



MT DORA

MT ADORABLE

Mt. Dora is about three hours from Sarasota, northwest of Orlando. We went up I-75 north of Tampa and turned right, rather than deal with the traffic and frustration of I-4. After a rural ride through countryside, we didn't know what to expect from this little town. But we knew when we arrived, we had struck gold.

Everybody told us we needed to stay at the Lakeside Inn, and everybody was right. It's a big beautiful restored yellow resort literally on the Lake Dora. It first opened in 1883 and was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 1987. But like many places—including the Ca' D'Zan in Sarasota—this jewel encountered neglect around the turn of the 21st century. Businessman Jim Gunderson bought it in 2010, and—along with his team and a career of experience in hospitality—brought it back to its original grandeur. I'm sure the rest of Mount Dora's business community appreciates all this iconic resort brings to the rest of this beautiful area.

The Lakeside Inn now has several buildings, all overlooking the lake, but we stayed in the only suite in the main building. It had a big picture window with a nice view of the huge backyard, the pool, pool car, the pier and the lake. The staff has a 5-star mentality, and we had a good experience throughout the weekend. It's the top wedding reception destinations in the Central Florida Lakes Region. One of the waiters in the hotel dining room raved about Gunderson, and he had no idea I was writing an article. Apparently it's quite a family there.

Once we unpacked our bags, we went to explore this quaint village. It's always exhilarating to experience a new area. My wife found a number of shops she liked—and even bought me an early birthday gift. (I've been wanting a cork-board map of the country where I could put thumbtacks in the places we've been. It will now be a nice reminder of our weekend.)

We stumbled upon an attractive restaurant with a line out the door for lunch. We figured it must be good, so we signed up. Thanks to modern technology, we didn't have to stand around or kill time in the bar. We were able to continue browsing around and the manager simply called my cellphone when our table was ready and we went back over to eat.

There's a reason why the Goblin Market Restaurant & Lounge is popular. The food is top-notch and the service is just as excellent. We had no trouble finding gluten-free choices—I had a blackened salmon plate and she had the blackened mahi caesar. We ate outside in the courtyard and chatted with some other diners in the relaxed atmosphere. Two fast hours later, after coffee and ice cream, it was time to move on. Excellent place, and a hands-on manager named Derek Stoltz who runs a flawless operation. Big place, two floors—and nearly every seat was taken. We recommend it highly.

Trains are a big part of this region, and we were tipped off to the Royal Palm Railway Experience based in nearby Tavares. There's also a 'performance train' where you can watch a live play while seeing the countryside. We caught the last show of a Mardi Gras-themed play, but by the time you read this is in the Spring, you can catch "The Wizard of Oz" in June. Kick back and sip wine, beer or soft drinks and enjoy this unique show that takes place in the aisle. Can't beat a beautiful moving view out the windows and a lively performance feet away from your seat.

The next morning, we got up early and went for a walk around charming Mount Dora. We stopped to watch some people playing pickleball who invited us to grab a couple paddles and join in. Very kind. We walked along the water and saw one of the region's historic light houses.

We were sad to have to pack up and leave so soon, but happy to have added this new area to our list of favorite places to go. Count us as hooked by this charming slice of Florida. We've been all over the coasts, so it was a pleasure to absorb interior Florida for a change.

Mount Dora is the perfect distance for a "one-tank trip" from Sarasota/Bradenton. We recommend it highly!

[Www.Lakeside-Inn.com](http://www.Lakeside-Inn.com)

[Www.GoblinMarketRestaurant.com](http://www.GoblinMarketRestaurant.com)

[Www.TheFloridaTrain.com](http://www.TheFloridaTrain.com)

