

An overnight at the Music Fest

What It's Like to Spend the Night At Shrine Mont

BY JOAN ANDERSON

I've never seen such a patient line of people. A bell rang. They gathered, coming from all directions in groups small and large. They formed a messy line outside the dining room door, spilling off the porch and into the lane. We waited and waited, but no one seemed to mind.

Then another bell rang, the doors opened and the crowd poured in seeking seats at tables on two levels. Most tables held about 16 people. We ended up on the upper level toward the kitchen, seated with a couple and their son, with a few empty chairs between us and a family reunion group.

We were experiencing our first family style meal at Shrine Mont, one of three meals that are included when you spend the night at the Orkney Springs resort. Our overnight was part of a package that paired a Shenandoah Valley Music Festival concert with one or two nights at the resort, resulting in a discount for both.

Check in time was 4 pm, giving us time to find our lodgings before the 5:30 dinner bell.

We were sent to the Atkeson Cottage, a structure with three rooms on the ground floor and three above. Ours was sparse (as promised by the photos on the Shrine Mont website) containing a double bed, one wooden chair, a small dresser with mirror, and a decent sized bathroom with shower.

No phone. No TV. No Wi-Fi. No unfathomable clock radio. No extra pillows. But, an extra blanket and a fan. Outside our door were two comfortable rocking chairs.

The rooms are not meant for hanging out in. Instead clubby lounges in the community buildings invite you to read or even nap in comfort.

For dinner, we were assigned to Tucker Hall, described above, where family style prevails. Depending on where their rooms are, other guests dine at the Virginia House where meals are buffet style. The couple at our dinner table, veterans of overnights at Orkney, said they much prefer family-style where you meet new people.

The table was set with dinnerware, water,

ice tea, and soon platters of roast beef, bowls of mashed potatoes, green beans, applesauce, salad, and gravy. There were two sets of everything per table including rolls and butter. As soon as a serving dish was empty, a young person would take it away and bring another. Dessert was fruit and cookies.

Our table mates knew what the dessert would be and were rhapsodizing over the lunch dessert – pecan pie. The menu is set so once you've spent a weekend there, you know what to expect and which meals on which days are your favorites.

We ate and talked and learned that the couple had come to bring their son to a Shrine Mont Camp, a summer treat he looked forward to every year. They were staying on a special parent's drop off plan, as were some others in the room.

Most, though, appeared to be family reunions where separate houses, rather than just rooms, were rented. As we waited for the dining room doors to open, we saw a multi-generational group relaxing in a screened gazebo

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with beer and wine. No alcohol is served at the resort, but you can bring your own for your own quarters.

After dinner, we returned to our room for a bit and then drove to the concert site, as our building was a bit away, walkable for more able people. If we had been assigned a room in the Pennsylvania House, there would have been no need to drive anywhere.

The concert was the Piedmont Symphony Orchestra playing movie music from the sublime "Gabriel's Oboe" from *The Mission* to the rousing *Star Wars* theme. It was all good. And so was the one-minute drive home. So much better than taking the winding roads out of Basye for a 30-minute drive to our home west of Woodstock.

We slept a bit fitfully because double beds are smaller than they used to be, aren't they? One's best bet is to make sure you get a room with two twins so you won't be elbowing each other all night.

At breakfast, we sat in the same place with the same couple. The table was preset with a variety of single serving cereals, yogurt, fruit, milk, bread and butter. Then the young servers entered bearing big platters brimming with pancakes and sausages and baked apples. It was more than enough to satisfy anyone.

Now we had several hours to kill before the famous Shrine Mont Sunday lunch. We packed up and vacated our room and then took a small auto tour of the resort. We drove by many lovely houses with huge porches, playing fields, and a beautiful outdoor swimming pool.

Next, we visited the Virginia House with its massive lobby where the check-in desk is. The ground floor also has the gift shop with clothes, books, and branded Shrine Mont souvenirs. I bought a fabric fan that folds into a tiny circle to tuck into your purse. The woman at the cash register showed me how easily it folded.

Now, it was back to Tucker, where we spent

some time reading in the gazebo and then went to the inside lounge in search of more reading material. I did a bit of work, sitting in a wing back chair, while my husband managed to doze off in his.

Lunch time came quickly and we returned to our usual table. This time we met a couple from Arlington who were there with their three children bound for camp. We had a nice conversation as we tucked into the southern fried chicken, Lima beans, coleslaw, rice and gravy, and biscuits. Dessert was ice cream and cake.

Our stay complete, we drove home in the daylight with smiles on our faces. We would do it again... yes, especially because I must return to the gift shop. I opened my fan and now I can't for the life of me get it folded down to fit in my purse again.

For more information on overnight and weekend discount packages or to reserve a buffet meal before a concert, contact Shrine Mont or call 540-856-2141.

For more information about the music festival visit musicfest.org.

What is Shrine Mont?

Shrine Mont is a conference and retreat center located in Orkney Springs, in western Shenandoah County. With accommodations for up to 550 people, the resort welcomes groups as well as individuals. It is owned by the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia with public services held at 11:00 on Sundays from early April through mid-November.

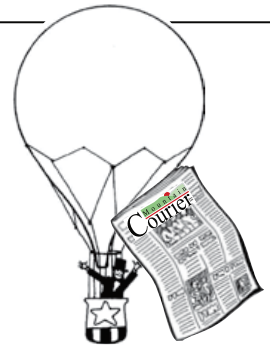
The Virginia House (formerly known as the Orkney Springs Hotel) is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and was purchased by Shrine Mont in 1979. Looking much like a wedding cake with its white clapboard structure and tall, green-shuttered windows, the Virginia House is four stories high. The 96,000 square-foot structure was built in 1873 and restored in 1987.

We say goodbye to our humble room after an overnight, three meals, and a concert at Shrine Mont.

Photo by Joan Anderson

Several different kinds of housing are available, including cottages with porches and fireplaces or rooms in the larger Pennsylvania and Maryland Houses. The two-story, 50-room Maryland House was built in the early 1850s. Both Maryland and Pennsylvania Houses provide more traditional accommodations with a double room and private bath. Cottages differ in size and consist of private bathrooms and shared baths. Shrine Mont follows The American Plan (One-night stay with three meals included).

Shrine Mont opens in early spring and remains open through the second Sunday in November. The resort can accommodate retreat groups and conferences ranging in size from 20 to 550. Family reunions and individuals are always welcome. Individual reservations are accepted on a space-available basis. Shrine Mont hosts church retreats, camps for children, meetings and conferences for religious and secular groups, high school bands, and is home each year to the Shenandoah Valley Music Festival and the Bishop's Bluegrass Festival.




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