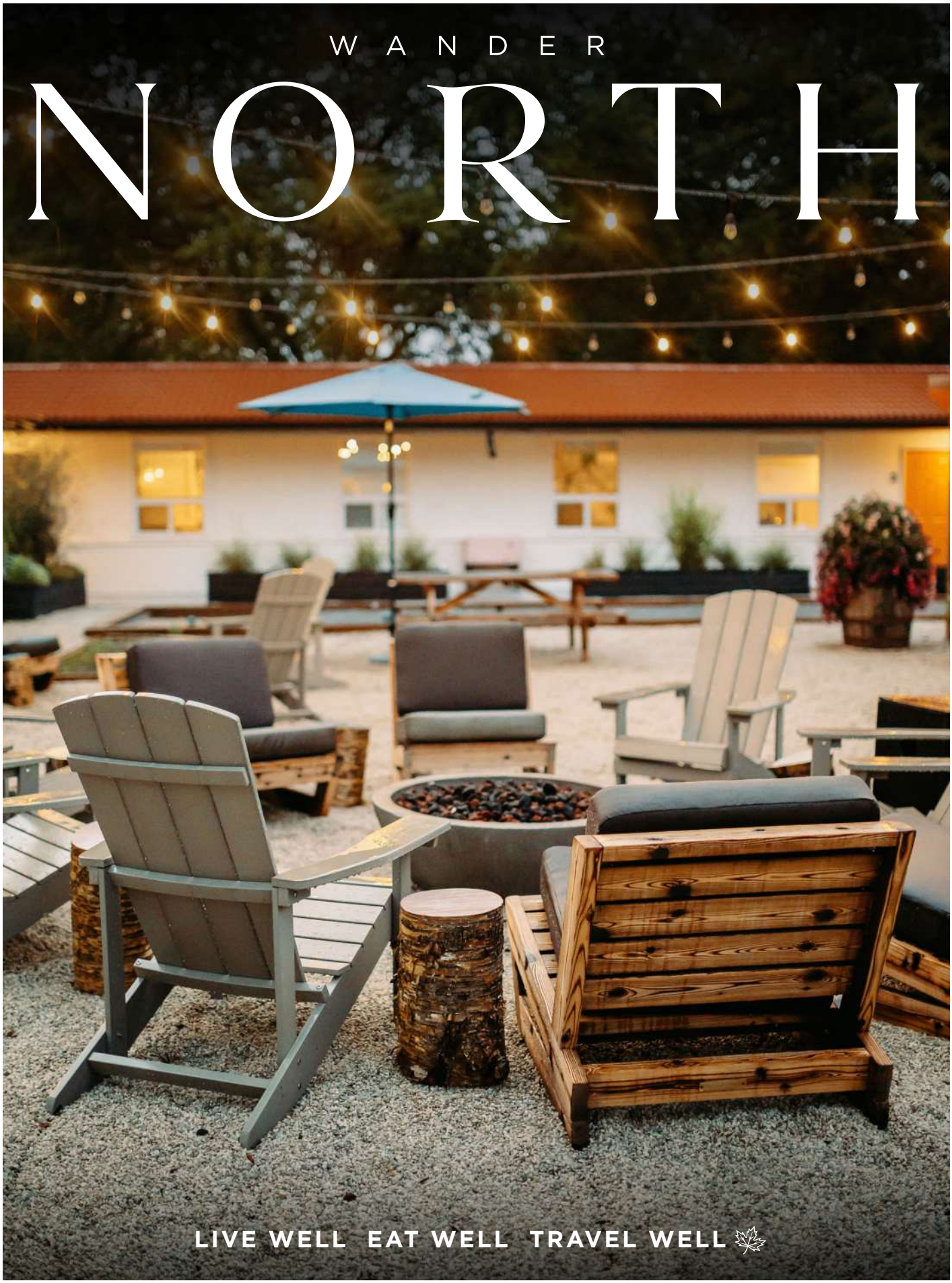

WANDER
NORTH
LIVE WELL EAT WELL TRAVEL WELL



HAPPINESS IS HERE AND NOW.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



LIVE WELL

6 **Fire & Ice: Embracing the Extremes**
From improved recovery to sharper mental clarity, hot and cold therapy is more than a trend—it's a game-changer.
By Brandon Houston

12 **Northern Entrepreneurs**
Meet five makers and founders who've built something to believe in in South Georgian Bay.
By Maddie Johnson

16 **Yoga with a View**
From sunrise sessions to fireside flows, retreats and festivals where you can stretch and breathe in nature.
By Kristina Smith





EAT WELL

22 **From Scratch**
Slow down, connect, and create—discover the joy of handmade food, timeless traditions, and the stories woven into every bite.
By Lauren Hambleton

28 **The [in]Cider Report**
Behind that easy-drinking can is a whole world of craft cider—and in Ontario, its roots are growing deep.
By Maddie Johnson

36 **Playing with Fire**
Blaze your own trail and bring an appetite—campfire meals are half the journey.
By Matthew Ross





TRAVEL WELL

40 **Pup-Friendly Stays**
If you're planning your next escape and don't want to leave your pup behind, these six stays make it so that you don't have to.
By Maddie Johnson

50 **Wander: Muskoka**
An escape to Ontario's beloved cottage country gives us something special in every season. Find inspiration for your next getaway with an inside look from a Torontonian turned local.
By Anna Cipollone

60 **Basecamp for Adventure in The Blue Mountains**
Where you stay shapes your getaway. From cozy chalets to luxury retreats, find the perfect home base to relax, recharge, and explore.
By Kristina Smith

64 **The Art of a Solo Reading Retreat**
A guide to planning and deepening your literary escape, plus places to go.
By Kami Marchand

72 **North of North**
Beyond the map and far from a signal, a spontaneous adventure becomes a quiet kind of magic in the wilds of Northern Ontario.
By David Spies

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



There's something about heading "north" that invites a shift in energy. Maybe it's the way the trees seem taller, the air a little clearer, or how the roads wind until you're not quite sure where you're going—but somehow, you're exactly where you need to be. Wander North was born from that feeling. A companion to our flagship publication, Wander, this new magazine is a love letter to the people, places, and experiences that define Ontario's north, our home.

We created this issue for those who crave more than just pretty views (though you'll find plenty of those, too!). Here, you'll meet makers carving out space for creativity and connection, travellers chasing peace and adrenaline in equal measure, and bakers and foragers reviving old traditions with fresh hands. From backcountry saunas to paddleboard yoga, this is wellness with a northern accent—rugged, restorative, and real.

You'll read stories of solo reading retreats and dog-friendly escapes, discover the heart of Ontario's growing cider scene, and learn where to stretch at sunrise or plunge into icy waters for a jolt of clarity. Whether you're lighting a fire at a lakeside camp or rolling dough in a farmhouse kitchen, the spirit of this issue invites you to slow down and stay curious. After all, adventure doesn't always come with a map.

With Wander North, we're proud to share the stories of our home, the people building something special here, and the wild beauty that keeps us grounded. We hope these pages inspire your next road trip, campfire meal, or quiet moment with a really good book—and remind you that thriving doesn't always mean going far. Sometimes, it just means going north.

Wander well,



Kristina Smith
Editor in Chief

P.S. If you happened upon this copy and enjoy it, consider subscribing to have future issues delivered to your door.

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FIRE AND ICE

EMBRACING THE EXTREMES

From improved recovery to sharper mental clarity, hot and cold therapy is more than a trend—it's a game-changer.



BY BRANDON HOUSTON



Photo: HUUM Sauna

The first time I lowered myself into the cold February waters of Georgian Bay, my body screamed. Every instinct told me to get out, but I forced myself to stay, shaking, aching, and wanting to give up. Sixty seconds felt like an eternity. I tried to focus on my breath, and after those first 60 seconds passed, something great happened. My body started to relax, my breath calmed, and I no longer felt the urge to jump out. And when I emerged after the next minute passed, I felt absolutely alive, humming with energy from my fingertips to my toes.

That was five years ago. Since then, I've explored everything from steel tubs to Nordic-style sauna circuits and a couple of lakes throughout winter. What started as a curious experiment has evolved into a practice that's transformed how I approach both physical recovery and mental resilience.

My journey went further when I decided to attend a Wim Hof workshop a couple of hours away. There, I learned the breathing techniques and cold exposure methods that would become the foundation of my practice. While the "Iceman's" methods opened my eyes to the possibilities, I've since discovered that cold therapy can be as simple or as elaborate as you want to make it.

These days, my morning routine is built around this practice of temperature extremes. After a workout at my gym, I'll head to the sauna, letting the heat work on my muscles and clear my mind, followed by a cold shower. It's a sort of reset button for both body and brain. When I don't have access to a proper plunge tub, a cold shower serves as my daily dose of voluntary discomfort, teaching my body and mind to embrace the uncomfortable.

The benefits I've experienced go far beyond the initial rush. My post-workout recovery has improved dramatically, with muscle soreness relieving much faster. But it's the mental clarity that keeps me coming back.



Five years after that first plunge, I'm still amazed by how something as simple as temperature exposure has transformed my wellness journey.

It acts like a reset button for my stress levels, reducing anxiety and leaving me with a sense of calm focus that carries through the day. I've noticed my stress tolerance has increased across all areas of my life.

The science behind these benefits is fascinating. Cold exposure triggers the release of norepinephrine, reducing inflammation and improving mood while activating brown fat—metabolically active tissue that helps regulate body temperature and metabolism. When you alternate between hot and cold, you're essentially giving your cardiovascular system a workout. Blood vessels constrict in the cold and dilate in the heat, improving circulation and cardiovascular health. When you enter cold water, your body activates its sympathetic nervous system (the "fight or flight" response), but because you're choosing to enter this stressful situation mindfully, you learn to regulate this response—a skill that transfers to other stressful situations in life.

While cold therapy tends to grab headlines, the heat component is equally vital. Traditional sauna cultures have long understood what science now confirms: regular sauna use can improve cardiovascular health, reduce inflammation, and even extend lifespan. In my experience, the sauna is where the mental benefits really shine. Those peaceful minutes of heat-induced meditation help clear my mind, and when combined with cold exposure, the contrast creates a uniquely invigorating experience.

For those interested in starting their own hot/cold therapy journey, here's what I've learned: Start small and build gradually. Begin with 30 seconds of cold water at the end of your normal shower, focusing on calm, controlled breathing. For sauna sessions, start with 5-10 minutes and listen to your body. Never practice cold exposure alone when beginning, especially in open water, and keep first sessions brief—30 seconds is plenty. The goal isn't to be a hero; it's to build a sustainable practice that serves you long-term.

A word of caution: this isn't for everyone. Those with heart conditions, high blood pressure, circulatory issues, or Raynaud's disease should avoid cold exposure. Pregnant women, people with diabetes, and those with severe respiratory conditions should consult their healthcare provider first. Even healthy individuals should pay attention to their body's signals and never push beyond their comfort zone too quickly. This is about enhancing your wellbeing, not testing your limits.

Five years after that first plunge, I'm still amazed by how something as simple as temperature exposure has transformed my wellness journey. While I started in Georgian Bay's wild waters and maintain my home practice, those interested in exploring hot/cold therapy can also find thermal circuits at several local wellness centres. Whether it's a brief cold shower or a full Nordic spa experience, the key is finding what works for you. There's something beautifully straightforward about this ancient practice: sometimes, the most powerful changes come from simply learning to embrace the uncomfortable. W

Cover + this page: Brandon Houston in the cold plunge pool at Somewhere Inn, Collingwood, ON. Photographed by Kianna Sunshine.







Photography: (clockwise from top left) Scandinave Spa Andrea Hamlin; Cedarvale Cedarvale; Ezentials aKaiserPhoto

YOUR TURN

Immerse yourself in the rejuvenating power of hot and cold therapy through expertly designed thermal circuits.

Cedarvale | Port Elgin, ON
With a wilderness wellness vibe in Saugeen Shores, Cedarvale offers contrast therapy sessions with wood-burning and infrared saunas and cold-plunge ice bath tanks. Layer on rejuvenating offerings like somatic breathwork, sound baths, yoga, and life coaching, all in a serene natural setting.

Ezentials | Sudbury, ON
Escape the city without leaving it with a Nordic-inspired wellness experience featuring a traditional cedar sauna, eucalyptus steam room, cold shower options, and a relaxing lounge. Perfect for solo, couple, or group retreats, Ezentials offers hot, cold, and rest cycles with the option to add spa services and refreshments.

Scandinave | The Blue Mountains, ON
An iconic retreat nestled in nature, Scandinave Spa offers a silence-focused, digital-free escape where you can cycle through outdoor hot pools, cold plunges, saunas, steam rooms, and relaxation areas with stunning views of the Niagara Escarpment. Enhance your experience with a therapeutic massage.







