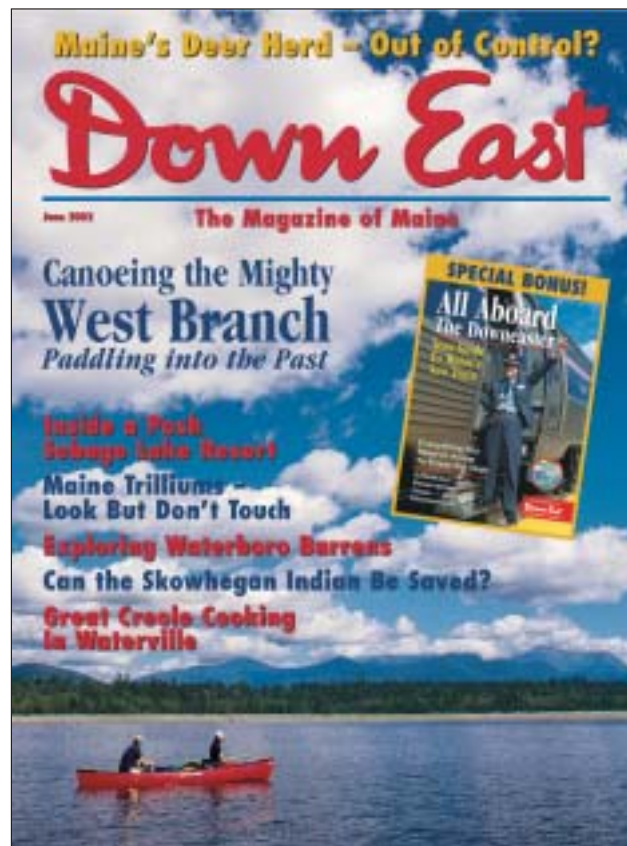


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Tall Trees, Tranquility, & Tradition

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THERE are any number of things most of us wouldn't mind being born with: A trust fund, for example. Or thick-hair and straight-teeth genes. Or a standing reservation for a high-season stay at the august summer resort on Sebago Lake known as Migis Lodge. And if you ever get a glimpse of this very special place, you'll understand why.

Its location — just moments off congested Route 302 and about forty minutes northwest of Portland — is deceiving. Sebago, the second largest lake in the state, can tend to be a less-than-pastoral destination. In certain quarters, shoulder-to-shoulder summer camps and cottages crowd much of its shoreline, while Jet Skis and powerboats rip and roar about. On a hot summer day, you'll have to be prepared to share your wee stretch of sand in the state park with the throngs of other relief-seekers. In short, most of Sebago Lake is very popular and very populous.

Thus, you might not quite be prepared for the instant quiet that engulfs you as you depart 302 in South Casco on the eastern shore of the lake and turn onto Migis Lodge's short, bumpy drive. Towering pine and fir so hem you in, you can hardly see the sky. The temperature

drops and the air sweetens, as though the grounds were contained in their own microclimate. It's tempting to just stop the car and bask in the calm — that is, if more of the same didn't beckon.

Passing the llama pen (the lodge keeps llamas) on your left and nearing the main enclave, you detect signs of a resort. A woman languidly pushes a pram. An older couple rumbles by on bicycles. A rough-hewn cabin is tucked into the woods. A three-tiered parking area is located, by design, away from the main lodge and cabins. The most arresting sight, however, must be the stacks and walls and mazes of split wood, which line every inch of drive and walkway and meet your every gaze. Migis seasons its own wood on site to fuel the innumerable fireplaces on the property. Regardless of the outdoor temperature, an eternal flame is kept going in the great fireplace in the main lodge, spicing the air with the aroma of wood smoke. If one could actually bottle Maine air, this would be the scent to capture.

