

Traveling with Tots

By LIBBY CARTY MCNAMEE

It's a water wonderland at The Homestead

Ah, spring break beckons on the horizon like a ray of hope. The idea of swimming in an outdoor pool sure is tantalizing, especially when it doesn't involve a wetsuit. However, the cost of airfare or the mindless hours traveling south don't sound nearly so appealing.

Thanks to some wonderful innovations, you can now just drive west to The Homestead in Hot Springs, Virginia, in less than three hours. It is well known for its Jefferson Pools, which Thomas Jefferson visited in 1818.

Although it's nearly impossible to improve this historic Alleghany Mountain resort dating back to 1766, it has managed to do just that. As part of a \$25 million transformation, its large outdoor family pool is now open year-round. Spring-fed waters are heated to balmy temperatures, adding a steamy aura to an already gorgeous setting. You can even relax in one of the many chaise lounges on the heated stone-face deck. Plus there are several cozy all-season whirlpools with warm mineral-rich waters to soak in as well.

Granted, we were skeptical at first. Once we took the plunge into the misty water, though, it was divine. The kids especially loved the decadence of it all. The nearby locker rooms are well heated, so there's no need to worry about shivering when you get out.

The Homestead's recreational activities on its 3,000-acre setting are many and diverse. There's off-road driving, mountain biking, hiking, canoeing, paintball, falconry, Segway tours, archery, horseback riding, carriage rides, shooting, as well as their renowned golf and tennis. You can also play complimentary lawn games such as badminton, bocce, and shuffleboard on the lovely back lawn.

Regardless of the season or the weather, one thing is for sure: You'll



A two-acre water complex at The Homestead includes a 400-foot lazy river. Photo courtesy of The Homestead.

never find yourself lacking something to do. Depending upon the whims of Mother Nature, the ice-skating rink is located next to the outdoor family pool through early March, creating a winter wonderland. Downhill skiing and snow tubing are also available on the resort grounds through the early spring.

In May as we start rolling toward summer fun, the options will expand. Make way for some serious family adventure at the new two-acre water complex, Allegheny Springs. This sprawling attraction is filled with waters from the native springs. The "Mountain Rush" area offers lots of thrills and spills with three 100-foot water slides. These slides feed into a 400-foot lazy river that meanders past gazebos, geyser-like fountains, and under bridges. The water is a convenient three feet deep throughout the river. There is even a water play zone for young tykes with a sandy beach, a large kiddie pool and sprinklers.

A miniature golf course with 18 holes known as the "Mini-Cascades" will also open this summer. The Allegheny Springs Grille, a casual new restaurant, serves light meals, snacks, and drinks throughout the day.

For kids between the ages of 3

to 12, The Homestead's KidsClub is brimming with activities. Kids love their time there just as much as their parents do, if not more. In fact, our son always asks if he can go back again. Children must be potty-trained, and pre-registration is recommended.

Set to open in September, the Canyon Ranch SpaClub will offer family spa services, including treatments for children and teens. This serene new spa will include an indoor pool, three fitness studios, and cycling and Pilates rooms. The Canyon Ranch Café will offer a wide range of healthy food and vegetarian options. The Jefferson Springs spa garden will be the ultimate outdoor haven for adults only. Lush and secluded, it will incorporate the "taking to the waters" tradition that Thomas Jefferson enjoyed so much. This ritual known for healing and wellness is now a longtime Homestead tradition. This sanctuary will be available year-round with heated walkways during the colder months.

If your idea of relaxing doesn't include the great outdoors, The Homestead has no shortage of indoor resort activities. For those who want to swim indoors, there is a magnificent indoor pool also fed by the naturally warm mineral spring waters. You can

go bowling, play board games, take The Homestead history tour, enjoy mid-afternoon tea, or watch a nightly family movie in their turn-of-the-century theater.

In another renovation, the Presidents' Lounge has relocated to the dapper Lobby Bar in the Great Hall. In its space there will be an informal dining spot. Families of all ages will enjoy this comfortable new lounge with wood paneling, wide-screen televisions, and electronic entertainment.

RPM

Libby Carty McNamee is a local writer, lawyer and mom.

WANT TO GO?

The Homestead

Address: 7696 Sam Snead Highway, Hot Springs, VA 24445

Phone: (877) 549-9506

Website: www.thehomestead.com

Distance: 160 miles; 2 hours, 45 minutes

Rates: Variable with additional resort fee; different packages available