

Traveling with Tots

By LIBBY CARTY MCNAMEE

Splendor in the Alleghenies

And to think I almost dismissed Bedford, Pennsylvania, as too far away! Now having visited the stately Omni Bedford Springs Resort, I can vouch for the downright enjoyable four-and-a-half hour drive. Surprisingly enough, it's actually closer to Richmond than parts of Virginia.

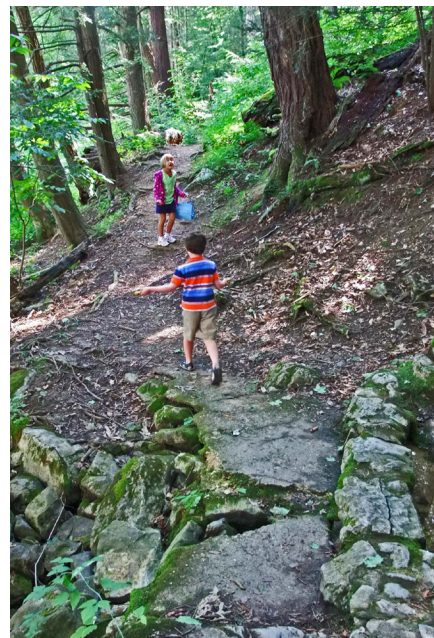
After picking up Route 17 in Fredericksburg, we rode through bucolic farmland and rolling green hills, now ablaze with fall foliage. Plus we had the additional bonus of passing through another two states, Maryland and West Virginia, along the way. After stopping a bit more than halfway in Winchester, we competed to be first in spotting each new state border.

Before we knew it, we came around the bend and caught our first glimpse of the mammoth building, as majestic as it is gargantuan. We couldn't help but exclaim, "WOW!" No wonder it's a National Historic Landmark. The history of this grand destination resort is remarkable, dating back to 1796. President James Buchanan once used it as his "Summer White House," and nine other presidents have visited. During World War II, the Navy conducted training there and later housed interned Japanese diplomats.

If you're wondering why you've never heard of such a noteworthy hotel, it fell into disrepair and closed its doors in 1986. After an amazing \$120 million in renovations, it reopened in full splendor in 2007.

The opulent hallways, parlors, and wide porches never seem to end, so exploring this glorious hotel is an activity in and of itself. Kids get to burn off some energy, giving parents a chance to marvel over the spectacular decor. There have been numerous additions over the years, leading to lots of unusual nooks and crannies to investigate. Don't forget your stroller. Similar to the Homestead in Hot Springs, Va., going from one end to the other is truly a hike.

Speaking of hikes, this classic resort has 25 miles of well-marked woodsy ones, including mountain biking. The majority begin outside the main entrance, but there are



The Omni Bedford Springs Resort in Bedford, Pa., is a sprawling historic resort with wide porches and plenty of hiking trails. Photos by Loretta Sherwood.

many others on the sprawling 2,200 acres, including a lake stocked with trout. For those on a quest, GPS devices are available for geocaching treasure hunts, often leading to one of the seven hot springs on the grounds.

These magical hot springs feed into the magnificent indoor pool, creating a heavenly haven with its fabulously warm and soothing water. After just one dip, you'll notice your skin feeling refreshed and softer. Come back anytime you want because it is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There is also a seasonal outdoor pool, a spa special-

izing in mineral springs treatments, and golf.

As for dining, at first we were intimidated to take kids to the exquisite Crystal Room. However, the breakfast buffet was a Thanksgiving-like spread of every scrumptious food imaginable, remarkably kid-friendly, and a great value. And there's the bonus that kids 5 and under eat for free. There are other options as well, such as the charming yet casual Frontier Tavern and the usual fast food chains right by the interstate.

During the late afternoon the main parlor offers complimentary tea, goodies, and light sandwiches.

Of course the kids love the sweets, but nothing captivates their attention more than the grand piano that plays by itself. In the evening guests gather at the huge fire pit out front, roasting marshmallows to make S'mores. If you're lucky, the smoky aroma will waft along the old-fashioned porch and come through the screen door into your room.

Nestled in the Allegheny Mountains of south central Pennsylvania, Bedford County is a serene locale known for its eight covered bridges, making for fun excursions. Next to the Claycomb Covered Bridge lies Old Bedford Village, an educational living history museum similar to Williamsburg.

A local traditional favorite, Bedford's Fall Foliage Festival takes place during the first two weekends of October (the 1st and the 8th) with fun family activities such as an antique car parade, scarecrow making, pony rides, and a magic show.

During this spooky time of year, Gravity Hill is an especially mysterious place to visit. Legend says if you put your car into neutral, your car will roll uphill. Of course, we were oh-so-skeptical but decided to give it a try. It happened; really and truly it did. The car rolled uphill on a moderate incline, even gaining momentum. Breaking the laws of physics is a unique attraction for young budding scientists.

With the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 on everyone's mind, the remote site of Flight 93 lies only 30 minutes west on the beautiful landscape of Shanksville, Pa. The National Park Service has recently unveiled Phase One of the National Memorial, part of a much larger \$62 million plan. Although not appropriate for young kids, it could be a remarkably moving experience for teenagers and adults alike. **RPM**

Libby Carty McNamee, a local freelance writer and mother, hopes to arrive in time for afternoon tea on her next visit to Bedford Springs. For more information please check out www.OmniBedfordSprings.com and www.BedfordFallFestival.com.