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Island Spirits, Rice Lake: A Unique Eco-Lodging on a Private Ontario Island

BY CAROLYN B. HELLER ON JULY 17, 2015



You know you're in for an adventure when the owner of a private island picks you up in her boat, shuttles you across the lake, then dons a coonskin cap, and asks you to identify a furry sack.

Especially when that furry sack turns out to be a pair of buffalo balls.

Island Spirits, an eco-friendly Canadian lodging just two hours east of Toronto, isn't your normal private island escape.

But thanks to gregarious owner "Captain" T.J. Chernuck, her menagerie of animals, and the beautiful setting in the middle of Ontario's Rice Lake, a getaway to this eco-escape on Grasshopper Island is great fun.

Here's the scoop:



Grasshopper Island, Rice Lake, Ontario

Location and Facilities

Island Spirits is located on a 25-acre forested private island in Rice Lake, which is north of the town of Cobourg, in southern Ontario's **Northumberland County**.

Captain T.J. or one of her staff pick up guests in her boat, "Spirit of the Loon," for the five-minute ferry ride to the island.

No cars are allowed on Grasshopper Island, although the staff have small ATVs that they use to transport guests' luggage and supplies between the ferry dock and the accommodations, which include cabins, a studio apartment, platform tents, and even a teepee.



Alpacas roam the island, along with sheep and chickens

In keeping with her eco-philosophy, and to the delight of the younger guests, Captain T.J. has several alpacas and a small herd of sheep who roam freely on the island and keep her from having to mow the grass or trim the shrubs.

One evening, I was startled by a gentle "baaaaa" that seemed to be inside my cabin. It turned out that the sheep had settled in for a rest underneath the cabin.

Chickens also wander the island, and in an enclosure labeled the "Composter," Captain T.J. keeps several pigs, who consume most of the island's food waste. Yes, you're allowed to feed them.



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One of Island Spirits' eco-cabins

Accommodations and Amenities

Accommodations at Island Spirits include two two-story "eco-cabins," with a living room on the main level and a large, loft-style bedroom upstairs with a picture window and six twin beds (which could be converted to three king beds). The living room has a queen-sized futon, which can be used to sleep two additional guests.



Inside the cabin, Island Spirits

Each cabin has a "kitchen" – a table in the corner stocked with dishes, pots and pans, and utensils. You can't cook inside the cabins, nor do they have running water, but you can prepare your food on an outdoor propane barbecue. Guests bring their own food and bedding.

Large barrels outside each accommodation collect rainwater, which you can use for washing.

Facilities are a bit too rustic to be considering "glamping," but they're a comfortable, family-friendly alternative to camping, particularly when you're relaxing outside on the Muskoka chairs or on the decks overlooking the lake.



Yes, there's wi-fi on this private island

Electricity comes from solar power, and one end of the island has wi-fi that you can pick up in one of the cabins, the eco-loft, and at an outdoor hot spot.



Outdoor shower in the trees, Island Spirits

Each unit has a well-maintained private outhouse. There are two outdoor "eco-showers" hidden in the trees, with solar-heated water, one on each end of the island.



Eco-loft interior, Island Spirits

Another lodging option is the “Eco-loft,” a studio apartment that’s above Captain TJ’s office and workshop. It has two queen beds and a queen futon sleep sofa, as well as an upstairs outdoor deck.



Platform tents are another sleeping option at Island Spirits

The island has 10' x 12' platform tents, each with wood floors.

The Miner’s Tent sleeps three, with one double and one single bed.

Noah’s Ark is a bigger site with two platform tents – each with three single beds – sleeping six people total. Also on the site is a private floating dock, where you can fish, swim, or just relax.



Sleep in a teepee at Island Spirits

Another option is to sleep in a large teepee that accommodates up to six, with one double bed and four singles.

Yet another alternative is to bring your own tents and set up camp on the island.



Island Spirits' wood-fired bread oven