gameraff's other hotel, the well-respected Green Mountain Inn in Stowe, Vt., and can accommodate guests who would like to add shopping, nightlife and spa treatments to their vacation.

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## IF YOU GO

Westmore, Vt. on Lake Willoughby is a two-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 10 to Route 55 south and Vermont Highway 91 south to exit 26.

WilloughVale Inn & Cottages: 800-594-9102, 802-525-4123, [willoughvale.com](http://willoughvale.com); 793 Vermont Route 5A S., Westmore, Vt. Dog-friendly: \$31.50 U.S. per night.

Price: Until October, rooms in the main inn cost \$99-\$239 for two, including breakfast, and use of game room, playground, lakefront with canoes and kayaks and mountain bikes; children 12 and under stay for free in the main inn. Cottages for up to four people: \$279-\$319 per night.

Packages available with dinner at Gil's Bar & Grill or access to Kingdom Trails for mountain biking. The Romance Getaway includes champagne and chocolates. Motor boat rental: \$40 per hour.

Gil's Bar & Grill: dinner served Tues.-Sun. until Sept. 2; during Sept.-Oct., dinner is served Wed.-Sun.

Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association: 800-884.8001, 802-626.8511, [travelthekingdom.com](http://travelthekingdom.com).

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