A path curves from the drive and around to the main lodge, a hulking, two-story, shake-shingle structure that overlooks the lake. A sprawling flagstone porch, replete with tables and comfortable wicker chairs, stretches nearly the

The thirty-one lake-view cottages of Migis Lodge are spread throughout the resort's 100 wooded acres, offering ample privacy and quiet for the couples and families who favor the place. Three meals a day, excellent and elegant all, are served in the main lodge, which also has a half dozen guest rooms.







length of the building's façade. From there, down over a gentle grade, framed by more soaring pine, is a splendid view of the lake. The water dazzles in the sunlight. In the foreground, a cluster of small, fir-studded islands creates a natural barrier to the wide-open expanse of lake beyond. In the distance, rolling hills span the horizon. A cloudless blue sky arcs overhead. As you stand, drinking all this in, it almost feels as though you have been transported to another era and frozen into an old-timey postcard, with

the words "Greetings from Migis Lodge" scripted in birch-log letters in the corner. The traffic and summer swelter back out on Route 302 are a world away.

IT is just this sense of timelessness owner Tim Porta, a trim and energetic man who sports wire-framed glasses and a neat beard, strives to achieve. Porta, who has owned Migis Lodge since 1978 (he purchased it from his parents who had owned it since 1968), asserts tradition is the mainstay of the lodge,

which has been in continual operation since 1916. He notes that some of the families who come to Migis span back five generations. "If you see a toddler running around," he says, "you can bet his grandparents are also on the grounds." And you can also bet Porta is running around (he wears a radio hooked to his back pocket to keep him in constant contact with the main desk, as he dashes from dock to cabin to lodge), ensuring that all his guests are content.

When the lodge first opened, under





the name National Camps, it was little more than a rough-and-tumble fishing camp, with the main lodge plus eleven primitive cabins. It stayed that way for decades. In 1924, the camp was purchased by one Halsey Gulick, founder of the Campfire Girls, who changed the name to Migis (pronounced “MY-giss,” with a hard G), which in the Abenaki Indian language means “place to steal away to rest.” (Yes, the name is frequently mispronounced.) The lodge had one more set of owners, from 1945

to 1968, before it came into Porta’s family.

It landed in capable hands. Porta hails from a hotel family. His parents owned two hotels on Martha’s Vineyard when he was growing up. He says he knew he would follow in the family business since he was in the sixth grade. “My parents probably broke every child labor law there was,” he says, laughing. “There were five kids in my family, and we all worked in our parents’ hotels. I remember doing dishes in the hotel kitchen

Migis guests can be as busy or as lazy as they like. While the resort offers a full schedule of activities ranging from sailing and waterskiing to fishing and golfing, the gorgeous lakeside setting and the eminently comfortable accommodations patently encourage loafing.



standing on a step stool.”

After high school, Porta received a degree in hotel management at Michigan State. Following a stint in Vietnam, he went into the hotel business, working for the Sheraton chain for a number of years. But when his parents decided to sell Migis, he jumped at the chance to buy his own resort property.

He came into the operation with eyes wide open. He knew the clientele at a resort with such a long history might be resistant to change, but he also realized some updating was in order. One thing he did was suspend the then-existing no-children-under-six rule. This move was not simply based on a love of kids. Porta was responding to what he saw as the hot new trend in the hospitality market — that of multigenerational retreats. “The baby boomers, as a group, are going to soon start coming into their inheritances,” he says. “It’s going to be one of the wealthiest generations we’ve seen. And what do boomers prize more than anything? Travel. And they want to be able to bring their kids with them.”

To accommodate these families, changes — some subtle, some substantial — were required. He launched what has, to date, amounted to an \$8 million renovation, transforming the rustic cabins with one or two bedrooms and shared baths into luxury digs — some with cathedral ceilings, some fully wheelchair accessible, and some with as many as four bedrooms and four baths. “The idea of sharing baths doesn’t fly anymore,” he says. “Families don’t share bathrooms at home, and they don’t want to do it on vacation.”

Each cottage — with names such as Driftwood, Pinetops, Gray Gull, and North Star — has a living room, a fireplace, and a porch overlooking the lake. Inside, the pine-paneled walls and floors gleam. There’s a woody, fresh-air scent to the rooms — think Maine summer camp, sans the must. Cabin boys come around each day to lay fires, fill ice buckets and replenish glasses in the wet bars, and sweep the porches and decks. Despite all the improvements and service, though, the cabins still retain an authentic — and utterly relaxing — feel of yesteryear.

