

February has many distinctions. Of course, it is the shortest month, whether it is 28 and 29 days. It is the birth month of two of our best-known presidents: George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. It is the last full month of winter.

But for many couples the best part of the month is Valentine's Day. The day that celebrates love and romance is the perfect time for couples to plan a close-to-home getaway without the kids.

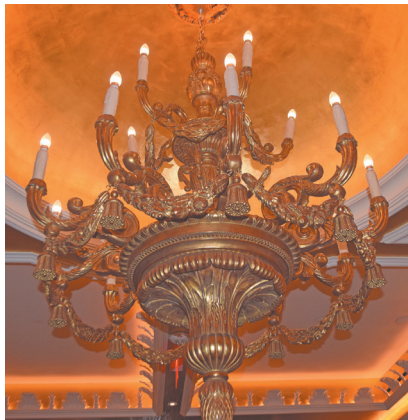
It always surprises me that a simple overnight can be so rejuvenating and relaxing. If you are lucky you might have relatives to watch your children or, if not, consider arranging a swap with friends. Generally hotel prices are the lowest during the winter.

Here are two new hotels that would make an ideal winter escape — one in the heart of downtown Buffalo and the other on the shores of Chautauqua Lake, 75 miles south of the city.

The **Curtiss Hotel** (210 Franklin St., Buffalo, 716-954-4900; curtisshotel.com)

is a high tech, 68-room luxury boutique hotel inside the shell of a historic former office building. Commissioned by attorney Harlow Curtiss in 1912, the building was home to a number of businesses over the years, including the legendary Kittinger Furniture Company.

At the time it was built, it was one of the tallest buildings in the city. It was designed by Buffalo architect Paul F. Mann. The building fell vacant in the 1990s and developer Mark Croce bought it in 2002 and set about to transform it into a special posh experience.



possess a Vegas vibe and the décor is clearly chosen for the “wow” factor.

Actress, singer, and theater star Vanessa Williams, who is married to a Buffalonian, is a fan of the hotel and has stayed several times on her regular visits to the city. “I love the rotating bar

FAMILY TRAVEL

— by Deborah Williams



Opened in 2017, the \$24 million hotel took nearly eight years in the planning and construction. The final results are quite spectacular, with many special touches. First impressions are always important and there is no worry about parking — free valet parking is included for guests, as well as a free shuttle to area highlights such as a Sabres game or an evening at Shea's Buffalo. There are a number of restaurants within a few blocks.

Since its opening, the hotel has attracted quite a buzz, including some celebrity guests. The hotel's public areas certainly

our breakfast in the adjoining, enclosed light-filled sidewalk patio. The five beautiful restrooms are each decorated differently.

Also off the lobby is the unusual hot tub that is billed as “Buffalo's first and only year-round Urban Hot Springs experience.” It is actually much bigger than any typical hot tub and can be enjoyed both inside and outdoors. Soaking in the spa on a cold winter night while the snow is falling is definitely an unworldly experience. It is even possible to swim a bit. On the lower level there is a fitness center and spa services.

Reached by one of the two high-speed elevators, our room was full of high-tech surprises. Though we were able to decipher the controls in the bedroom and in the quite amazing bath-



room, some written instructions would be helpful, as would a description of the hotel and amenities. The bedside tablet controls the lights, television, drapes and temperature — but there was not enough light for reading.

downstairs and the sky bar is beautiful.”

The most impressive rooftop bar is officially called the Vue Rooftop Lounge. Open year-round Tuesday through Saturday, beginning at 5 pm, the panoramic views of Lake Erie, the Canadian shoreline, and downtown buildings are hard to top. The fire pit and heated enclosed bar areas offer warm spots to get away from Buffalo's winter cold.

Downstairs, just off the lobby, are the revolving bar and the 200-seat Chez Ami Restaurant. The name is an homage to the former Chez Ami Restaurant on Delaware Avenue that was known as the Home of the Revolving Bar back in the 1950s. We enjoyed

The bathroom consistently receives the most rave reviews, especially the shower with six jets including a steam function. It is certainly one of my most memorable showers. There was also a tub with multiple jets. Then there is the Toto Japanese bidet toilet, an experience to remember especially if you are a first timer.