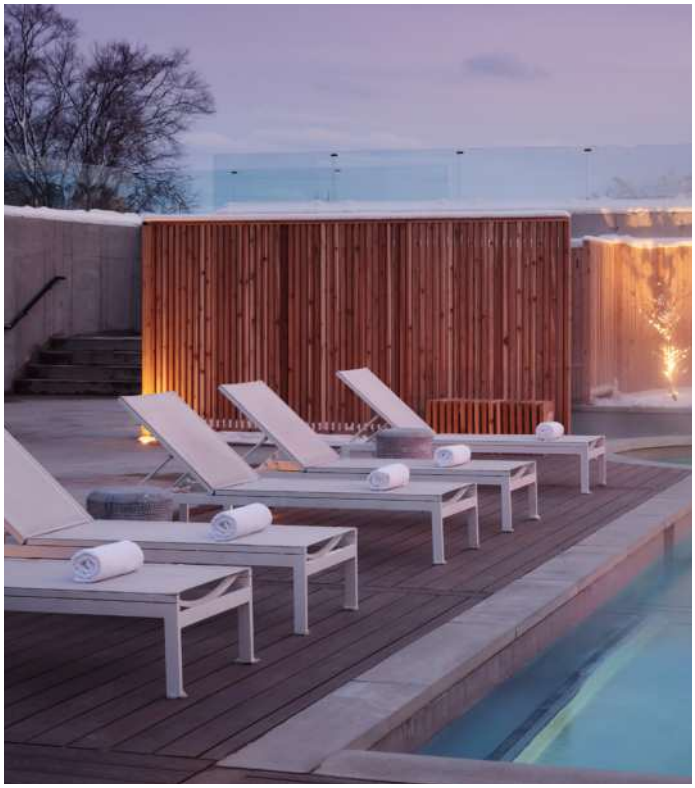
Photography (clockwise from top left): **Everlove** Kim Vincent; **Floathaus** Floathaus; **Spa Grande Nature** Bailey Whissel

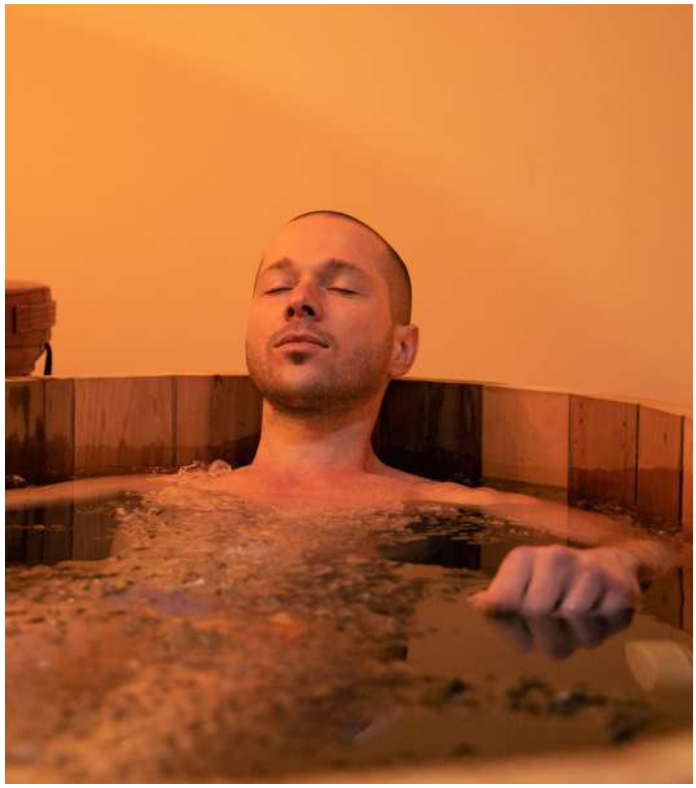
Floathaus | Gravenhurst, ON
Relax in a floating wood-fired sauna before plunging into the cool waters of Muskoka Lake, where a ladder provides winter access through the carved-out ice. This unique Nordic thermal cycle is available year-round for community or private bookings, with access to Muskoka Mind + Body's change rooms and relaxation spaces.

Everlove | Collingwood, ON
This downtown wellness hub offers a sauna and cold plunge experience, whether self-guided or as a private or group session with a certified instructor. Beyond contrast therapy, Everlove features fitness and yoga classes, therapeutic treatments, and a co-working lounge—a full-body reset under one roof.

Spa Grande Nature | Timmins, ON
A serene Nordic bath experience in the tranquil beauty of Northern Ontario at Cedar Meadows Resort. Cycle through heat, cold, and rest in the dry sauna, steam bath, pool, and waterfall. Elevate your visit with a massage or a nourishing meal from the spa's curated menu.







Photography: (clockwise from top left) **The Cedars Haliburton** Basil Haseeb; **Flow Spa** Flow Spa; **Wander the Spa** Patrick Biller

Wander the Spa | Bloomfield, ON
Housed at Wander The Resort, Ontario's first lakefront Nordic spa is a subterranean wellness retreat where contemporary design meets nature. Cycle through sauna, steam, pools, and cold plunges, then enhance your experience with body treatments, Aufguss rituals, and nourishing meals—a true escape in Prince Edward County.

The Cedars Haliburton | Dysart et al, ON
Nestled on beautiful West Lake, The Cedars Haliburton offers a luxurious lakeside escape. Their Cedars West cottage features a sauna and cold plunge tub for unlimited contrast therapy during your stay. With space for multiple guests and an on-site hot yoga studio, it's perfect for family vacations and group getaways.

Flow Spa | Peterborough, ON
At this wellness centre, contrast therapy is personalized and customizable, with an infrared sauna to boost circulation and a cold plunge pool tailored to your experience level. One of Ontario's few spots for flotation therapy, Flow also offers float pods and cabins for deep relaxation and recovery. W

NORTHERN ENTREPRENEURS

BY MADDIE JOHNSON



{ Ariana Novak from Everlove }







There's something in the air around here. Maybe it's the lake effect, or the crisp escarpment light—but there's no denying the kind of energy that lives in South Georgian Bay. It's creative, it's undeniable, and it's wildly entrepreneurial.

Whether you're walking through downtown Collingwood, pulling off the highway in Meaford, or stepping into a cider house in the hills above Thornbury, you'll find that same spirit woven into just about everything: community-minded, beautifully built, and made with intention.

Some of the folks behind these businesses were born and raised nearby. Others found their way here—drawn by the water, the landscape, and a lifestyle that simply feels more like them. And almost all of them will tell you the same thing: starting a business here isn't just about the business. It's about building something you believe in.

Here are five makers, founders, and families who've done just that.

Back Forty Glamping

Hidden down a winding road just outside Meaford, Back Forty Glamping feels like a secret escape—though word has certainly gotten out. Founded by brothers Scott and Ben McIntosh and their wives, Elizabeth and Alyssa, the family-run retreat has become one of the most thoughtfully built glamping destinations in the province.

Originally drawn to Meaford for its proximity to adventure and slower pace of life, the couples behind Back Forty have since woven themselves into the fabric of the local community. From partnerships with other small businesses to curated experiences that spotlight the region—like local food add-ons, spa and hiking recommendations, and handcrafted extras—their vision has evolved into something more than a place to stay. It's a springboard for exploring everything Grey County has to offer.

"We thought people would book Back Forty as a place to sleep while visiting the area," says Elizabeth. "But it turns out, they come *because* of Back Forty, and fall in love with the region while they're here."







Lemonade Bay

Born out of sun-soaked summers on Georgian Bay and a desire to keep their young daughter safe while playing outdoors, Lemonade Bay is a Collingwood-based swimwear brand made for active little ones and the families who adventure with them. Founded by Becky and Adam Roberts, Lemonade Bay creates UPF 50 swimwear for kids that's as functional as it is beautiful.

"We spend so much time outside—paddleboarding, hiking, beach days with our daughter—and we couldn't find swimwear that matched our lifestyle," Becky says. "So we decided to create it."

What began as a side project quickly turned into something more. Today, Lemonade Bay is stocked in shops across the country, and each collection draws inspiration from local landscapes.

"Our goal is to help parents keep their kids protected while still enjoying every part of an active, outdoor lifestyle," Becky says. "And doing it in a way that celebrates where we live."

Spy Cider House and Distillery

Darcy Hagerman and Ian Smith weren't cider makers when they bought Spy Cider House and Distillery. They were neighbours, living down the road in the Blue Mountains, who saw untapped potential when the local cidery became for sale.

"We wanted to create the kind of place we wished existed here," says Darcy. "Somewhere you could bring your kids, your dog, your friends. Somewhere that felt like it belonged to the community."

Spy was already known for its crisp, sugar-free cider made from Ontario-grown apples, but under Darcy and Ian's leadership, it evolved into a true destination—one where live music and good company flow as easily as the drinks. With head cider maker Jonah Read at the helm, the lineup continues to grow, from Spy apple staples to creative small-batch blends like black tea with honey.

And while cider may be front and centre, Spy's distillery program is growing fast, too, with small-batch spirits and seasonal liqueurs earning a loyal following.



Everlove Healing + Yoga

Tucked inside a beautifully restored heritage building in Collingwood, Everlove Healing + Yoga is more than a wellness studio—it's a living, breathing space built on movement and community. Founded by partners Ariana Novak and Dan Fotopoulos, and co-owned with Justin Hyde, Everlove was born out of a desire to create the kind of space they longed for: somewhere to gather, to grow, to heal, and to feel at home. We wanted to create something that felt intentional and inspired," Ariana says. "A space where wellness is a shared value—and where we could bring people together in a meaningful way."

Originally from the Kitchener-Waterloo region, the couple left behind their careers and their first studio venture to chase a different kind of dream—one shaped by their longing for a slower, more aligned lifestyle. They found it here. What started as a vision unfolded organically: two sunlit studios, treatment rooms, and a backyard-turned-workout space, now home to everything from yoga and strength classes to breathwork, cold plunges, a co-working space, and more.

"Every decision we make comes back to two questions," Dan says. "Does this serve our village? And does it inspire?"

At Everlove, the answer is almost always yes.



Gingerbug

It all started with a low harvest and a few mason jars. Megan Silk was on her way to the Meaford Farmers' Market with not enough vegetables to fill her table. So she grabbed a few jars of her family's homemade fermented ginger beer—just one of the many gut-friendly concoctions brewed on the off-grid homestead she shares with her husband, Bren, and their five kids.

To her surprise, the fizzy, spicy drink sold out that day—and Gingerbug was born.

Rooted in fermentation traditions and inspired by the starter culture known as a "ginger bug," the beverage quickly grew from a local market favourite to a national brand.

"We decided if we were going to risk everything—our farm, our savings—we were going to think as big as possible," Megan says.

And they did. Within six months, Gingerbug was on shelves across Canada. The brand's quick rise caught the attention of *Dragons' Den*, where Megan and Bren pitched to a national audience. But even with that spotlight, they remain grounded in their Grey County roots.

"We started this business here, and we'll always manufacture here," says Megan, a fifth-generation Grey County local. She credits the early support of independent retailers—like Grandma Lambe's, Goldsmiths, and the Kimberley General Store—with propelling Gingerbug into the national spotlight.

Photography: Cover Kim Vincent; **Back Forty Glamping** (domes) Shelly Lynn Photography, (team) Field Photography; **Lemonade Bay** Town + County Collective; **Spy** Frances Beatty Photography; **Everlove** Kim Vincent; **Gingerbug:** Sunday Ajak, Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship



YOGA WITH A VIEW

From sunrise sessions to fireside flows, retreats and festivals where you can stretch and breathe in nature.

BY KRISTINA SMITH



As the editor of a wellness travel magazine for the past ten years, I've moved through sun salutations in a lot of different places—on stunning beaches, snowy mountaintops, and in autumn-leaved forests. On paddleboards—on lakes as well as a crocodile-infested (I discovered later) river. In several yurts, a converted monastery, and a jungle hut complete with prop-stealing monkeys. In gorgeous urban studios with glass walls, converted Victorian mansions, old warehouses, barns, museums, and even art galleries.

I love learning from new teachers, trying new flows, feeling different vibes. I get something from every single session, indoors or out. But being in nature is my favourite place to be on the mat. Practicing outdoors invites a deeper connection with the natural world—you can smell the pine trees, feel the grass, and hear the birds, and I find that helps me to feel more grounded and focused. Luckily, there's no shortage of festivals and retreats where yoga enthusiasts can stretch and breathe in stunning surroundings, many in the heart of Ontario's natural beauty.

One festival, *City of OM* in Ottawa, offers a combination of yoga, fitness, and connection set against the backdrop of the capital city's peaceful 40-acre park, perfect for a spring escape. What began as a yoga festival has grown into a dynamic wellness event offering something for everyone, and newbies are welcome. If you're craving something more immersive, *BUMI Festival* in Blackstock, held in late June, invites



guests to explore yoga, meditation, dance, and healing workshops while embracing the freedom of movement and sound in a lush countryside setting. Various passes and accommodation options are available, including a Kids Camp for the little yogis.

For those seeking a transformative wellness journey, *Everlove Festival* in the Blue Mountains in July brings together movement, mindset, and wellness for a revitalizing, high-vibe weekend. With a focus on personal growth and community connection, it's the perfect place to deepen your practice and learn new ways of being. For a more eclectic mix of music, wellness, and art, *Camp Summerdaze* in Algonquin National Park at the end of July promises a fusion of creativity and rejuvenation, with yoga sessions nestled alongside live performances and art installations. Promising a soulful rhythm, it is "a place to be wildly expressive and melt into yourself."

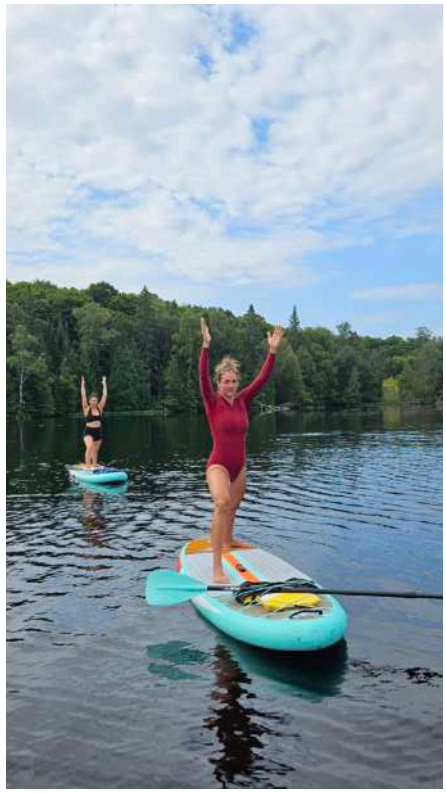
As August rolls in, the *Coming Home Festival* in Amaranth offers a rejuvenating experience of wellness and music, inviting you to realign your body, mind, and spirit while camping under the stars. The following week, *Sonic Springs Music & Arts Festival* in Field invites you to flow through a diverse array of yoga workshops, all set amidst the sounds of music and art in a wild and natural landscape. For vibrant movement, head to *Bhakti Bliss Yoga & Music Festival* in Eganville to flow through invigorating asanas, experience the freedom of ecstatic dance, and discover the heart-opening power of Kirtan chanting.













And for those who love a good old-fashioned camp-style experience with a side of yoga, *Camp Yoga Ontario* in Parry Sound offers an unforgettable weekend at Camp Manitou, combining yoga with traditional camp activities. The September retreat promises a warm, communal ambiance, seasoned instructors, and an immersive escape that connects you to nature in a new way.

