

ONTARIO

# Teeing up for fun in Muskoka

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## **Grandview's Academy nine-hole course is a perfect golf introduction for kids. (Lori Knowles/QMI Agency)**

What struck us first was the smell -- a mix of pine, cedar, damp rock and maple leaves--evident the second the van doors slid open.

The four of us had just hard-charged it north from Toronto via Hwys. 400 and 11 on a Friday night in late spring. We'd eaten burgers in the car, argued over directions, bathroom breaks and in-car movies, and were relieved when we finally rolled to a stop at Delta Grandview Resort near Huntsville in Muskoka, our lodging for the weekend.

What struck us next was the sound --or lack of it. We could faintly hear wind in the trees, water lapping ... and was that frogs croaking? Obviously we had travelled a long way from horns, lights and screeching brakes of downtown Toronto.

I travel a fair bit with my family-- across Canada, the States, sometimes Europe. But I cannot remember a moment when the four of us were so suddenly stilled by our new surroundings. I guess that is the beauty --and the lure--of Muskoka.

There were few people about as we entered Grandview's main lodge, The Owl's Nest, to check-in. It has a cozy, pub-like atmosphere -- a fire was burning in a fireplace somewhere --and it made us feel instantly welcome. We were given keys -- yes, keys instead of those plastic cards. And the woman who checked us in offered the kind of directions to our rented condo that only small-town locals know how to give: "Down the hill, left at the rock, up a hill, left again, you can't miss it."

Perched on a hilltop overlooking Grandview's nine-hole golf course, the one-bedroom unit was spacious, with a full kitchen, cavernous bathroom with separate shower and whirlpool tub, a fireplace, plus an open-concept living-dining area that spilled out onto a big deck. Doors were instantly opened and there were those sounds and smells again-- a recipe for rest, I was convinced of it.

Our kids were chirping with the birds the next morning, so we were ready for breakfast by eight. We were the first to arrive at the main dining room at the lakeside Rosewood Inn. The mist hadn't yet lifted off the lake, so, as we waited for our bacon, eggs, waffles and toast, from the vantage point of the restaurant's massive windows we sat in silence and watched the fog magically dissipate. The Rosewood is inside Grandview's original farm house, built in the 1800s on a hillside overlooking Fairy Lake. There is no mystery as to why it was called Grandview.

All the sweet syrup, cholesterol and carbs were worn off soon after breakfast with a walk down by the dock, along the resort's kilometreplus private lakefront.

The recreation centre was our kids' favourite spot. With few other guests about, they had the indoor basketball, tennis, badminton courts and pool to themselves. Grandview's busiest times are July and August, when the lake is warm and the beach, the kids' club, the mountain bike trails and the boats are in full action. May, October and the winter are low seasons and a lot quieter.

The following day was solely for golf. Grandview has two courses: The tricky 18-hole Mark O'Meara Golf course etched by the PGA pro into a beautiful, impossible landscape of rock, forest and hill; and the easier Academy Golf Course, a nineholer by the lake that's a decent test for your short game, but also ideal for kids and beginners.

I will always remember the Academy course as home to my kids' first nine-hole round of golf -- the highlight of our weekend. Fairy Lake was gleaming and the fairways were each an easy, perfect yardage for our kids to experience success in golf.

We closed the weekend with an oversized lunch in the O'Meara Bistro, marvelling how an architect could lay a course into the roughness of Muskoka rocks and woods. One last sniff of the pine air and we were back in the van headed for the 400.

The sights, sounds and smells really are the beauty--and the lure --of Ontario's Muskoka.

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