

LIFESTYLE

# Holiday gatherings for the family — away from home

In a desire to join up with relatives on holidays without the burden of preparing a feast for a crowd, some are turning to inns and resorts that specialize in hosting such events, freeing up time for participants to socialize, relax, and enjoy one another's company

By Sarah Shemkus | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 18, 2012

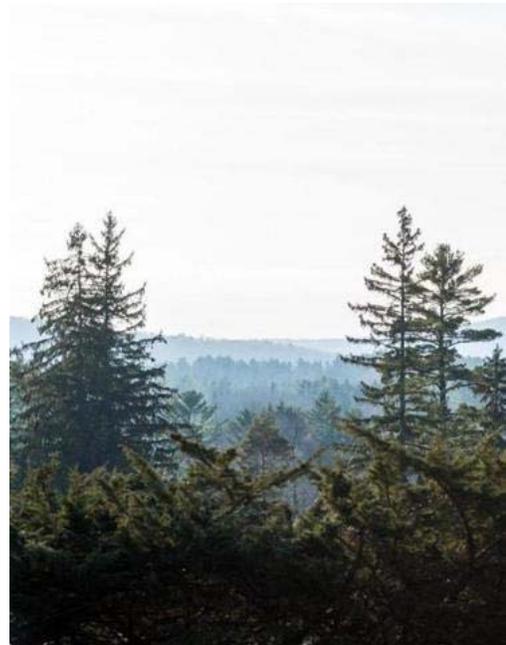
Every year, Steve Giblin and his six siblings celebrated Thanksgiving at their parents' house in Marblehead. As they grew up, got married, and started families of their own, the get-togethers grew ever larger.

"Pretty soon we had 38 people descending on Grandma's house," said Giblin, 59. "Half the people were sleeping on couches and the kids were running around."

So, 15 years ago, the Giblins decided to move their annual holiday gathering to a place where everyone could have their own bed and no one had to cook for a crowd: the Cranwell Resort in Lenox. Giblin's parents have since died, but the rest of the family keeps up the tradition, with three generations returning to the Western Massachusetts resort every November.

For extended families that enjoy intergenerational holidays, but not the chaos and cleanup they entail, a visit to a New England inn or hotel can make the season less stressful and more festive. Indeed, innkeepers and hotel managers from around the region report more families have been making such holiday plans in recent years.

"We have absolutely noticed an increase in requests for larger units with explicit mention of families intending to get together in this area," said Jason Robinson, marketing director for the Eastern Slope Inn in North Conway, N.H., and Attitash Mountain Village Resort in nearby Bartlett.



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**The view of the Berkshires from the Cranwell Resort in Lenox, which has become a destination for extended families to spend holiday gatherings together.**

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▼

## Related

- **Special section: Living Longer, Living Better**

Some who choose these arrangements are originally from the Northeast but scattered across the country as the family grew, and want to relive a traditional New England holiday. Others are trying to spare one of their group from shouldering hosting duties. And for other clans, convening at an inn can ease internal tensions.

Whatever the reason, these trips can be memorable holiday celebrations that allow families to relax and enjoy one another's company with a minimum of hassle.

"The inn is a traditional thing," said Charles Mallar, owner of the 1785 Inn in North Conway. "It is less work for them, but it still has that homey feel to it."

Among the considerations for planning a family holiday is whether a location offers activities and facilities for everyone from grandparents to toddlers, said Cranwell general manager Carl Pratt. Cranwell, for example, has an indoor pool that is popular with children, a spa for older teens and adults, and plenty of outdoor space — Giblins play an annual pre-dinner football game on the lawn.

The Grafton Inn in Grafton, Vt., caters to children with a game room and Christmas Eve storytime, complete with hot chocolate and seasonal snacks, said Melissa Gulotti, director of communications for the Windham Foundation, which operates the inn. The inn also offers references for local baby-sitters so adults can have a night out at a local restaurants or take one of the popular wine-and-cheese snowshoeing tours.

Lexington resident John Adams spent four Thanksgivings with his extended family at Liberty Hill Farm, an inn and working dairy farm in Rochester, Vt. He has fond memories of his young grandchildren eagerly helping out in the barn.

"They each had a little cow that they could milk and a little calf that they could feed," Adams said.

The size of the lodging establishment can also affect the character of a visit. Liberty Hill Farm has just seven rooms, often booked by a single family, which makes for an intimate and personal experience, said owner Beth Kennett.

"It's like it's their house for the week or the weekend, and that part of it feels very comfortable," Kennett said. "It's a big old house with plenty of space for everybody."

Larger resorts, meanwhile, offer more options. The Grafton Inn has conventional rooms as well freestanding guest houses that include living space, a kitchen, and multiple bedrooms. Cranwell is huge, with a true resort feel and a full suite of activities, including fitness center and ice rink, and several onsite eateries.

Meals are another important factor in choosing a destination. For those families who want to cook their own feast, some inns and resorts offer guest cottages or suites



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Jean Mansfield (left), 59, socializes over a drink with her sister-in-law Gwen Mansfield, 41, in Sloane's Tavern at the Cranwell Resort, situated in the Berkshires in Lenox.**



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Among the amenities at the Cranwell Resort in Lenox are a large lawn area, often used by families for outdoor games.**



that include kitchen facilities. But be careful, warned Robinson: These kitchens may not be equipped to handle a turkey or other large meal.

“When you hear, ‘We have kitchen facilities available,’ that might just be a microwave and a stove top,” he said.

Many establishments offer full festive meals. At Liberty Hill Farm, Kennett provides dinners that include ingredients from her farm and others nearby.

“My wife doesn’t have to cook, my daughters don’t have to cook — it’s all done for us,” said Adams, the Liberty Hill Farm regular from Lexington. “And the food is outstanding.”

Logistically, it is crucial to start planning well ahead of time. Pratt, from the Cranwell, recommends at least three months, to allow time to find a place that fits everyone’s travel schedules and budgets.

Robinson, from North Conway, also recommends contacting the resort or inn directly, despite the modern-day ease of booking rooms online.

A hotel staffer, he said, will be able to make sure you get exactly the rooms, beds, and space that your family needs.

For his family, Steve Giblin said, enjoying holidays away from home has been a great way to relax, reconnect, and celebrate all at once.

“It becomes a mini-vacation as well as a family reunion as well as Thanksgiving,” he said.



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Diana Marshall, Debbie Stewart, and Doris Neffinger gather for a chat at a spa at the Cranwell Resort.**



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Naomi and Benjamin Cohen paused to talk during a swim at the Cranwell Resort's indoor pool.**

Try BostonGlobe.com today and get two weeks FREE.

© 2012 THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY