Discovering DEERFIELD VALLEY

The Hermitage Club reawakens this once-sleepy region.

BY LIZA CHURCHILL
Vermont’s Deerfield Valley has experienced a rebirth, thanks to The Hermitage Club at Haystack Mountain. Not long ago, the concept of a four-season resort seemed improbable within this laid-back and tranquil section of the Green Mountain State. But the region has become a popular year-round tourist destination since The Hermitage Club owner Jim Barnes arrived on the scene nine years ago.

Barnes purchased the historic Hermitage Inn in 2007, and then four years later bought Haystack Mountain and the Haystack Golf Course, combining the three properties to create The Hermitage Club. Set on 1,400 acres, the club features an 80,000-square-foot clubhouse that celebrated its opening two years ago with a Kenny Loggins concert.

There is also a 30,000-square-foot spa and such clubhouse amenities as ski valets, on-site child care, a movie theater, bowling alley, fitness center, luxurious locker rooms, outdoor hot tubs and fire pits. The Hotel Hermitage, a slope-side condominium complex, is currently under construction and is scheduled to be completed next year.

Although winter definitely remains high season in Vermont, there are plenty of attractive activities available in spring, summer and fall, including fishing, mountain-biking, hiking and, of course, golf. The semi-private Hermitage Golf Club was built in the early 1970s. It is a challenging mountain course that measures 6,550 yards from the tips and includes eye-catching backdrops of Haystack Peak and Mount Snow.

The signature hole is the par-5, 533-yard 11th, which features an 860-foot drop from tee to green. “Tee boxes appear to be very narrow, but once you’re [on] the fairways, they widen up to generous hitting areas,” head professional Johnny Cleanthes says.

Mark Bradley, father of PGA Tour pro Keegan Bradley, served as head pro in the 1970s when the course was called the Crown Point Country Club. The best time to tee up at Hermitage is during peak fall foliage season, which stretches from early September into the middle of October.

There are many superb lodging options in the area, including the recently renovated Four Columns Inn, located in Newfane. Set on 138 acres, new owner Charles Mallory has redesigned the guest rooms and suites into the rustic coziness of a classic Vermont inn.

Oversized soaking tubs and wood-burning fireplaces are standard amenities in every room. A Wellness Center and Spas, gym and European-style steam room are other new additions. The Inn’s farm-to-table restaurant features homemade pastas with braised rabbit, pumpkin risoto and Faroe Island salmon, along with a hearty selection of regional beers and hard cider. One more reason to stay at The Four Columns is that guests have access to tee times at The Hermitage Club.

A second option is The Hermitage Inn, which is owned by The Hermitage Club and is approximately five miles away in West Dover. Visitors are welcomed by an old-fashioned covered bridge that leads to the 15-room country inn. The award-winning five diamond restaurant features a nationally recognized wine cellar and a casual bistro.

The surrounding area of West Dover and Deerfield Valley includes many farm stands, antique stores, local music festivals and museums. Many of these attractions were here before The Hermitage Club opened, but now, because of its presence, more visitors than ever are taking advantage of the area’s quaint charms. In a way, Deerfield Valley has truly been discovered.