If you're looking for something a little smaller, Wolf Flow SUP's *Paddle Play Grow Retreat* in July is perfect for those who want to take their practice to the water. Paddle, stretch, and relax in the beautiful surroundings of *Northern Edge Algonquin Centre*, where you can enjoy yoga sessions, paddling adventures, and plenty of downtime in cozy glamping-style cabins. With farm-to-fork meals, reflective journalling, and guided hikes, this retreat promises a holistic experience that supports personal growth and transformation.

Finally, *Dimensions Retreats* in the Algonquin Highlands offers a unique blend of evidence-based wellness practices and deep nature immersion. Nestled along the fresh waters of Maple Lake and surrounded by the rugged beauty of the Canadian Shield, Dimensions curates ongoing yoga retreats, each designed to align the body and mind with the natural world. Guests can complement their yoga practice with somatic therapies, breathwork, biofeedback, and mindfulness-based nature walks. One of the highlights is their stunning 500-square-foot yoga dock, where sunrise and sunset flows take on an almost meditative quality over the water.

No matter where you find yourself, these experiences provide more than just a yoga session—they're opportunities to reset, reflect, and connect on a deeper level. Whether flowing under the sun or stretching near a river, practicing yoga outdoors offers a chance to rejuvenate both body and soul. Just check for the crocodiles first. W

Photography: Cover Scoria; page 17 **BUMI Festival** Tirazheh Studio; page 18 **Everlove Festival**; this page (first column) **Northern Edge Algonquin Destination Ontario**; (second column) **Wolf Flow SUP Karley Stevenson**; (third column) **Dimensions Retreats**

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FROM SCRATCH

Slow down, connect, and create—discover the joy of handmade food, timeless traditions, and the stories woven into every bite.

BY LAUREN HAMBLETON

Photography: Jessica Crandlemire—Light and Shadow Photo







"Feel the flour as you're rubbing it between your palms. How soft, and cool, and powdery it is. Smell the dough at every step in the process. Use your eyes to take note of how your ingredients are transforming. Taste it if you're feeling brave."

These are some of the cues I give my students during workshops on everything from sourdough to pies, bagels, and pasta. "*Wow, this is so meditative,*" someone often says with quiet excitement. A meditation in slowing down and choosing quality over quantity.

On a weekly basis, I welcome people into my studio for food experiences that involve learning new skills, honing old ones, making friends with strangers, and working with the simplest of ingredients to create delicious treats. When students walk into the studio, the stress of day-to-day life gets put on the back burner. They pour themselves a hot coffee to sip throughout the morning, and we dive into the recipes.

From the minute we get started to when everyone packs up to go home, we are fully immersed with all of our senses. Being involved in a project or a recipe this way—slowing down, opting for your hands instead of the machine—forces you to focus your attention on the task at hand, rather than the long list of to-dos in your notes app. More often than not, our society rewards you for doing more, more, more. In a modern world that is full to the brim with hustle and bustle, the desire to go back to the basics and prioritize quality over quantity has been bubbling up for a while now. A resistance to the status quo. A desire to slow down, live a little bit more in the present moment, and get creative while connecting with others.

"*Where can I buy this flour? Can I have a mill like that in my kitchen? Wow, that wheat is so pretty, I'm going to plant some in my garden! I'm thinking of getting a cow so I can make my own cheese with fresh milk.*" These are just some of the questions and conversations I overhear when people are attending a workshop, conversing with each other over their love of food. There is a palpable growing interest in knowing the whole story and being a part of it.

During the height of the pandemic, people were stuck in their own kitchens, making their own food when they may not have otherwise. And so as much as the concept of going back to the basics isn't a new one at all, cooking from scratch with an emphasis on premium, local ingredients has been gaining momentum ever since.

The needs of the modern-day maker and baker, forager, and brewer are certainly different from those of previous eras, but for as long as humankind has walked the earth, we've been creating things with our hands. And for just as long,













we've needed and wanted the human connection to our food: a person and a story to tie us back to the ingredients in a recipe. People are intrigued, now more than ever, by wholesome hobbies that allow them to make these connections. And small businesses ranging in offerings from freshly milled flour to organic goat cheese are rising up to meet the demands of the curious population. Flourishing like their own sustainable ecosystem.

The growing interest in local artisanal products is having a positive trickle-down effect within communities. Businesses are expanding as consumers seek goods that are not only fresher but also grown or prepared with care by someone they know, near the same land they call home. Farmers' Markets are busier than ever as hot spots for connections and bridging the gap between producer and consumer. Subscription boxes are also increasing in interest, with the option to order specialty items, such as a curated coffee collection with tasting notes, right to your door. The direct exchange between producers and consumers is fostering a deeper understanding of the food system and helping to strengthen the bonds between people and their food.

A story. To the past, or at least to the past of the grain, grown by the farmer, turned into a delicious loaf of bread by the baker, and enjoyed by you with friends and family. A story that more deeply connects us to traditional methods using artisanal ingredients. It's what we're all after. W

Lauren Hambleton from **Red Hen Artisanale** offers hands-on baking workshops and cooking classes out of a bright, welcoming studio in the heart of Grey County.

She provides a relaxing space to connect with others while learning new skills and being guided through the fundamentals of recipes.

For a list of available workshops, head to **redhenartisanale.com**.

RED HEN

FOOD EXPERIENCES

ARTISANALE

Hands-On Baking Workshops and Food Experiences held in the Heart of Grey County



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THE CRAFT OF ONTARIO CIDER



BY MADDIE JOHNSON



The sun's high, the bay's glassy, and someone just handed you a chilled can from the cooler. You take a sip—crisp, not too sweet, surprisingly refreshing. You're thinking: *this tastes like summer.*

But behind that easy-drinking can is a whole world of craft cider—and in Ontario, its roots are growing deep.

Photography: Cover Drink ON Apples;
above **Two Blokes Cider** Bre Ferguson – Banyan and Bone Photography

Cider isn't new—not globally, and certainly not here. But in Ontario, the craft scene is growing in both quality and curiosity. For a province blessed with diverse landscapes, rich soil, and a climate that apples love, it's no surprise that some of Canada's most compelling cider is being made here—often just down the road from where the fruit was picked.

So, what exactly is cider? And why are more Ontarians discovering—or rediscovering—their taste for it?



Fermented. Not Brewed.

First, let's clear something up: cider isn't brewed, it's fermented. That means no hops, no water, no grains. Just apples. Pressed, juiced, and fermented with natural or cultured yeasts. It's more like wine than beer—though it doesn't always get that kind of credit.

"People think cider is brewed, but it's really closer to winemaking," says Jenna Boucher, lead cider maker at Two Blokes Cider near Seagrave. "You're working with the fruit, choosing your yeast, watching the fermentation. It's about getting the best juice possible—and letting it speak."

Each step matters. Fermentation needs to be carefully monitored. Blending requires a practiced palate. Bottling, aging, and packaging come next, and with each batch, there are countless variables to consider.

"Cider making is simple," Boucher adds, "but there are a million little things that can go wrong. I often joke that I'm just a caregiver of yeast."

Not Just Any Apple

In cider, not all apples are created equal. Grocery-store favourites like Honeycrisp and Gala may be great for snacking, but when it comes to fermentation, they lack the acid and tannin structure that cider needs to sing.

That's why many of Ontario's most respected cideries are growing heritage and cider-specific varieties. These are apples bred not for looks or crunch, but for flavour. They're more like wine grapes than lunchbox fruit: rugged, tannic, complex.

"These apples aren't pretty—and that's the point," says Jenifer Dean of County Cider, Ontario's oldest craft cidery. "Ontario grows incredible cider apples."

The province's diversity of soil, climate, and lake effect conditions create distinctive terroir. A Dabinett grown near Georgian Bay isn't the same as one grown in Prince Edward County. The soil matters. The weather matters. And that's what makes drinking Ontario cider so interesting.

What Cider *Really* Tastes Like

One of the biggest misconceptions about cider? That it's sweet. Or that it's all the same.

"People try one overly sweet cider and think they know the whole category," says Boucher. "But cider is incredibly diverse. There's dry, semi-dry, still, sparkling, fruited, hopped, botanical. It can be bright and crisp or rich and funky."









Photography: page 30 **County Cider** Johnny Lam; this page (clockwise from top left) **Spy Cider House** Frances Beatty Photography; **Two Blokes Cider** Bre Ferguson—Banyan and Bone Photography; **Loch Mór Cider Co.** Kassandra Melnyk; **County Cider** Johnny Lam

At Spy Cider House in the Blue Mountains, cider maker Jonah Read leans into the natural expression of the fruit.

"We don't add sugar," he says. "Our cider is just apples and yeast. You're tasting the fruit—clean, crisp, and full of character."

Sara Boyd, who owns and runs Loch Mōr in Prince Edward County, agrees.

"We make the cider we like to drink—drier, with more complexity. Cider pairs beautifully with food, and because it's lower in alcohol than wine, you can enjoy it over a longer meal. I actually think it pairs better."

And despite the sunny setting we began with, cider isn't just for warm weather.

Ontario producers are crafting everything from lightly sparkling summer sippers to rich, barrel-aged bottles that pour like wine. Whether it's a Kingston Black single varietal, a lavender botanical blend, or a delicately sweet ice cider, Ontario's craft cider makers are redefining what cider can be—and what occasion it can be for.







Drink Ontario Apples

Cider is more than just a drink—it's a deeply local product. When you choose an Ontario cider, you're choosing more than flavour. You're choosing the farmers, too.

"This is apple country," says Read. "It would almost be wrong not to make cider here."

That sense of place and purpose runs through every part of the process.

"Good things grow in Ontario—that's what I remember from growing up here," says Boucher. "And I see it every day. The land gives us these beautiful apples. It's our job to treat them with care."

Supporting Ontario cider means supporting small farms and regenerative agriculture. It means fewer food miles and more transparency. And often, it means getting to meet the person who made your drink, right there in the tasting room.

"I think we're just scratching the surface of what cider can be," says Boyd. "There's so much potential here—and the quality is already incredible. People are starting to notice."

And the experience is part of the appeal. At many of Ontario's small cideries, you're not just sipping something local —you're stepping into it. You might find yourself at a communal table overlooking the orchard, listening to a local musician, tasting flights under a canopy of trees, or chatting with the person who planted them.

So next time you're choosing what to drink with dinner, or packing a cooler for a weekend getaway, consider what's growing close to home. Taste it slowly. Ask where the fruit came from. Let it tell you a story.

Because Ontario cider isn't just having a moment—it's growing something lasting, one apple at a time.

Photography: this page (clockwise from top left) **Loch Mór Cider Co.**; Slabtown Co.; **Spy Cider House** Jessica Crandlemire; (page 33) **Two Blokes Cider** Bre Ferguson—Banyan and Bone Photography; (page 34) **Spy Cider House** Frances Beatty Photography



Pair Like a Pro

With Jenna Boucher, Certified Pommelier and Head Cider Maker at Two Blokes Cider

Pairing cider with food is easier than you might think—and more rewarding than you might expect. According to Boucher, the key lies in understanding the 'Four Cs': Complement, Contrast, Cut and Complete.

Complement
Mirror the cider's key flavours with similar flavours or profiles to create harmony.

Try:
Spy's Golden Eye with an apple, smoked trout and arugula salad
Muskoka Lakes' Cliff Jump Cranberry Cider with a late-summer salad or berry galette

Contrast
Balance opposites—pair sweet with heat, dry with creamy, light with rich.

Try:
Coffin Ridge's Lavender Earl Grey with an aged manchego or Ontario blue cheese
Pommies Mimosa Cider with spicy breakfast sausage or a chorizo hash

Cut
Use cider's natural acidity and bubbles to slice through fat, salt, or richness.

Try:
Slabtown's Hint O' Hops with fish and chips and a lemony tartar sauce
Two Blokes' Pomona's Pour with buttered corn on the cob with chili-lime salt

Complete
Use cider to fill in what's missing—a touch of sweetness, acidity, or texture.

Try:
County Cider's Ice Cider with vanilla bean ice cream or affogato
Thornbury Pear Apple Cider with a summer grain bowl with roasted squash, feta, and mint

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Discover more perfect pairings of small-batch cider with artisan cheeses.





ONTARIO TO THE CORE

The **DrinkON Apples** logo guarantees you're drinking cider that's crafted with 100% Ontario grown apples. Look for the logo and pick some Ontario Cider up today!

GET YOUR CIDER ON

Please Enjoy Responsibly



PLAYING WITH FIRE

Blaze your own trail and bring an appetite—
campfire meals are half the journey.

BY MATTHEW ROSS



It seems to be the constant. From camping trips to Killarney as a kid to weekends at the cottage. From tree planting in the far north to overlanding across the country. The best days always seem to end up with friends and family around the campfire. Stories get a bit further from the truth, laughter gets a little louder. And the food? Somehow it just tastes better.

They say that all house parties end up in the kitchen. The same, I think, can be said about adventuring in Ontario. As far as backyards go, it's pretty hard to beat. And cooking over an open flame? Impossible to top. It takes us to a simpler place. No televisions, no digital distractions. It's basic. Instinctual.

Overlanding, or vehicle-based travel, has become increasingly popular over the last few years. For me, it means throwing a bunch of gear in the back of my Jeep and heading out for a few days of fishing, camping, and exploring backroads. This movement is getting more people outdoors, exploring harder-to-access areas, and most importantly, it's reconnecting people to nature—one smoky meal at a time.











The Joy of Cooking (Simply)

The key to successful campfire cooking is to keep things simple. I recommend investing in some cast-iron cookware. It's virtually indestructible, and as you're not hauling it around all day in a backpack, the weight doesn't matter. On the fire, a cast iron pan or pot has no parts that will melt and no Teflon that will peel. Moreover, over coals, a thick iron base will spread heat evenly to the food.

Remember, campfire cooking is not the time for culinary acrobatics. Stick to simple recipes, minimal ingredients, and a handful of spices. The campfire itself adds a smoky richness to all your food. The less complicated the recipe, the more the meal becomes a chance to slow things down and connect as you prepare the food.

