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Sweet dreams

Margaret Swaine

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The Global GOURMET



28 MAR 2011: As the snow melts and sap rises, a truly Canadian way to celebrate spring is embracing all that our maple trees have to offer. I still have vivid memories as a child going to sugar shacks in Quebec to watch the sap boil away into delicious syrup. A special treat was getting a stick of the maple taffy fresh off the snow where it had been laid to cool. A recent all maple day in Northumberland County brought me back to my childhood and was just as much fun.

It was a trip through small town Ontario that started with a wake-up call as dawn rose on the Trent Severn Waterway. I opened the drapes of my charmingly renovated room at Water's Edge Inn in Campbellford to sunlight dancing off the Trent River. After a quick tea on my balcony I headed with my companions to the tiny picturesque village of Warkworth where the 25th annual Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival had just taken place.

We stopped first at Gallery B&B for breakfast and then crossed the street to Glover's Farm market where the smell of fresh baking filled the air. Denise Glover cooks everyday they are open offering hot from the oven cinnamon buns, baked beans, savoury and sweet pies, their own farm raised beef and of course local maple syrup.

More mouth watering aromas greeted us at Sprucewood Handmade Cookie Company, tucked in back of Mrs. McGarrigle's Fine Food on Centre Street.

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They had been baking since eight in the morning and of course we had to sample some of the maple shortbreads. Among the multitude of gourmet products lining the shelves I found Mrs. McGarrigle's Canadian Maple, a grainy style mustard with a distinctive maple finish which I was told would make great maple glazed ham.

Spring was in full swing at Sandy Flat Sugar Bush just down the road and into the woods. Four times world champion maple syrup producers, George and Alice Potters played old time music for guests in their laid back pancake house while we all indulged in sausages, biscuits, beans and pancakes slathered with maple syrup. Outside others were enjoying horse drawn sleigh rides through the maple forests, sugar bush tours as well as new and old method maple syrup making demonstrations.

Our bellies full, it was time to take care of our bodies at Ste. Anne's Spa in Grafton. Voted Canada's favourite spa 2006-2010 by SpaFinder Reader's Choice, Ste. Anne's is Canada's largest destination spa with day and overnight packages. Set on a 400 acre estate with a lovely view of Lake Ontario, natural spring water flows from every tap and is used to fill the pools and hot tubs.

The spa services menu is extensive but going with the theme of the day I went for the spa's spring seasonal treatment called Maple Showers.

It began with an organic maple sugar scrub to exfoliate my dry winter skin. Then Lisa, my spa hydro therapist wrapped me in insulating linens to allow my body to absorb the healing vitamins and minerals found within natural maple sugar. After she unwrapped me, she wheeled my waterproof massage bed under a warm Vichy shower, using the water to gently rub the maple sugar off me. She concluded my sweet treatment with an application of maple syrup infused skin lotion.

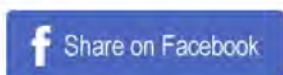
When I had my robe back on she handed me real treats - a maple elixir to enrich the body internally and a chocolate maple bonbon that was pure indulgence.

The last stop of the day was the Woodlawn Inn in Cobourg. Once the principal residence of the city's first mayor, it has tripled in size over the years and now boasts twenty luxurious guest rooms. There's also a bar well stocked with single malts and a fine dining room where we had one last feast before nightfall.

Owner and sommelier Stephen Della Casa served us the Proudly Northumberland menu.

It started with a cheese and mushroom tartlet featuring Empire Cheddar from Campbellford. The main was bison sirloin from Century Game Park in Warkworth. Served as a roulade it was stuffed with maple bacon, pickle and braised onion. The dessert? What else but maple ice cream crepes with Sandy Flat Sugar Bush maple syrup drizzle.

It was sweet dreams for me that night.





Margaret Swaine

Margaret is a nationally published wine, spirits, food and travel writer, who has authored thousands of articles on these subjects for magazines and newspapers.

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