The dusky interior of the main lodge, however, is decidedly unchanged. To enter the common room, with its fieldstone fireplace, upright piano, wide windows, and overstuffed chairs and couches, is to take another step back in time. To the left of the common room, through

swinging doors, is the dining room — which is all austere pine elegance. To the right, is the main desk, where the staff bustles to attend to guests’ needs. A notice board is posted there to announce guest arrivals, the day’s activities and menu, just as it has probably been done for decade upon decade.

WHILE this winning combination of old and new, upscale luxury and casual comfort, helps define the Migis experience, Tim Porta did not leave it at that. To ensure Migis became a true destination resort, he implemented a full menu of diversions and programs for both children and adults. “When people arrive,” Porta says, “they throw their keys on their dresser, and that’s the last time they see them again before they

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check out.” That’s because he has seen to it that there is absolutely no reason ever to leave Migis’ 100-acre grounds.

Indeed, the array of things to do is dizzying. There are water sports of every stripe: swimming at one of the three beaches, waterskiing, boat rides and island visits in the 1946-vintage thirty-foot Chris Craft the lodge has owned since it was new. Fishing guides can be booked. Canoes, rowing dories, day sailers, and motorboats are available for those wishing to venture out on their own. Some guests prefer to bring their own boats (dockage is free), and there are even a couple of regulars who own and store boats in the area just for use during their one- or two-week stays.

For guests favoring nonaquatic activities, there are tennis courts, shuffleboard, walking trails, and an alfresco fitness center. Massages, mud wraps, and even acupuncture are offered, as well as a loll in the wood-fired sauna. On any given day you can participate in a yoga program, play bingo, or take a swing and Latin dance class. Golfers are transported, via boat, to the nearby Point Sebago golf course, where their carts await them on the dock. On Fridays,

a surround-sound movie is shown in “Boulders,” the lodge’s rec room/conference center. (The lodge is also available for corporate functions and weddings during the shoulder seasons — before June 15 and after Labor Day. Porta notes he is now doing weddings for brides whom he remembers as toddlers when they first started coming to Migis.)

And the kids are not left out of all this action either. Each weekday afternoon, traditional summer camp-style activities are planned and supervised by Migis staff. If guests find themselves at loose ends during their stay, it’s most likely by design.

Again, that is the successful Migis mix at work. In fact, doing nothing is the main goal of many Migis visitors, according to Porta. He says activities hold little appeal for some of his guests. “You know,” he explains, “I could book Barbra Streisand for a concert in Boulders, and there would be people who wouldn’t bother to show up. They are here specifically to spend time with their families.” And if you are trying to arrange a little quality time with kin, you probably couldn’t select a lovelier setting.

Of course, this all comes at a price. A week’s stay is the minimum required in the high season, and the per-person, per-day rate can run between \$200 and \$300, depending on the number in your party. Children’s rates range from \$40 per day for an infant to half-adult rate for a child six to twelve years old. While, with the American Plan, your three meals, excluding alcohol, are included, and most all of the aforementioned activities are gratis (except the use of motorboats — and that’s just to keep teens from hogging them, according to Porta), a family stay can obviously get pricey. In fact, one patriarch of an extended, multigenerational clan dropped a cool \$45,000 for one week’s stay. Okay, so there were thirty-one in his party, including babies, but still. . . .

Money, however, is clearly beside the point for the average Migis guest. The lodge is largely booked out for the next season by the end of the last. During the months of July and August, 90 percent of the clientele is made up of repeat business, according to Porta. There is a tacit understanding that once you have carved out your week’s niche at Migis, it’s yours and your family’s for keeps.

WHEN the lodge is at high-season capacity, there can be as many as 136 guests roaming about, along with 85 staff members — which begs the question: With all these people on the grounds and all there is to do, where's the thrum of activity? Where's the noise, where are the crowds? Sure, there's a little action down at the dock, where the water-skiers lounge in swimsuits and trunks and guests wait for excursions on the Chris Craft. Or, if you poke your way over to the shuffleboard area, you might find a quiet game going on or see a couple gliding away from shore in a canoe, perhaps for a picnic on a neighboring island. But overall, an amazing calm and quiet pervades. Porta notes that serenity is a large part of Migis' appeal — with one exception, that is. "The only time you get a sense of how many people are staying here," he says, "is at mealtimes. No one misses many meals here."

