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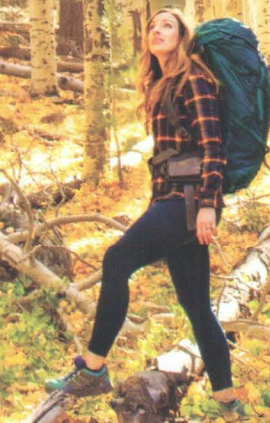
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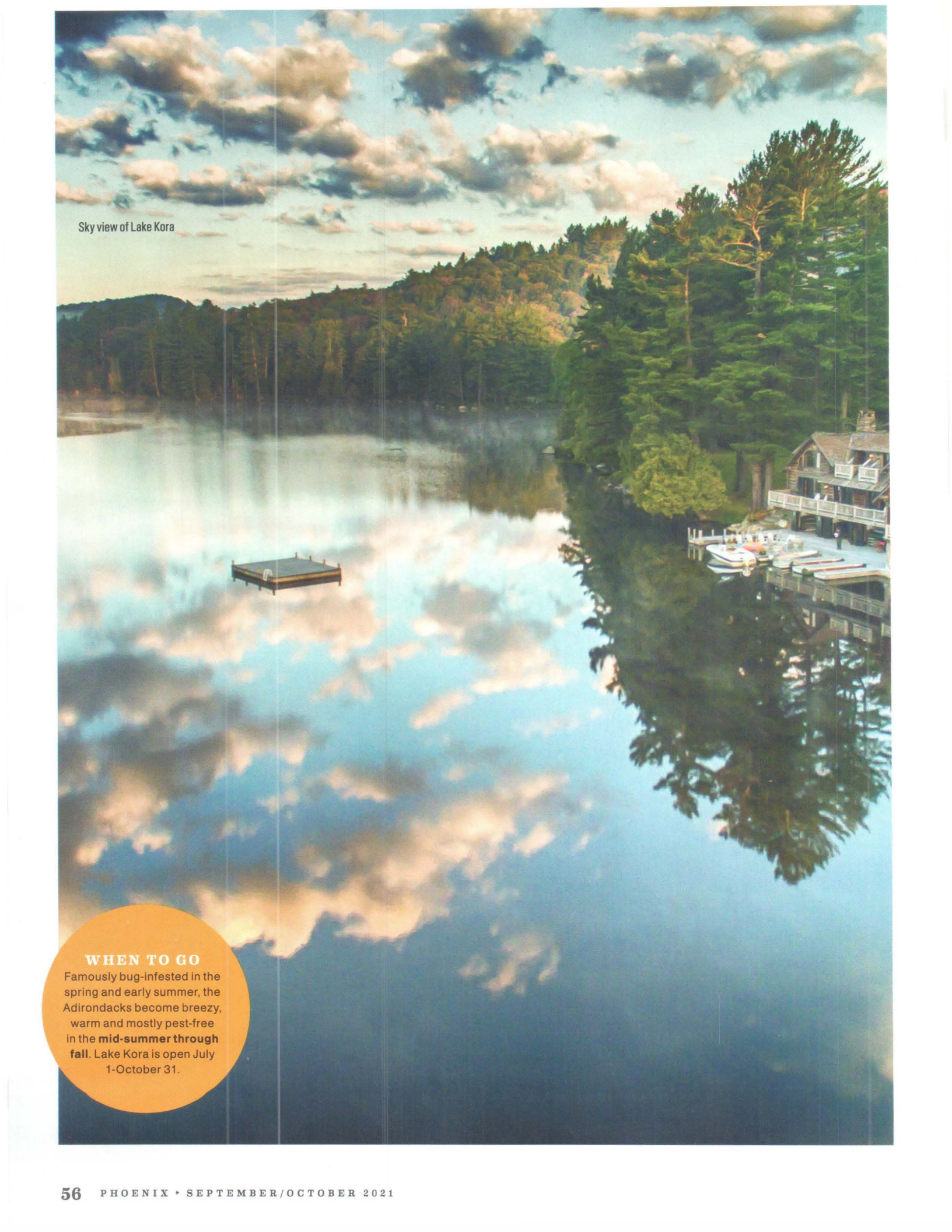


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Sky view of Lake Kora

#### WHEN TO GO

Famously bug-infested in the spring and early summer, the Adirondacks become breezy, warm and mostly pest-free in the **mid-summer through fall**. Lake Kora is open July 1-October 31.



# Adirondack Escape

*Even humble Arizonans can vacation like the Vanderbilts at Lake Kora in upstate New York.*

**IF YOU'RE LIKE ME** – which is to say, the product of a West Coast, middle-class upbringing – the Adirondacks probably have a familiar but persistently vague ring. Are they mountains? Tribal reservations? A network of rural dance studios?