Another thing to keep in mind is that when preparing a meal from the back of a vehicle, prep space is limited, and you generally won't have access to running water. The simpler a meal is, the fewer headaches you'll have cooking and cleaning.

Close to the Land

Ontario is home to many incredible Farmers' Markets and roadside stands offering up fresh produce, meats, and baked goods. It's a great way to avoid lineups at the grocery store and support the businesses that cater to the areas you're visiting.

There are also amazing cideries, breweries, and distilleries all over the area, making this an excellent opportunity to try some brands that you won't find at the LCBO. Complement your next campfire meal with a newfound favourite beverage.

Camping is all about getting back to nature and returning to basics. Increasingly, we are less involved in what we eat. We buy more prepared foods. We spend far less time preparing meals for ourselves. Cooking over a campfire takes time; it's more than just a meal, it's an event. Humourist Art Buchwald said it best: "Dinner is not what you do in the evening before something else. Dinner is the evening." W

Go Places, Do Stuff

Overland travel is growing by leaps and bounds, geared toward adventurous souls, truck nerds, and families who like to connect over campfires. Find out more about overlanding in Ontario at wandernorth.co.


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PUP-FRIENDLY STAYS

IN ONTARIO'S NORTH

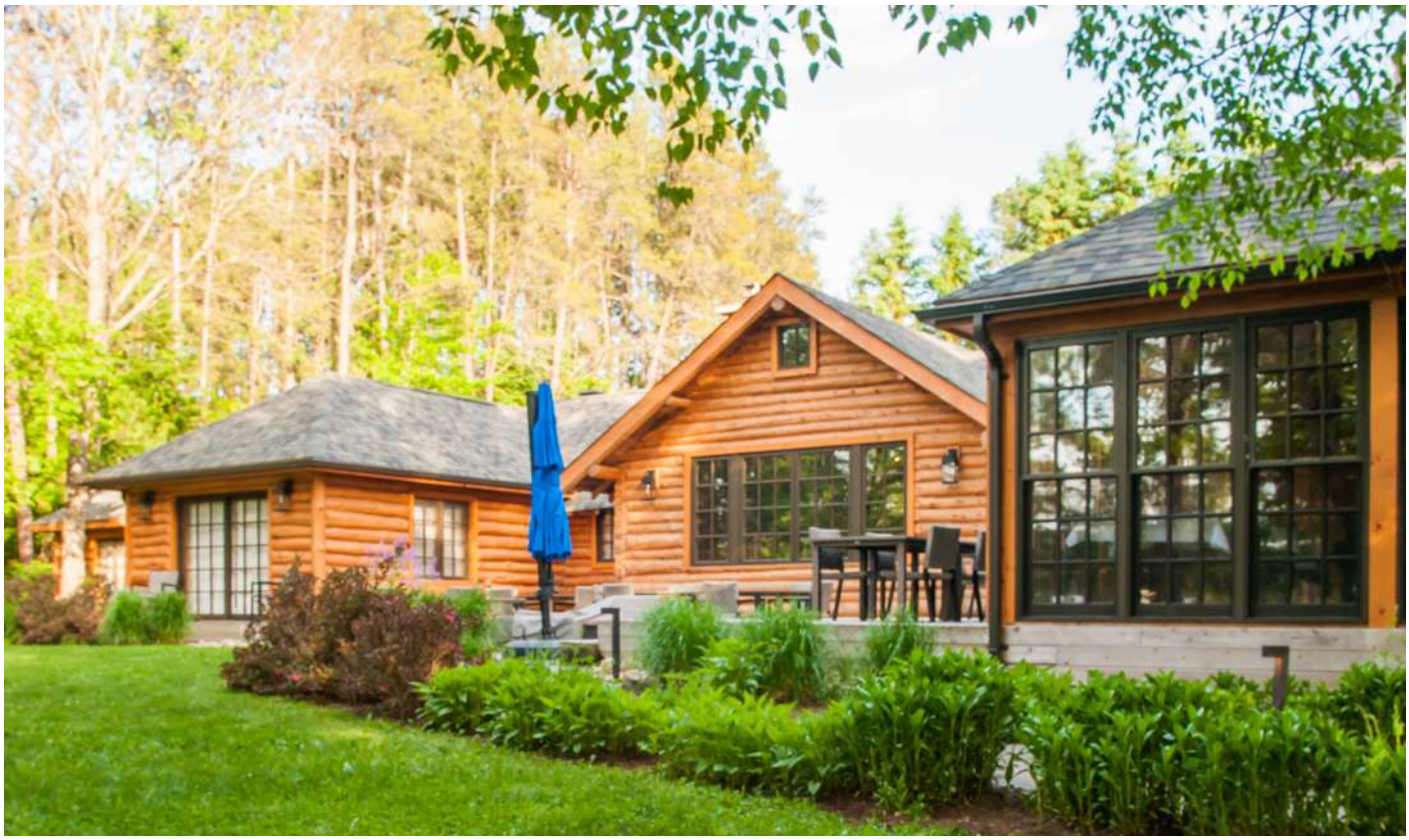
BY MADDIE JOHNSON

For me—and for most dog people I know—our pups aren't just pets. They're family. They're road trip co-pilots, backcountry hiking partners, foot warmers by the fire. So when it comes time to plan a little weekend getaway, the idea of leaving them behind just doesn't sit right.

Luckily, in Ontario, you don't have to. More and more places are making space for you to bring your four-legged friend along, which means no scrambling for sitters or worrying while you're away.

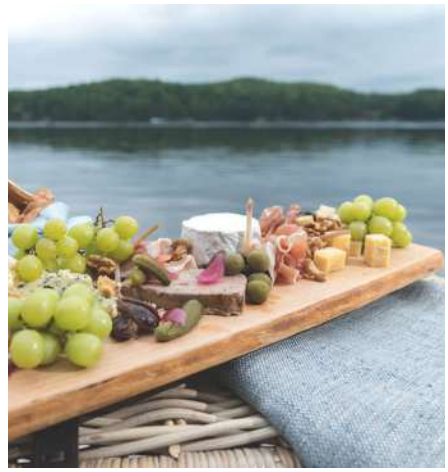
Most of my favourite road trip moments happen when my pup is with me—scouting new viewpoints, going for a sunset swim, and crashing together after a long day in the sun. My dog loves the adventures as much as I do, and honestly, I think he helps me slow down and enjoy it a bit more, too.

If you're planning your next escape and don't want to leave your pup behind, these six Ontario stays make it so that you don't have to.









The Haliburton Post House

Minden, ON

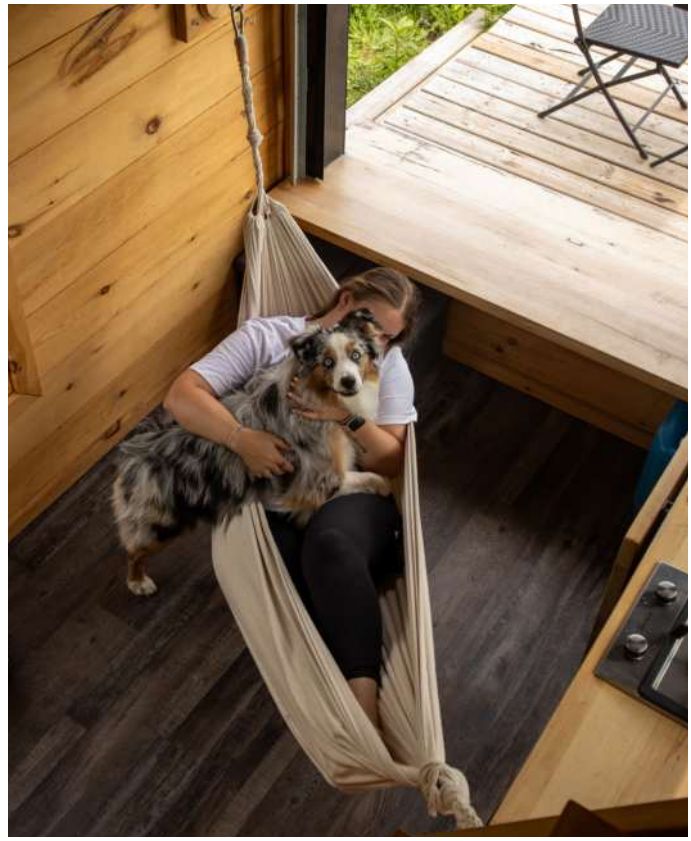
There's a certain kind of stillness that settles in when you wake up lakeside at The Post House—mist rising off Kashagawigamog, coffee in hand, your dog curled up nearby. It's the kind of place that feels like it holds stories, and it does. Originally built in the 1940s as a family compound, the Post House has been lovingly brought back to life, keeping the bones and beauty of its past while layering in thoughtful design, familiar comfort, and a real sense of care.

One of the biggest highlights here is the food. Executive Chef Dan Sanders crafts seasonal menus that are as refined as they are rooted in place, and the Post House proudly holds a Feast On® designation for its commitment to local sourcing.

Plus, dogs are welcome in select cottages, so your pup doesn't have to miss out on the fun.

Photography: (wedding couple) Jennifer van Son; (dining room)









Photography: (page 41) @mygoldenbubbles; (this page clockwise from top left) @mainlymalinois; @koda.gone.wild; @mainlymalinois; ourwildestories

Cabinscape

Multiple Locations

If you've ever wanted to disappear into the woods for a few days—with nothing but a good book, a stack of firewood, and your dog at your feet—Cabinscape is probably your kind of place. Their tiny, off-grid cabins are tucked away in some of the most beautiful corners of Ontario, from Haliburton to Lanark County, and most are happily dog-friendly.

I've stayed in a few over the years, and there's something special about the rhythm you fall into there: wake with the sun, wander the trails, maybe paddle out if the water's calm, and end the day under a sky full of stars. Your dog will love it for the freedom and fresh air. You'll love it for the quiet. Whether you're exploring Crown land or just curled up with a thermos of coffee, it's the kind of escape that resets everything—and feels even better with your pup by your side.







Penny's Motel

Thornbury, ON

There's something about Penny's Motel that just works—maybe it's the retro bones, the colourful rooms, or the fact that you can enjoy a killer cocktail without having to leave the property. Either way, this little roadside spot in Thornbury has become one of my favourite go-tos when I'm in need of a getaway. It's stylish without trying too hard, and the energy is fun in that low-key, "let's see where the day takes us" kind of way.

Dogs are very much welcomed here, and the overall vibe is super relaxed. Spend your days wandering into town for fresh bread from Thornbury Bakery with your dog in tow, sipping wine on the picnic tables out back, and then end the evening by the firepit, toes warm, dog snoozing close by.

Photography: (cover and this page) Jenna Kitchings







Photography: (top) **Huntsville A-Frame** The Cabin Hunter; (bottom) **Barry's Bay** Christine North

Our Lake Space

Barry's Bay & Huntsville, ON

Born from one family's love of travel and the belief that vacations should be shared with all your loved ones—pups included—Our Lake Space offers two thoughtfully designed lakeside retreats that balance comfort, nature, and connection.

The Barry's Bay location is built for multi-generational gatherings and big, joy-filled weekends, while the Huntsville A-frame offers a more intimate, wellness-inspired escape with sunrise views that stop you in your tracks. Both properties are fully pet-friendly, with dog bowls, toys, baby gates, tie-outs, and even outdoor balls provided—so your dog can feel as welcome as you do.









The Dudley Inn

Bala, ON

Just outside Bala, in the heart of Muskoka, The Dudley Inn (or "Dudley's" as it's affectionately known) feels like one of those places you stumble upon and then immediately want to tell your friends about. It's got that perfect mix of roadside motel nostalgia and fresh, thoughtful design. The rooms are simple but stylish, with exposed logs, soft lighting, and little comforts like propane fireplaces and communal outdoor fire pits. There's even a farmhouse out back if you're travelling with a group or want a more cottage-style stay.

And the best part? You don't have to leave your dog behind. There's a one-time pet fee, no carpet (aka less stress), and lots of space for them to hang out after a day of exploring.

Photography: Kirsten Schollig of Town + County Collective









Photography: Ian Patterson

Somewhere Inn

Calabogie & Collingwood, ON

Somewhere Inn feels less like a hotel and more like a very cool club. I've visited both their Calabogie and Collingwood locations, and in each one, I found that sweet spot between laid-back and beautifully intentional. The rooms are warm and minimal, there's always a record playing somewhere, and the staff are the kind of people who'll happily spend 20 minutes circling trails and local eats on a map for you.

And they don't just allow dogs—they love them. My pup was greeted with a bandana, a bowl, and a welcome so genuine it felt like they were more excited to see him than me. In Calabogie, you can wander straight from your door onto the K&P Trail. In Collingwood, it's all about leisurely strolls around town, lounging on the patio, and unwinding with a glass of wine before a golden-hour sauna session. W

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WANDER **MUSKOKA**



BY ANNA CIPOLLONE



AN ESCAPE TO ONTARIO'S BELOVED COTTAGE COUNTRY GIVES US SOMETHING SPECIAL IN EVERY SEASON. FIND INSPIRATION FOR YOUR NEXT GETAWAY WITH AN INSIDE LOOK FROM A TORONTONIAN TURNED LOCAL.