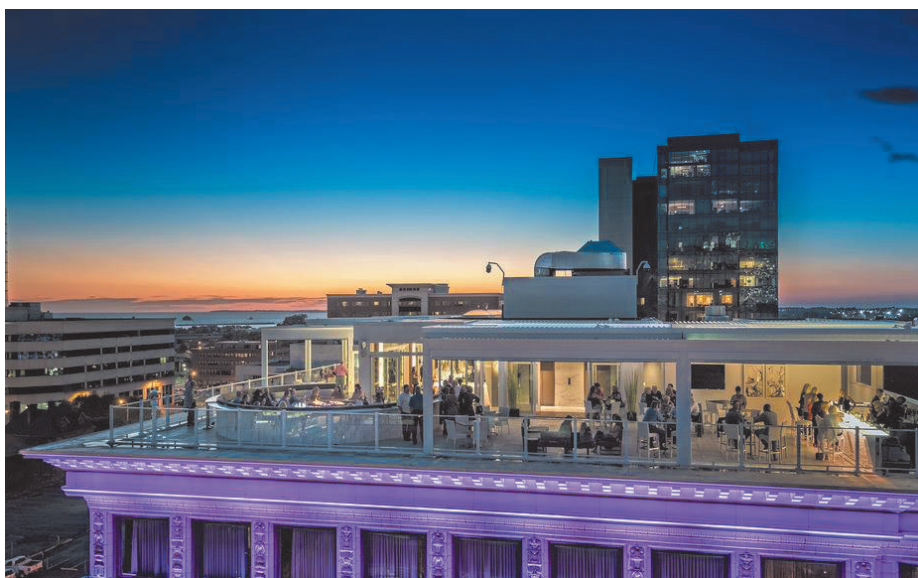
Their Staycation promotion continues through March 31 and is available Sunday through Friday, except for certain blackout dates. It includes a king room, a three course dinner for two at the Chez Ami Restaurant, breakfast for two, valet parking, and a \$40 voucher to the Buffalo Chophouse, also owned by Mark Croce. The price is \$199.

The hotel is part of Choice International's Ascend Collection of independent hotels that includes the Giacomo in Niagara Falls.

Chautauqua Harbor Hotel (10 Dunham Ave., Celoron, NY; 716-489-2800; TheChautauquaHarborHotel.com) is a dazzling new \$38 million, 135-room hotel with a prime location on the shore of Chautauqua Lake. It opened in September 2018, just after the debut of the National Comedy Center in nearby Jamestown. It is now the largest year-round hotel in Chautauqua County.

It is the newest addition to Buffalo-based Hart Hotels' Harbor Hotel Collection. Speaking of the long-awaited hotel opening, David Hart, President and CEO of Hart Hotels said: "We are thrilled to open Chautauqua Harbor Hotel, the fifth in our Harbor Hotel collection and bring world-class, waterfront accommodations and conference facilities to the region."

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FAMILY TRAVEL *continued...*

It is located on the nine-acre site of the former Celoron Amusement Park. In 1891 a Warren, Pennsylvania company purchased the property from the estate of Mary Pendergast to create a summer resort. It was renamed Celoron in memory of the French explorer General DeCeloron. The park that included the Hotel DeCeloron opened in 1893 and drew thousands over the years until it closed in 1962. Lucille Ball, who grew up nearby, was one of the many visitors.

The Hilarious Getaway package is popular and includes tickets to the National Comedy Center and Lucy/Desi Museums, a meal voucher to the Lakehouse Tap and Grill (serving breakfast, lunch and dinner) and even Groucho Marx glasses. The glasses come with a voucher that reads: “No Joke! Wear Your Groucho Marx glasses to the Lakehouse Tap & Grille and enjoy a complimentary dessert.”

Be sure to visit the National Comedy Center Exhibition in the hotel lobby for a preview of the laughs in store for you. Stroll along the lakeside boardwalk on your way to Lucille Ball Memorial Park adjoining the hotel, boasting statues of the First Lady of Comedy.

Fascinating reproductions of old prints and photographs featuring the amusement park and Lucy line the halls and public spaces. Staff is very friendly and gracious. Everyone seems quite proud to welcome guests to this beautiful hotel that manages to blend many stunning arts and crafts style features from the grand lakeside hotels of yesteryear with all the modern conveniences.

Although it is closed for the winter, the lakeside Carousel Bar pays tribute to the carousels of old. It is connected by footbridge to Sunset Island offering a special setting for private ceremonies, receptions, and performances.

No detail is missed. Landscape architects have created beautiful plant-filled grounds with inviting patio areas, fire pits, and an outdoor pool area. Just inside is the indoor pool and hot tub with an impressive wall of murals from the early days of Chautauqua tourism. Next door is a large state-of-the-art fitness center.

Rooms are spacious and many include balconies offering a prime vantage spot for viewing the spectacular Chautauqua Lake sunsets. Rooms come with thick bathrobes and refrigerators. Coffee and tea is served every morning in a sitting area on each floor.

The Fire & Ice Celebration takes place February 14-16 and features more than 20,000 pounds of ice carved into ice sculptures, luges and bars. There will also be music, drinks and food. The President’s Day Weekend Winter Festival runs February 15-17 in Mayville with fireworks, a flare parade, bonfire, horse-drawn wagon rides and more.

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Deborah Williams is a veteran travel writer and author who lives in Holland, NY. Her work has appeared in national and international publications and she is the recipient of the Society of American Travel Writers’ Lowell Thomas Gold Travel Writing Award.