And with good reason. Not only is the food first-rate — offerings on the impressive and rotating menu, ranging from rack of lamb to tuna loin to roasted duck breast, are determined by what's fresh and available locally — but meals are also events. On Fridays, an outdoor lobster bake is offered. On Saturdays, a massive hot-and-cold buffet features large trays of chilled lobster tails, a variety of salads, pasta dishes, and smoked seafood, two carving stations, and a dessert bonanza. Wednesdays, there is a luncheon outing to an island. Box lunches are available, as is a continental breakfast — dubbed the "Snoozers Shelf" — for those who choose to sleep past the breakfast hour. Guests are assigned the same table and the same waitress for the duration of their stay, which means that as long as the dining room is open, they may amble in whenever they please and their table will be waiting.

The evening meal is the real star of the show, however. In an age in which even the best restaurants allow casual wear, men at Migis Lodge are still required to wear a jacket to dinner. Happily so, it appears. "That will never change," Porta says firmly — not because he insists on keeping the tradition but because his guests do.

EVEN though Porta has made Migis more kid-friendly, children under six are not permitted in the main dining room at dinner. They may either eat

with their parents in the family dining room, which is separated from the main dining room by French doors, or take part in the "Zoo Program" (the term "zoo" is a long-standing name in American Plan hotels for the staff dining room), in which kids eat at six and then participate in supervised activities. It's an arrangement that seems to keep everyone happy.

And that contentment is evident as the dinner hour unfolds. Fifteen minutes or so before mealtime, the front porch and duff-covered terrace below it are vacant — but that doesn't last long. First to arrive



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on the scene are a grandfather and grandson, a boy of ten or so, both in khaki slacks, shirts open at the neck, and navy blue blazers with brass buttons. They pad up the path to the porch, peruse the fruit and cheese tray, and then take a seat. A bartender instantly appears at their table. Next, a young father and his daughter select a table on the porch, where she entertains him by taking sips from her glass of ginger ale and making small burps. More guests arrive, and more bartenders appear, their trays filled with small individual decanters and bottles in order to mix cocktails tableside. Families slowly congregate, and the numbers of chairs swell around the tables on the terrace and the porch. Women greet each other with Hollywood-quality air kisses.