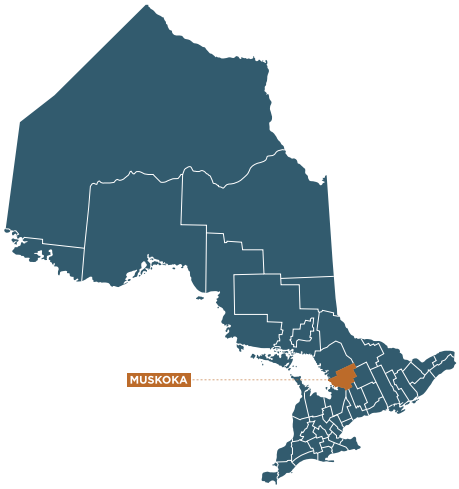


Photography: Northridge Inn Shawn Moreton

WANDER MUSKOKA

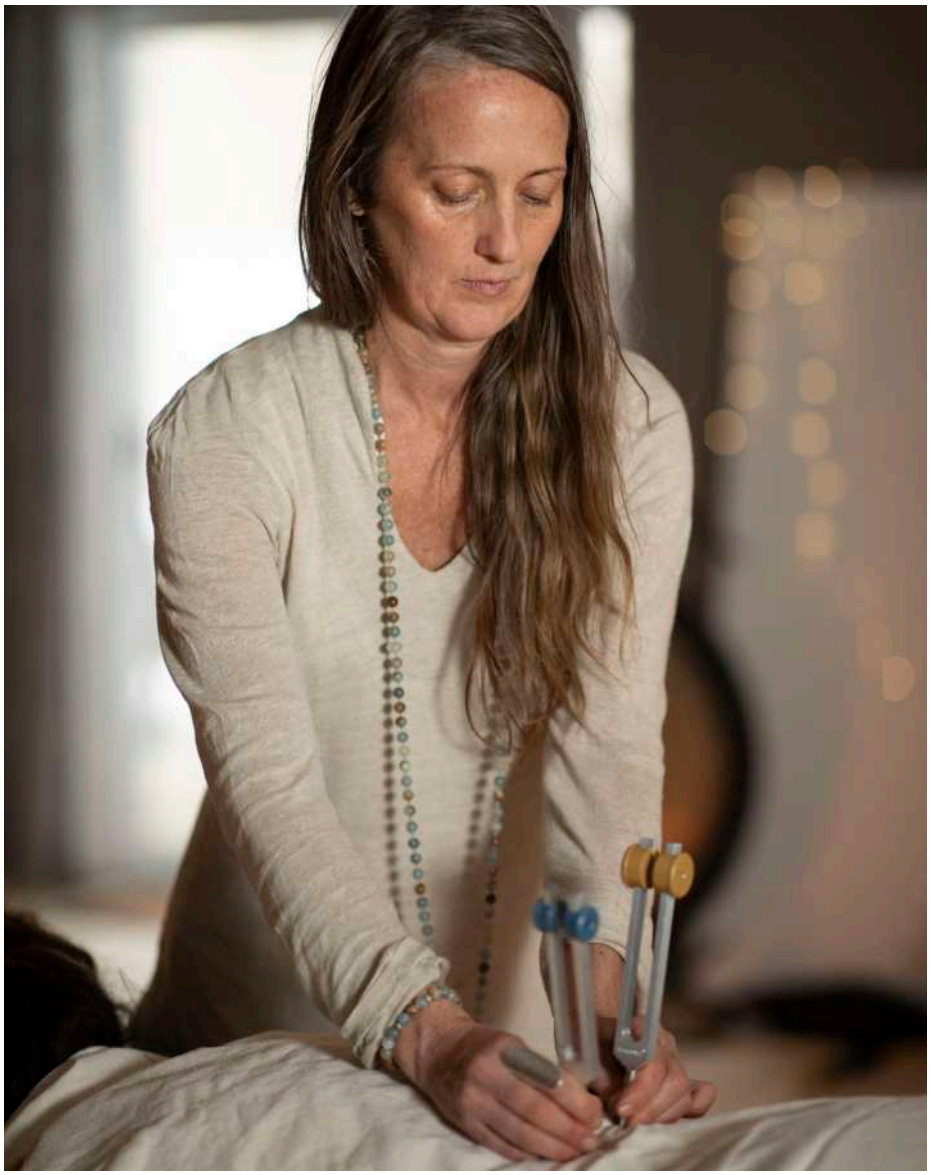


Photography: Destination Ontario Barb Simkova

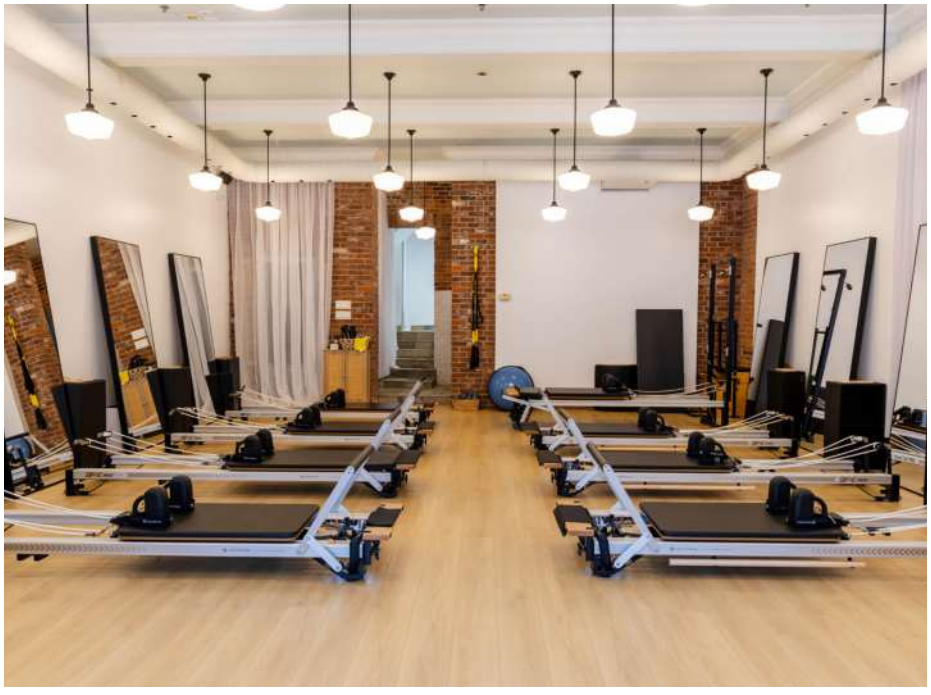


With charming little towns nestled along the water's edge of Muskoka's many lakes and rivers, a distinct mood permeates the abundance of natural beauty that surrounds. Colloquially known as "the Hamptons of the North," scenic forests and lakeside vistas are adored by both the celebrities who summer on star-studded Billionaire's Row and those seeking refuge in a nature preserve.

With vibrant restaurants, studios, and retreats, there's no shortage of ways to enhance your wellbeing within Muskoka's tranquil setting. Here, we've captured the requisite musts to invigorate your body and nourish your mind on your next sojourn up north.



Photography: Cedar Healing Arts Jelena Vemic



Photography: Flow Pilates Searra Ritchie | SR Studios

The Boathouse Yoga Co.

Within a rustic antique boathouse on the northern edge of Lake Rosseau, bare bones post-beam interiors are the perfect backdrop for finding your flow. Weekday vinyasa classes from May to October will leave you feeling grounded, sun-kissed, and serene.

Locals Know: Weekends can get busy, but there's extra outdoor space on the dock to roll out your mat.

Cedar Healing Arts

Yoga teacher and licensed Chinese medicine acupuncturist Sonja den Elzen hosts classes and retreats at her Gravenhurst wellness hub, with an inspiring roster of guest teachers. Experience the potent healing of acupuncture, qigong, and Traditional Chinese Medicine with a private treatment in the clinic.

Locals Know: An immersive yin yoga and sound journey class settles your nervous system with crystal bowls and ear seed therapy to stimulate acupressure points.

Salt Hot Yoga

For the unrivalled experience of soothing heat therapy, balance your body and breath within a Huntsville yoga space rooted in a salt-of-the-earth community. Classes range from dynamic to restorative—choose from a vigorous hot pilates class or a slow vinyasa flow in a warm room.

Locals Know: Walk to class along scenic Hunter's Bay Trail, a floating boardwalk that hugs the Muskoka River.

Flow Pilates + Social

For diehard Pilates devotees, it's rare to find a reformer class beyond the city. This boutique studio is right in the heart of downtown Bracebridge and boasts classes for every level, from beginner reformer to barre-pilates on the mat to postnatal.

Locals Know: Get a group together and book a semi-private class.

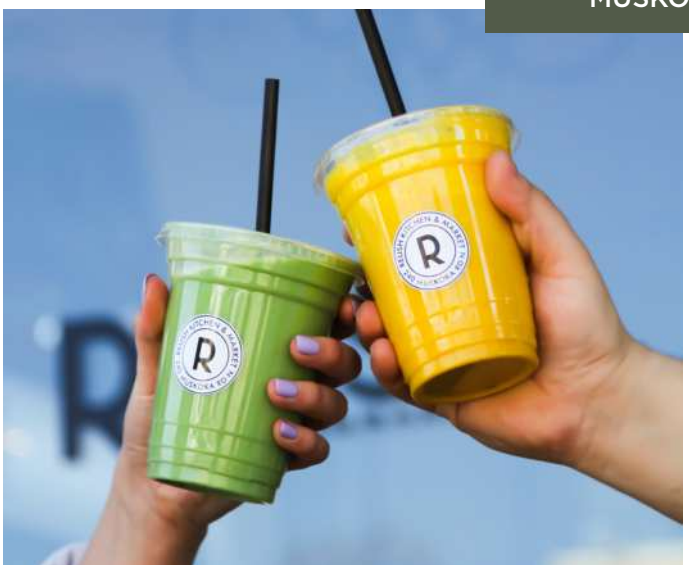


Photography: AdobeStock



Photography: Jack & Stella Jack & Stella







Photography: (clockwise from top left) **The Pearl** Rachel Callan; **Relish** Gregory Lops (Photographer) & Sabino Lops (Art Direction); **Wild Muskoka Botanicals** Wild Muskoka Botanicals

Jack & Stella

A contemporary cafe and restaurant with dockside seating overlooking Bala Bay, come for your morning mocha or imbibe in the evening at the bar. From a delightful home decor boutique to a studio offering three daily yoga/pilates classes six days a week, a quick visit can easily become a full day of bliss.

Locals Know: Go on Saturdays for live music, and don't miss Georgie's mini doughnuts at the adjacent pink sugar shack.

The Pearl

Discover simple cottage comforts in harmony with elevated cuisine. Whether you grab a cappuccino to go, dine al fresco, or shop a curated artisanal market for the pantry essentials you crave, decompress within the calming modern aesthetic of this plush snack bar.

Locals Know: The Black Pearl is a sublime signature cocktail–a blend of housemade blackberry purée, gin, crème de cassis, lemon juice, and Cointreau.

Wild Muskoka Botanicals

Huntsville-based herbalist Laura Gilmour sustainably produces a collection of wildcrafted botanicals and artisanal tonics. Join her for a foraging workshop, where you'll be guided through the forest in pursuit of nature's finest ingredients while promoting reconnection with the earth and traditional herbal medicine.

Locals Know: Rejuvenate with the locally made elderberry syrup—an organic elixir that boosts immune function and is today's trendiest health brew.

Relish

A cafe, kitchen, and health food haven owned by mother-daughter duo Jess and Emily, a visit here marks your official arrival at the gateway to Muskoka. Within a historic church in downtown Gravenhurst, stock up on necessities like soups and salads, a maple vanilla latte, and fresh dishes prepared in-house from their to-go counter.

Locals Know: Try the chicken caesar wrap with a Green Dream smoothie (we love adding boosters like hemp seeds, moringa, and aloe vera).







Photography: The Northridge Inn (clockwise from top left) FloFoto; Shawn Moreton

The Northridge Inn

Country chic with all the sumptuous fixings you left behind in the city. This Sundridge resort has a unique mix of picturesque accommodations–a vintage 1971 Airstream or glamping tent are standout options for an unforgettable visit to this luxe hideaway. Explore bold culinary flavours from Chef Bronwyn Solomon, whether dining on the terrace or in the fireside lounge.

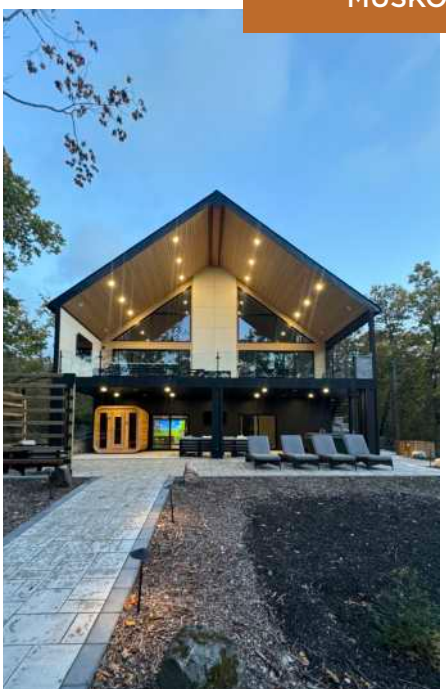
Locals Know: In July and August, sip cocktails poolside while soaking in the calm waterfront.

Muskoka Dome

A geodesic dome in the woods of Bracebridge treats you to sweeping views and a skylight to the stars. This laid-back retreat reconnects visitors with the benefits of forest bathing within a modern loft space, ensuring an unrivalled, therapeutic experience in a remote sanctuary.

Locals Know: Add the DIY oyster bar package for everything you need to shuck like a pro.









Photography: (top) **Eco Bay Chalet** (left) The Mint Studio; (bottom) **Windermere House** scottturnbulltookthisphoto

Windermere House

Enjoy nostalgic lore with historic roots dating back to 1870 at this elegant Victorian-style resort, rebuilt in the mid-1990s after a destructive fire. Known as the Lady of the Lake, its classical embrace is felt at every vantage point. With panoramic views from the barrel saunas overlooking Lake Rosseau, impressive culinary fare, and seasonal sports like tennis and pickleball, this is timeless Muskoka relaxation at its best.

Locals Know: Chef Kee serves refined sushi platters in the summer months.

Eco Bay Chalet

An expansive modern space with luxury amenities on the waterfront, well-suited to a mindful reset. Unwinding becomes effortless within the newly built chalet that blends open-concept contemporary design with all the extras you find at an extravagant hotel.

Locals Know: Located on an environmentally-protected Bay with no motorized boating, canoeing and kayaking invite space for quietude and self-reflection.

Photography: Blue Mountain Village Captured by Kirsten



BASECAMP FOR ADVENTURE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Where you stay shapes your getaway. From cozy chalets to luxury retreats, find the perfect home base to relax, recharge, and explore.