One thing we know for sure: They're where *New York people go*, much like the Catskills, the Hamptons and other places – generally upstate, we surmise from thousands of hours of AMC and Bravo non-premium TV cable consumption – where New Yorkers gobble up summer stock theater and form life-defining friendships. The mosquitos are bad. The hunky camp counselors plentiful.

*And so are the lakes, I think to myself as our small press group flies over the region in a Cessna Grand Caravan seaplane. The Adirondacks are, in fact, mountains in upstate New York, but the term more broadly applies to Adirondack Park, a 6.1-million-acre state preserve that encompasses about a fourth of the Empire State. It's also lousy with lakes – more than 10,000 of them, of all shapes and sizes, dappling the quilted forest rolling by under my window 8,000 feet in the air.*

"The one we're headed to is pretty small," the pilot, sitting about five feet in front of me, says when I ask about our upcoming lake landing. "Only 500 acres."

I smile and nod dumbly. 500 acres would be a pretty big lake indeed in Arizona, which, after all, has only two natural lakes in a landmass the size of 12 Adirondacks.

But our upstate journey is less about the body of water we'll be floating on in a few minutes, Lake Kora, than the private

colony of cabins and rustic lodges built on its forested shore. Recently opened to the public, it's one of several Adirondacks retreats, known as Great Camps, built by New York City oligarchs in the early 19th century as summertime sanctums for their extended families. The Vanderbilts had one down the highway a bit. So did the Morgans.

As our seaplane banks over the teeny-weensy 500-acre private lake for landing, I catch a glimpse of the sprawling compound – the stately boathouse and dock, the august cabins, the immaculate lawns shaved into rising stands of Balsam fir and spruce – and it

By **CRAIG OUTHIER**

starts to dawn on me that the classic Adirondack experience is *not* just about stock theater and patio chairs.

## A Brief History of Great Camps

Part of the fun of *Lake Kora Great Camp* (1185 Sagamore Rd., Raquette Lake, 315-354-4600, [lakekora.com](http://lakekora.com)) is learning its history – and the lesson begins the moment we step off the seaplane onto the tidy dock, which recedes into a boathouse filled both with modern, molded-plastic kayaks and original, 120-year-old wooden canoes, along with standup paddleboards and other water toys. Rising up above and around the boathouse is a large cabin of the most striking design – somehow both imperious with its powerful ridge beams and expansive stone masonry, and also quaint and hand-crafted, with many cozy-looking recesses and accent windows.

Lake Kora is staffed by a small but



**Clockwise from this photo:**  
Seaplane arrival; boating on  
Kora; poached Maine lobster  
salad with citrus supremes,  
celery and radish; the Library  
room at Lake Kora



impressive crew of hyphenates who all pull multiple guest-service duties (think: concierge-mixologist-bike mechanic), and as our luggage is ferried to the rooms, they enthusiastically give us the Cliff Notes history of the place: The cabin structure above us, along with each of the other five main guest buildings, were the handiwork of **William West Durant**, a self-trained architect who became the go-to designer for the New York clans who started taming this part of the state in the late 19th century, and thus the father of the **Great Camp architectural style** that later spread across the nation.

Durant built the Lake Kora camp for businessman and politician Timothy Woodruff, who was lieutenant governor of New York from 1897 to 1902. He was also a Yale man, I'm told – a fact impressively punctuated by the many century-old pieces of Ivy League memorabilia displayed in my cabin, which the staff refers to as **The Library**, as the room also contains hundreds of ancient-looking books and volumes (sample title: *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* by James McNeill Whistler).

Each of the other guest buildings, which sleep 24 guests across 16 rooms, evince the same careful attention to origin, and one gets a palpable voyeuristic charge ingesting it all. It's not just a resort, after all, but a privileged glimpse into the generational habits of quarter-percenters. For a deeper and more detailed dive into the history of Great Camps, the Lake Kora team can engage the services of historian Robert Engel, who lectures our group over nicely proportioned gin martinis the day of our arrival. Engel is the staff historian at **Great Camp Sagamore** (that was the Vanderbilt family camp) a few miles down the road, but my sense is that Camp Kora could pry him away for one-time visits if the history buffs in your group strongly insist on it.

## Fun in the Forest

Naturally, the plutocrats who summured at Lake Kora in the early days didn't just hole up in their cabins – friends, they played and partied like nobody's business, and vestigial evidence is everywhere, from the still-working, lever-operated **two-lane bowling alley** beneath the camp's main lodge to the lakeside Algonquin wikiups where they built campfires and drank into the night. (And often passed out, according to the staff.)

On our second night, we have cocktails in **The Casino**, a game room with roulette, card tables and sundry puzzles and board games. I shiver with admiration thinking of the fortunes pushed into the pot by judges, industrialists and mere, indolent millionaires during countless wee-hour poker marathons.