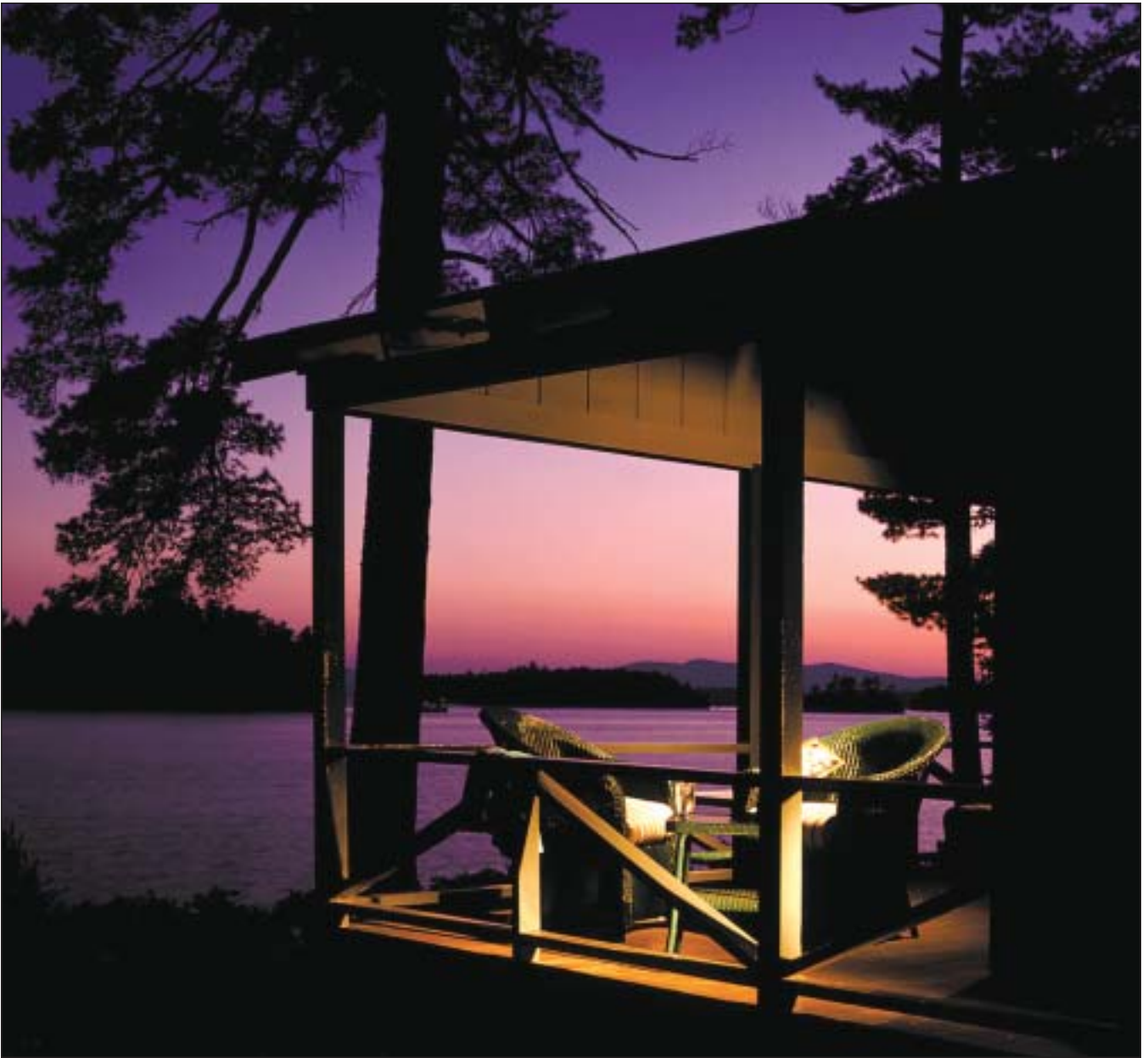
Men clearly have the disadvantage on this warm evening, with their jackets, but no one seems uncomfortable. There is only one necktie in sight and lots of bare ankles. One man, with a bit of fashion derring-do, sports sandals and linen shorts with his jacket, which elicits an under-the-breath comment from one of his fellow diners to a friend, "What's next? A *thong* and jacket?"

Soon both porch and terrace are filled to capacity. People lounge on the railing and around the steps. Cocktail voices rise and carry. And then, as if by cue, the crowd begins to thin, and the diners start to file inside. Many tables are set for parties of six and eight. Lorraine, the lodge's dining room hostess since 1950 (yes, that's 1950), mans the door, greeting each guest by name, and keeps the floor staff bustling. A diminutive woman with coiffed white hair and wearing a tropical-patterned jacket, Lorraine doesn't miss a trick. "That's a three," she says in passing to a young waitress who is setting a table for a party of five. Lorraine lays a hand on the shoulder of an already seated diner and leans in for a few moments of conversation, while keeping an eye on the rest of the room. There is clearly no question who is running the show. At the buffet, a guest asks the chef (who, himself, has been with Migis for nearly twenty years) when the buffet will shut down, and he replies, "Ask Lorraine. She's in charge here."

The dining room is at full tilt and is filled with the quiet clatter and tinkle of dishes and glassware and the din of lively conversation. Outside, dusk gathers. The trunks of towering pine turn black in silhouette. The lake stills. There is an antique quality to the light. As you gaze out the window, you can't help but think of the generations that have gazed out this very window at countless Maine summer evenings very much like this one. And, oh, if you could only turn back time and prod your ancestors into securing a midsummer reservation at Migis Lodge for your use, so you could join these families for a week or two.

Oh well, you think. It doesn't hurt to dream. □

While Migis Lodge has virtually no openings in July or August, occasionally there are a few, and there are several in June, September, and October. Supper is open to the public by reservation only. Phone: 207-655-4524; e-mail: migis@migis.com



MIGIS LODGE

On Sebago Lake

To learn more about staying at Migis Lodge with your family or business, please contact us:

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