BY KRISTINA SMITH



Photography: Property Valet Kianna Sunshine

You might know The Blue Mountains best for its snowy slopes, but there's so much more to this destination than winter sports. As the days get longer, the region transforms into a vibrant outdoor playground set amidst the turquoise waters of Georgian Bay and the rolling hills of the Niagara Escarpment.

Whether you're chasing adventure, craving relaxation, or both, The Blue Mountains really does have something for everyone, from hiking trails to spa escapes and everything in between.

Choose Your Own Adventure

Whether you prefer an adrenaline rush or a serene nature walk, The Blue Mountains delivers. Hike through lush forests, discover hidden waterfalls, or bike along rugged, winding trails. If water is your element, paddleboarding and kayaking offer a refreshing perspective, or you can simply unwind on sandy beaches along the bay's shimmering shores.

The heart of the action, Blue Mountain Village, is a bustling hub of activity. Sip coffee on a patio, explore the shops, or try the alpine coaster ride for a little excitement (it's not just for kids!). With frequent events and live music, the village is the place to be, where there is always something happening.

Seeking relaxation? Scandinave Spa offers a restorative experience in nature. Enjoy the benefits of hydrotherapy as you alternate between hot and cold baths, followed by a cat nap in a hammock, lunch in the bistro, or a peaceful forest stroll.

For golf enthusiasts, Monterra Golf offers an 18-hole championship course with immaculate rolling bent grass fairways. Featuring 86 sand bunkers, numerous ravines, creeks, and lakes, and breathtaking views, Monterra is perfect for a leisurely afternoon on the green.

The Blue Mountains region features countless hiking and biking trails for all levels. Tackle the Bruce Trail, which offers spectacular panoramic views of Georgian Bay; opt for a leisurely forest walk at Pretty River Valley Provincial Park; or seek out Step it Up Adventures for private hiking tours of the nearby Nottawasaga Bluffs or Singhampton Caves. Dogs are generally welcome on area trails but must be on a leash.

Savour the Flavour

After a day of exploring, satisfy your appetite with the area's culinary scene, home to charming cafés, upscale restaurants, and farm-to-table eateries that celebrate local ingredients. Sample fresh Georgian Bay whitefish, try unique regional wines, or sip on locally crafted hard cider.







Photography: (clockwise from top left) **Apple Pie Trail** Blue Mountain Village Association; **Property Valet** Kianna Sunshine

The not-so-secret local secret is Ravenna Country Market, where you can get made-to-order sandwiches and soups, butter tarts (come early before they sell out—they might be the best you've ever tasted!) and a selection of local farm products, frozen entrees, and beverages.

And truly, you cannot leave without satisfying your taste buds on the famed Apple Pie Trail, a culinary adventure that celebrates the region's apple-growing heritage. From cider tastings to farm-to-table dining, it's a delicious way to experience the area, enjoy all types of sweet and savoury apple-inspired treats, and meet some really great people.

Stay in Style

For the ultimate, stress-free getaway experience, Property Valet offers accommodations that combine luxury, comfort, and personalized service with a selection of vacation rentals that cater to families, friend groups, and retreats alike. Each property is designed to feel like a home away from home, offering amenities like Wi-Fi, hot tubs, saunas, pools, and stunning mountain views. With options ranging from cozy retreats to spacious 10-bedroom homes, many rentals feature outdoor dining areas, fire pits, and even pet-friendly accommodations.

Gather with family and friends to stream your favourite shows on smart TVs or cook together in a fully equipped kitchen, complete with appliances, cookware, bakeware, cutlery, and both Keurig and drip coffee makers—just bring your favourite ingredients and spices. Enjoy meals in the dining area or out on the patio, making the most of your time in this scenic escape.

Property Valet is set apart by their exceptional service. The booking and check-in process is seamless; everything is delivered electronically, including a personal guide that you can share with other guests. Local team members are available to offer personalized recommendations and work closely with local businesses to curate memorable experiences.

Girls' Getaways

Pamper yourself with in-home spa treatments, catered dinners, and even rejuvenating IV therapy service packages.

Family Reunions

Bond over bonfires, beach days, and outdoor adventures. Spacious properties ensure everyone has room to relax.

Golf Weekends

Tee off at Monterra Golf or explore other nearby courses. Return to your chalet for post-game cocktails and sunset views.

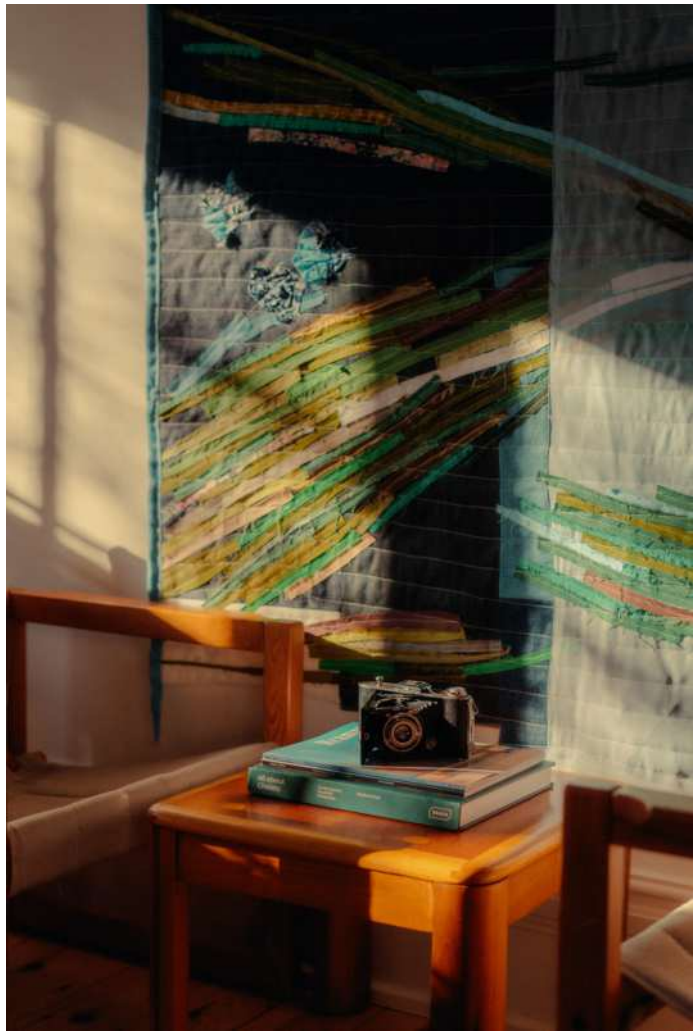
Whether you're drawn by the outdoor thrills, restorative relaxation, or simply time to bond with your people, The Blue Mountains is just a stay away. W



THE ART OF A SOLO READING RETREAT

A Guide to Deepening Your Literary Escape

BY KAMI MARCHAND



Dear reader, I have a confession. Every time I step into the town bookstore, I leave with at least three books—two of which inevitably become part of the ever-growing decorative stacks on my bedside table, waiting for their moment. Life piles up, much like this stack, and by the time I finally settle into my designated reading time, my brain is often too overwhelmed or exhausted to absorb more than a few pages. Yet, the curiosity that outweighs the time and space I've allocated to explore—the same curiosity that led me to buy those books in the first place—lingers. The desire to learn about the slow art of deep listening or follow a wandering poet as they find home still nags at me, like a child pulling at a parent's sleeve in front of a display of sweets.

Reading has always been a way of escaping—of slipping into different worlds that weave self-reflection with adventure. Authors like Leonard Cohen carry me through poetic reveries of longing, while Pam Royles takes me on horseback through Oregon trails accompanied by a man named Skip. There is a particular beauty in wandering through the minds of these writers—one that invites me to slow down, to truly be present with their words.

Maybe reading doesn't just require time—it requires space as well. Not just a retreat from daily life, but a retreat into the pages themselves.

What if you treated your book like a partner on a weekend getaway? Exploring your relationship with the author and their story. A reading retreat is, in essence, a couple's trip with your books—an opportunity to immerse yourself fully without distraction. In a way, you are dating the characters, the environment, and the themes of each page.

Before planning your reading retreat, take a moment to reflect: What do I want to get out of this experience? Is it an escape, an intellectual challenge, a means of deep introspection, or a way to unwind? Understanding your personal goals will help you shape the retreat in a way that feels fulfilling.

The books you bring will shape your retreat experience. Choosing the right ones is key. Some books feel like effortless conversation with an instant spark; others take work. Think about your connection to the books you've chosen. Why do they call to you? Is there a recurring theme in your selections? Whether it's fiction, philosophy, poetry, or memoir, your reading retreat is an opportunity to embrace the books that resonate with your current state of mind. Be open to the idea that the book you thought was *"the one"* might not be right for the moment—and that's okay. Don't force a book if it isn't clicking. This retreat is about enjoyment, not obligation.


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Consider curating a mix—perhaps a novel that whisks you away into a fantasy world, a memoir by an artist that cultivates play, and a non-fiction book that expands your perspective. Balance is essential. Too many dense reads may feel overwhelming, while light reads might leave you craving more depth. Let your retreat be a blend of what you *need* and what you *desire*.

What makes the perfect spot for a reading retreat? Maybe it's a quiet cabin in the woods, a lake, or riverside escape with the soothing sound of water, a cozy nook in a book-filled space, or even a retreat within your own home, carefully curated for comfort. Luckily, this is your opportunity to escape—so follow your inner hobbit.

If you're craving nature, seek a space with access to fresh air and peaceful solitude. If community energizes you, a boutique hotel with shared lounge spaces might be the ideal setting. The key is to find a space that allows you to sink into your books without distraction.

Elements like cleansing water, crisp mountains, or meditative fire can influence your ability to focus and escape into a book. Think about which natural rhythms draw you in, and weave them into your retreat—whether through a riverside setting, a crackling fireplace, or the quiet hum of a local café.

To create a truly immersive experience, consider what environment helps you focus. Do you need absolute quiet, or does ambient noise help? Do you prefer reading by candlelight or in the soft glow of the morning sun?

A reading retreat isn't just about books—it's a full sensory experience. Think of it as setting the mood for a perfect literary date. Creating the right atmosphere can transform the entire experience. Wrap yourself in soft blankets, warm socks, and cozy loungewear for ultimate comfort. Set the mood with beeswax candles in a softly lit corner. Choose silence, classical music, or nature sounds to enhance focus. Infuse the space with scent using essential oils and herbal teas. With these simple touches, your reading retreat becomes more than an escape—it becomes a sanctuary.

Now that you've set the scene, it's time to set boundaries with distractions. Unplug from digital noise by switching your phone to Do Not Disturb or leaving it in another room. You wouldn't check your

Photography: Cover and page 65 **Somewhere Inn Collingwood** Ian Patterson; page 66 (1, 5) **The June Motel Beaver Valley** Lauren Miller; (2, 4, 6) **Somewhere Inn Collingwood** Ian Patterson; (3) **The Seed Lodge;** page 68 **Blue Moon Collective**



phone every time a date pauses mid-sentence—so why do it to your book? If you're struggling to focus, clear mental clutter by journalling before diving into the pages.

This retreat is about honouring your time with your books—letting them be the focus rather than something squeezed into the margins.

Deepening your engagement with your reads through reflection and ritual can be a wonderful tool to connect further. Mark passages with sticky notes, underlines, and bookmarks. Journal about how you feel after reading certain chapters and note key takeaways.

Now that you have clear intentions, it's time to make a packing list. Keep the atmosphere you are building in mind and create a packing list that includes your carefully chosen stack of books, a journal and pens, comfortable clothes and blankets, tea and snacks, noise-cancelling headphones or a reading-friendly playlist, and aromatherapy or grounding rods for added comfort.

At its core, a reading retreat is about allowing yourself to disconnect to reconnect, honouring a great story and the curiosities that led you to buy that book in the first place. It's about slowing down and engaging in self-reflection. Blending what you *need* and what you *desire*. Whether you spend a weekend in the woods or a quiet afternoon in a café, the gift of uninterrupted reading time is one worth giving yourself.

So, answer the call of those books waiting on your bedside table. Go on that date. Retreat—not away from the world, but deeper into it, one page at a time. W

We've put together a list of spaces that we hope will spark your next reading retreat.

The Seed Lodge Writing Residency | Rocklyn, ON
Rest & Reconnect Retreats at the SEED Lodge offer a seasonal escape into the peaceful countryside—a space to pause, breathe, and reset. For those seeking creative focus, the lodge also hosts seasonal writing residencies, providing dedicated time to bring ideas to life.

The June Motel | Beaver Valley, ON
Nestled along the Beaver River, this boutique hotel is an 8-room retreat designed for quiet mornings, immersive reading, and deep relaxation. With a cozy sauna and country charm, it's the perfect escape for rest, reflection, and literary indulgence.

Somewhere Inn | Collingwood, ON
A restored century home turned boutique hotel in Downtown Collingwood, designed for slow mornings and uninterrupted reading. With a Thermal Cycle and Wine Bar, bespoke vintage furniture, and Malin & Goetz bath products, it's the perfect literary escape—plus it's dog-friendly.

Blue Moon Collective | Markdale, ON
A creative studio and gathering space where you can unwind with a good book in a peaceful, community-focused atmosphere. Nestled in charming Markdale, it's perfect for those craving an afternoon escape. Grab a coffee from the local deli and settle in for a tranquil day retreat in this inspiring space.

Wild Rose Farm | Mulmur, ON
An eco-friendly organic rose farm offering artists a peaceful overnight retreat to immerse themselves in nature and cultivate their creativity in a restful, beautiful setting. It's the perfect place to sink into your stack of reads and nature as part of your escape.

Pack well and read deeply—get book picks and a mindful packing list.