Elsewhere, we find tennis courts, squash courts, pickleball courts and other venues tailored for guests with zesty athletic tastes; plus horseshoes, rollerblading and roller hockey. There's even a baseball field abutting the forest where the Yale hardballers used to square off against their Harvard rivals for special once-a-year neutral-site games. Another reporter and I play long-toss for a bit with some 80-year-old mitts we found downstairs.

This place is basically Camp Snoopy for billionaires.

Over its 122-year history, Camp Kora only changed ownership four times before finding its way to its current owners – a “family in New Zealand,” someone tells me opaquely – but you can bet each of the families had at least one thing in common: They liked to eat well. Converting the camp to a commercial entity in 2015, the owners extended that experience to modern guests, as well. Lake Kora essentially amounts to an almost-all-inclusive resort (minus alcohol), with **chef Justin Souza** and



his team creating both on-request family-style menus or more formal four-course dinners.

During our last night at the camp, Souza gives us a taste of the elevated farm-to-table delights that guests can expect, in the guise of a four-course dinner that starts with a chilled cauliflower velouté (a rich white sauce, here presented as a sort of vichyssoise) with caviar; clicks into cruising speed with a bacon-tousled grilled salmon over lobster risotto; and achieves escape velocity with Cervena venison tenderloin, an elite appellation from New Zealand – sort of the Kobe of game meats. Drizzled with a truffled jus, the velvety meat was paired masterfully with a Saint-Julien Bordeaux by general manager Cameron Karger, an affable Texan who also happens to be a sommelier and winemaker.

Or you can simply ask Souza for burgers and barbecue. You're at the lake, after all.

## The Kora Catch

Intrigued by a Lake Kora getaway? There is one big, honking caveat: You have to buy out the whole place. All six buildings, the bowling alley, the spa converted out of a 19th-century ice house, the whole bit. Moreover, the daily "tariff" – a term I find both charming and vaguely terrifying – for the camp is about equal to the cost of a new Chevy Trailblazer (\$21,980/night).

The upshot: No romantic getaways *pour deux* at Lake Kora, unless the couple in question *really* needs to spread out.

Since a four-day stay at Lake Kora could conceivably creep into the six figures, my colleagues and I amuse ourselves by concocting scenarios that might make such an outlay possible. The first and most obvious one: **a bucket-list family reunion**. Family togetherness was the *raison d'être* of this place, after all, and spreading the cost among multiple families could do the trick.

Corporate retreats and **team-building** are also mentioned, and Kora management seems to have anticipated this by converting the camp's original hilltop powerhouse into a board room with AV hookups. Pretty cool... though I can't imagine anything more cruel than making someone sit at a table and parse third-quarter earnings when they could be kayaking to a beaver dam. But, hey, still better than a Courtyard by Marriott.

My personal contribution to Lake Kora funding conundrum: the **fantasy football draft** to end all fantasy football drafts. Or its other-gendered bookend: a knock-down, drag-out **bachelorette party**.

Someone mentions a **destination wedding**, which actually makes a lot of sense, given there's an add-on island cabin about 200 yards off the shore that would serve perfectly as a newlywed suite, and a gorgeously austere Presbyterian chapel designed by neoclassicist hit-maker John Russell Pope (Jefferson Memorial, National Gallery of Art) for the service itself. (Unless the betrothed are atheists, in which case the baseball field checks all the boxes.)

If the wedding idea gets any traction with you or someone you know, I just have this to say: I'd make an amazing usher. Or officiant. Or flower boy. This West Coaster has seen the Adirondacks, and there's a lot to like.

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## LAKE KORA: GETTING THERE

From LaGuardia, JFK or Newark airports in the New York City metro, travelers have three options:

- **Drive:** The camp is approximately a 5.5-hour drive from the city.
- **Air:** Cape Air flies direct to Adirondack Regional Airport three times a day (90 minutes one-way, [capeaire.com](http://capeaire.com)). Guests can then rent a car and drive to the camp (90 minutes).
- **Air/Water:** Fly the Whale operates chartered seaplane flights out of the East Hudson River and can fly guests directly to Lake Kora (80 minutes). Contact them for rates. [flythewhale.com](http://flythewhale.com)



## MORE GREAT ADIRONDACK CAMPS



### GREAT CAMP SAGAMORE

Originally owned by rail tycoon (and RMS Lusitania victim) Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, this traditional guest lodge offers all-inclusive, per-night stays (\$375-\$2,000) built around activities and crafts, e.g. Cycle the Great Camps and Pack Basket Making. [sagamore.org](http://sagamore.org)



### GREAT CAMP UNCAS

Financier J.P. Morgan purchased this massively envisioned compound from architect William West Durant in 1896. Owned for a time by the Boy Scouts of America, it's currently privately owned and noncommercial.



### GREAT CAMP PINE KNOT

Durant's original Great Camp design was built over 13 years starting in 1877. Gifted to SUNY Cortland in 1949, the noncommercial camp hosts school groups year-round.