

Lofty Retreat

Hop the border to Virginia's Primland for a luxury experience that reaches for the stars

WRITTEN BY MELISSA REARDON

“One light year is the equivalent of six trillion miles,” Virginia Tech masters student Lauren Perry notes as she types in star coordinates, and the massive telescope begins its slow rotation to pinpoint the burning ball of gas in deep space.

A small group, including myself, is gathered in the observatory at Primland, a luxury resort just over the North Carolina border in Meadows of Dan, Virginia, which just happens to have a super-powered, research-grade telescope that can peer at galaxies a mind boggling 27 million light years away. The observatory is unexpectedly located inside a state-of-the-art barn silo, the lid of which rotates and slides back for the awe-inspiring stargazing.

“Looking at light that’s 12 million years old really makes you realize the brevity of life,” Perry adds. It’s a powerful notion, and one that makes me realize that the sky truly

is the limit at Primland.

The 12,000-acre mountaintop resort, completed in 2009, was the vision of the late Frenchman Didier Primat, whose family operates it today. Primat was a lumber tycoon who built his fortune developing a market for tree chips and kindling. What began as a retreat for sport hunting has grown into an escape unrivaled in Southern Appalachia. Offering ample lodging options, including cliff-hanging tree houses,

an acclaimed golf course, a European-style spa inspired by Native American traditions, multiple restaurants, and an array of activities that leave you wanting for not, it’s no wonder Primland turns up on all of the most revered top hotels lists. Like any extravagant vacation, you have to pay to play, but the splurge extends an experience you’d have to be a lunatic to forget.

Any visit to Primland starts at one of two gates and follows a long, winding road to



SEE & DO From a 2,800-foot plateau just beyond the North Carolina border in Virginia, Primland counts horseback riding and golf on a Donald Steel-designed course among its many offerings, as well as views that stretch for miles.



TREE HUGGER Among the accommodation options are three intimate tree house cabins that are built around big solid branches and hang out over the Kibler Valley far below.

the top of a lofty 2,800-foot plateau, which offers grand views over the Dan River and rippling blue ridges beyond. On a clear day, it’s even possible to see Winston-Salem in the distance. Any traffic you may have encountered en route gives way to the occasional roadway meanderings of wild deer and turkey. Life slows down.

For my stay, a Blue Ridge suite in the 26-room boutique Lodge proved most enjoyable. The LEED-certified hotel is constructed with indigenous and recycled materials, such as American chestnut gleaned from old area barns. Architecturally speaking, the lodge could be likened to an enormous Swiss chalet with a silo—a nod to the surrounding area—and the inside, which features lots of warm wood tones and stone fireplaces, beautifully blends rustic elements with modern luxury.

While the lodge is ideal for couples or a few friends, families and larger parties can choose from among 26 homes and cottages dotted throughout the property. The four new Pinnacles Cottages will test your comfort with heights; stand on any of the balconies and you’re literally suspended over the valley. Likewise, three tree houses offer the same thrill in a more intimate environment and with the added novelty of, well, staying in a tree.

As you might expect, you’ll never go

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STAY & PLAY Novice and experienced marksmen can embark on guided or semi-guided hunts. Right, the Woodpecker is among three cottages that sit along the 10th and 11th fairways of the golf course.

hungry at Primland. Offerings at the four restaurants range from casual to gastropub fare to fine dining. Elements restaurant is the crème de la crème, serving locally sourced French-inspired new Southern cuisine on Bernardaud china, and offering a wine selection that encompasses more than 2,000 bottles. Dining in-room? You can even call ahead with your grocery list and have it delivered upon arrival.

When it comes to the play part of the stay, there are many options. Fall and winter are prime times for hunting pheasant, quail, and deer, with turkey hunting in the spring. Guided and semi-guided hunts are available to novices and experienced hunters alike. Fishing, sporting clays, and a new bow and air rifle range are also on offer. Golfers shouldn't miss hitting the links on the 18-hole Highland Course, designed by acclaimed architect Donald Steel. And other activities, including horseback riding, mountain biking, geocaching, tree climbing, and an ATV adventure, appeal to all ages.

Unwind at the spa, where 40-plus French treatments are influenced by the traditions and beliefs of seven Native American tribes that once roamed the land here. Turquoise, symbolic of the sky, and brown, representing



the earth, color the serene environs, and the forces of nature—fire, air, water, and earth—play a role in the grand scheme as well.

And of course, don't miss the chance to experience the observatory. The Whirlpool galaxy in the spring, Sagittarius constellation in the fall, Andromeda galaxy in the winter, or the occasional meteor shower—the scope of exploration is as boundless as the night sky. If the timing's right, the staff will even show you the star registered in Primland's name—because when you offer an experience that goes above and beyond, why shouldn't you have your own beacon in the sky? ▲▲

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