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THORNBURY CRAFT CO. - VIENI ESTATES
WINDSWEPT - SPY + MORE

FOOD VENDORS

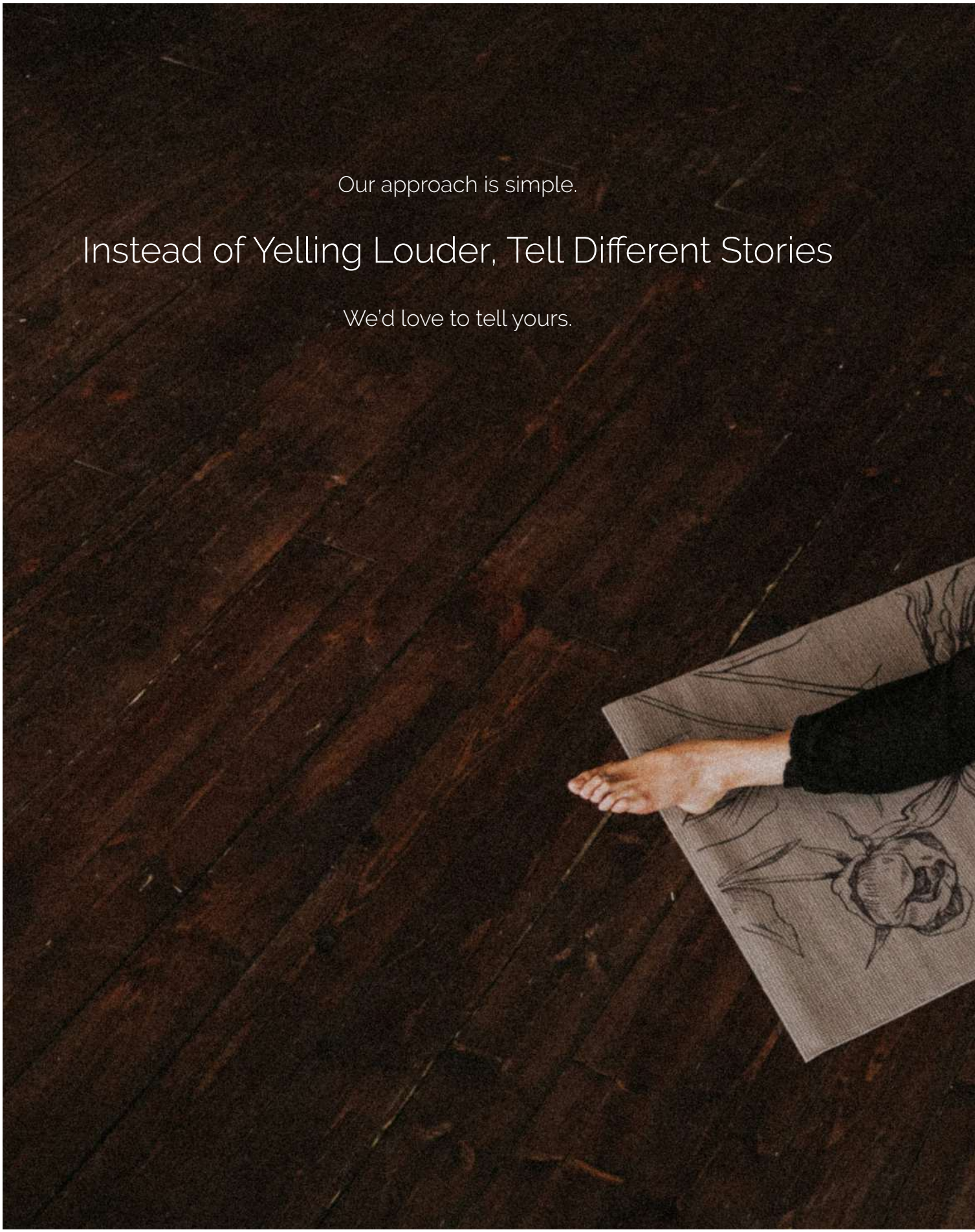
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THE GATE
MISFITS BODEGA

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MARSHALL VERONI

Spy CIDER HOUSE AND DISTILLERY

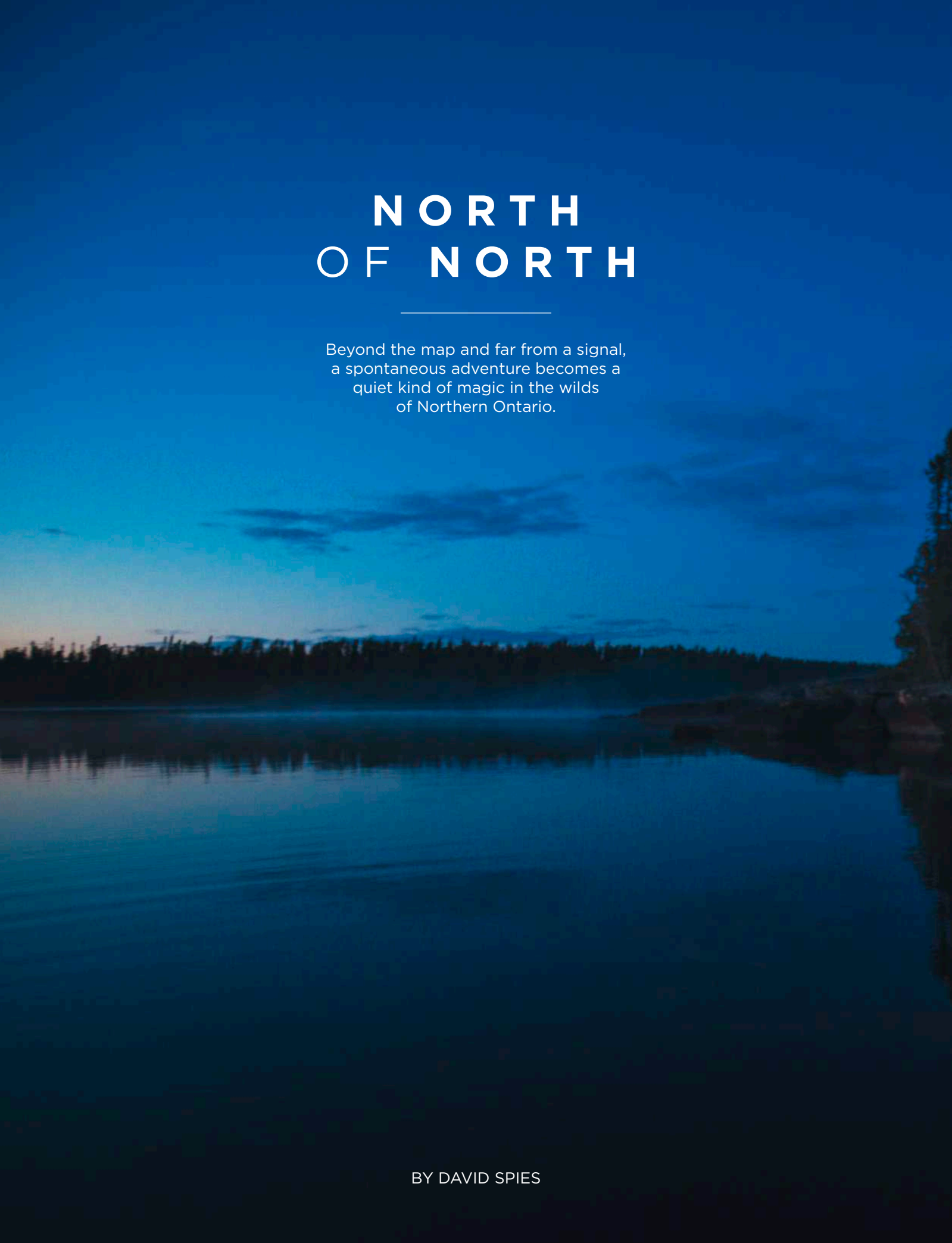
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NORTH OF NORTH

Beyond the map and far from a signal, a spontaneous adventure becomes a quiet kind of magic in the wilds of Northern Ontario.

BY DAVID SPIES



Photography: Destination Ontario



Photography: David Spies

Full disclosure, I did not know the road that I am currently on existed 15 minutes ago.

The truck's built in GPS is also unaware that it exists.

I pulled out my Backroads Northwestern Ontario book when I first turned onto the road, after it appeared out of nowhere and there it was, a little industry road off the highway, hiding right before some real nice boulders.

It also confirmed that I am now on a very large parcel of Crown land.

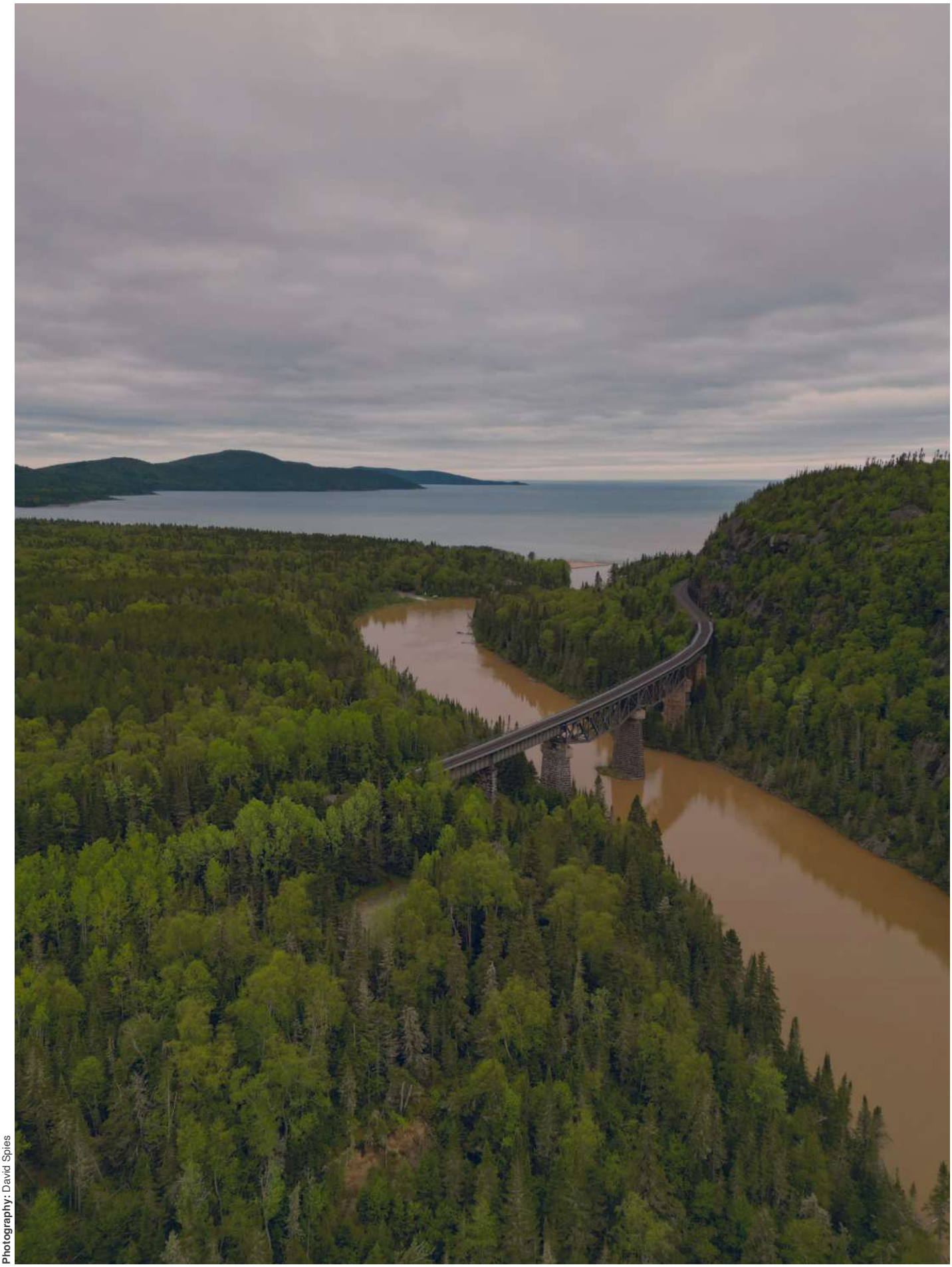
It's my third summer in northern Ontario. I grew up in the turquoise waters and patchwork of forested islands within Thousand Islands National Park outside of Gananoque. My family spent lots of time outside, but we certainly were not exploring a road that doesn't appear on a GPS in an area without cell service and no official destination. Since moving, I have learned that the lack of an official destination can define an adventure while north of north. Up here, there isn't a race to computers in an attempt to book campsites as soon as reservations open for the year.

Instead, you end up slowly meandering down a road it feels like you've discovered. The Hip flow out of the radio, although the internal soundtrack in my mind is blasting the Indiana Jones theme song.

The further I travel, the steeper the slope to my right becomes. Deep in Canadian Shield land, boulders decorate the lower angle slopes, as large rock faces reach above and beyond the treetops.

To the left, sunlight bounces through the trees, reflecting off a glassy, undisturbed lake.

The dirt road winds and buckles along the shoreline before a long sweeping left turn brings me to a fork in the road.



Photography: David Spies









Photography: (left) Destination Ontario; (right) David Spies

The tracks that I have been following continue down the dirt road to the left. My option to the right appears to be more trail than road, with thick bushes lining either side. There wouldn't be enough room to make a 23-point turn if someone else was coming from the opposite direction.

Just as I'm about to continue following the tire tracks left, I realize that the tall grass on the trail is exactly that—tall. There aren't any tire marks treads. No one has taken that fork in a while.

After some slow meandering in 4x4, the trail opens up to a small clearing.

A slightly overgrown footpath leads to a sandy beach on the lake. As soon as the engine stills, peace and calm envelop the landscape.

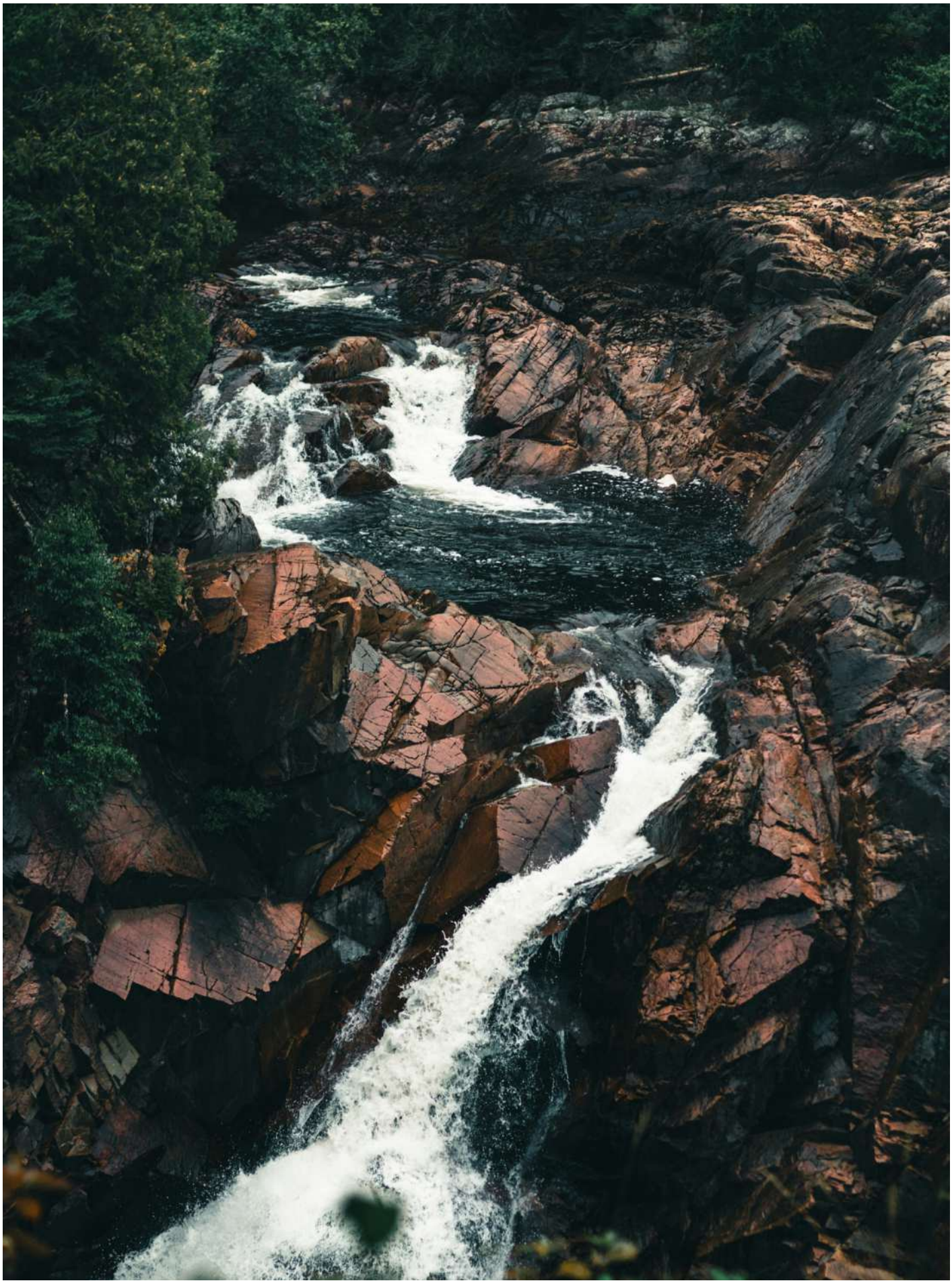
I settle into the familiar rhythm of getting camp constructed. Within 15 minutes, the paddleboard is unloaded, rooftop nest is deployed and the bed has been made.

Standing barefoot in the sand, it feels like I'm in the Pacific Northwest. A slight haze from wildfires thousands of kilometres away clings to mountain peaks on the lake's distant shore.

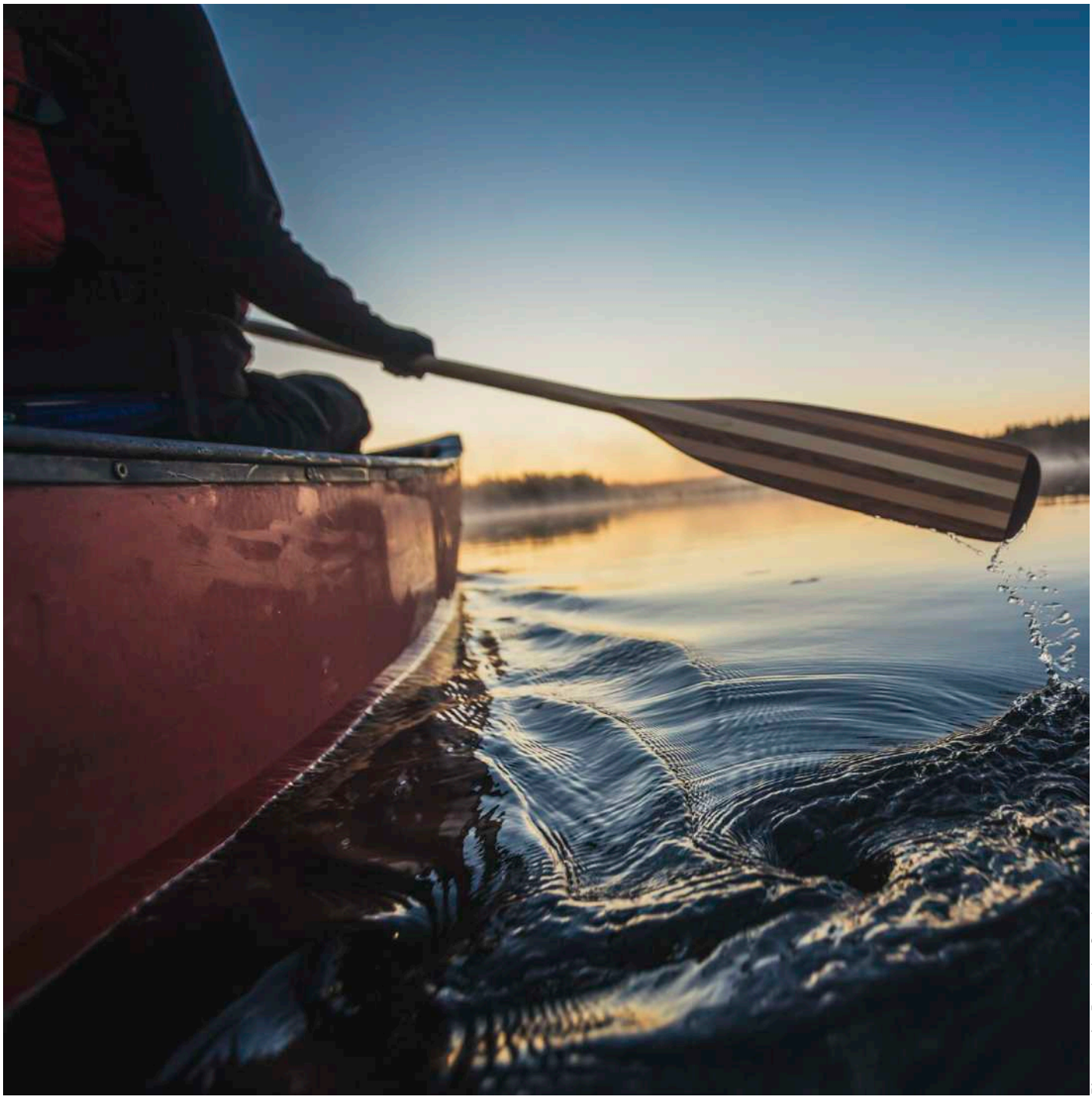
It's nearly impossible to put the amount of peace present at this moment into words. As far as I can see, there is no evidence that any other human exists on the planet. I walk along the shoreline, watching small birds dip, duck and dive through thick conifer branches.

Collecting driftwood, it's not long before I am sitting fireside watching the sun dip towards the distant horizon. Splashes of pink and orange paint clouds slowly drifting through the sky.

The hiss of sausages cooking alongside the snap and crackle of the fire are the only sounds breaking the serenity of the north woods.



Photography: Ali Kazal



Photography: Destination Ontario

When the sun disappears, the stars come out to play. Growing up in southern Ontario, I thought I knew how the night sky looks. Then I moved to Thunder Bay.

As soon as you are twenty kilometres out of the city, the night sky here is alight with infinite galaxies. I have travelled to 42 different countries across 3 continents and the only place I've seen more stars was during a four-day crossing of the Pacific Ocean from California to Hawai'i.

I thought that I had been exposed to wilderness before. Whether it be on the British Columbia coast, jungles of Colombia or the middle of the Joshua Tree desert.

Yet in all those places, city life exists just outside the boundary. It's a couple hours to Vancouver, Cartaghena, or Palm Springs.

Here, you are 550 kilometres from Minneapolis. 800 away from Winnipeg. 1,500 from Toronto.

When I told my grandmother that I was going to move here, she told me there's nothing up there but rocks and trees. She wasn't wrong.

There are a ton of rocks and even more trees up here. That's the beauty of being north of north. It's rocks and trees, not city blocks and streets.

It's north of north. And there is no place I would rather be. W



















ESSENTIAL GOODS

Solo Stove Bonfire 2.0
Smokeless flames, easy cleanup, and serious camp vibes. This portable fire pit turns any outdoor space into a gathering spot.
solostove.com

Roots Beaver Canoe Hoodie
With a cottage-core design and soft French Terry fabric, this hoodie is made for cool mornings and stargazing nights.
roots.com

Night Shift, Spy Cider House
Warm up by the fire with this rich, handcrafted espresso liqueur—just the right kick after a day outdoors.
spydistillery.com

MSR PocketRocket Deluxe Kit
Ultralight, fast-boiling, and trail-ready—this compact cook set is made for morning coffees and backcountry meals for two.
mec.ca

Roots Wasaga Short
Stretch, stroll, or sprawl—these comfy shorts are made for laid-back days and lakeside lounging with just the right amount of give.
roots.com

ChocoSol Fino Collection
Ethically sourced and stone-ground in Toronto, these dark chocolate bars bring bold, feel-good flavour to your camp kit.
chocosoltraders.com

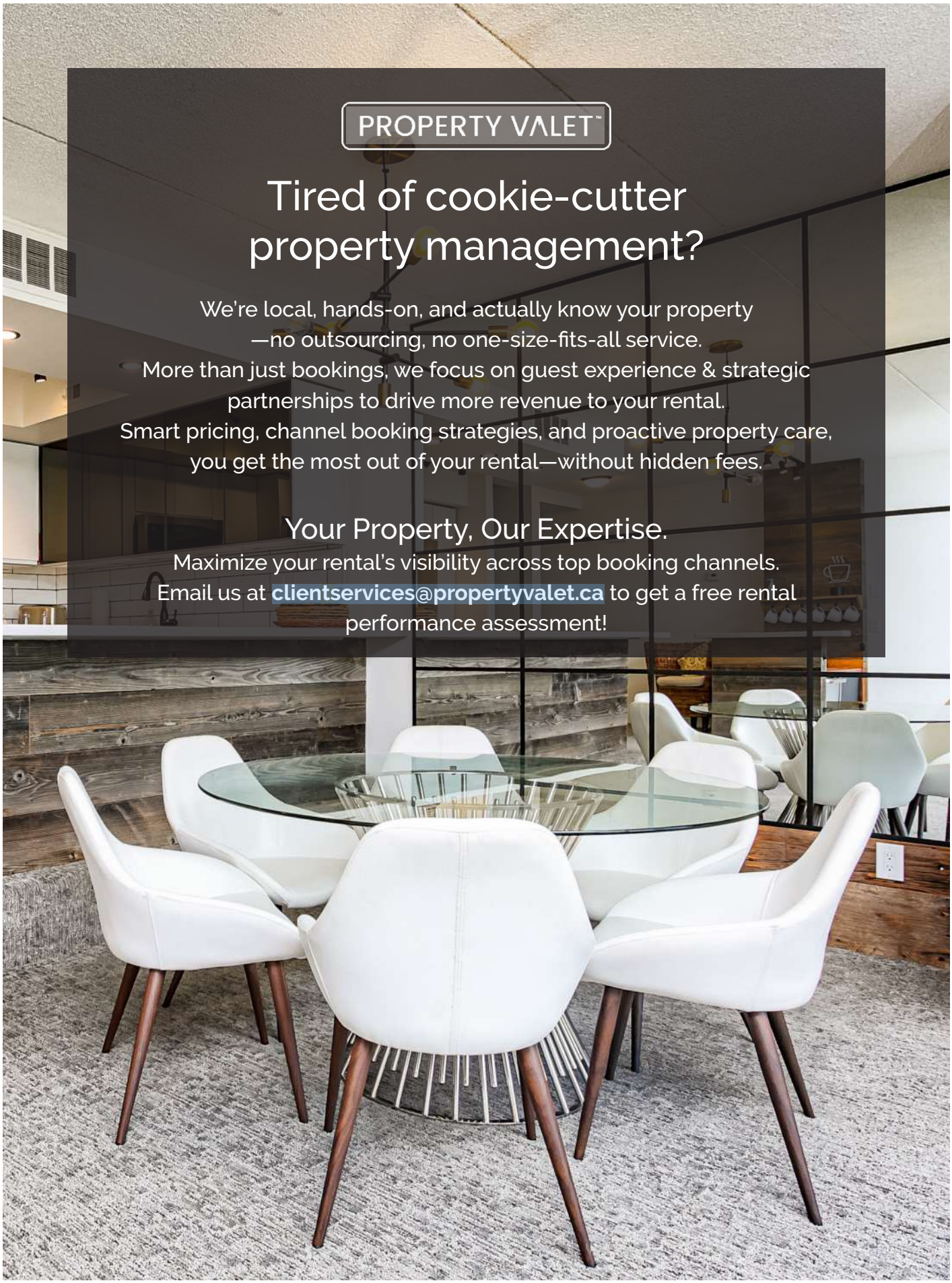
Helinox Chair Zero
Super light, surprisingly sturdy. This packable chair is your comfy seat after long hikes, campfire nights, or trailhead lunches.
helinox.com

Roots Baseball Cap
A trail-to-town essential. Comfy cotton twill, adjustable fit, and classic style for wherever the day takes you.
roots.com

Heartbeat Hot Sauce
Small-batch and full of flavour, this Thunder Bay-made hot sauce brings bold, fermented heat to campfire meals and trail snacks.
heartbeathotsauce.com



Georgian Bay Kayaking
Photo courtesy: DESTINATION ONTARIO


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