

TWEEDS AND TEAS

at The Gray Goose Inn

The Gray Goose Inn
350 Indian Boundary Road
Chesterton in northwest Indiana
(219) 926-5781
www.graygooseinn.com
Check in: 3 p.m.; check out: 11 a.m.
Rates range between \$95 and \$185 plus tax
Children older than 12 are welcome.

The Gray Goose Inn is at the end of a surprisingly short driveway off Indian Boundary Road, a busy thoroughfare in Chesterton lined with fast food joints, discount hair cutters and gas stations.

Driving past the gate and through the thick woods that surround the inn, however, requires turning one's back on the garish busyness. If you don't look too far behind you, it is easy to forget it's there.

Before us, instead, was a grand and gracious structure with green shutters, red doors and a terrace sprouting a gurgling fountain, hibiscus, impatiens, geraniums and other splashes of color against the cool white siding. The trees still bore leaves that formed a canopy of shade for the lush ferns and hostas layered along the walk to the front door and created a hush that prepared us for the serenity we found inside.

We were greeted at the front door by strains of classical music, the soft smell of scented soap and a cordial welcome by Tim Wilk, innkeeper and owner of the Gray Goose.

Tim led us on a brief tour of the inn, which is dressed in a traditional English style bespeaking tweeds and teas. The sitting room's polished woods are complemented by dignified dark stripes and patterns for a slightly masculine and very comfortable warmth. An elegant settee, writing desk, fireplace, sofas and chairs are framed by numerous books, mounted decorative plates and shelves full of china, ceramic, brass and silver figurines that spill over into the other rooms.

The attached sunroom is several shades brighter, surrounded by generous windows interrupted only by light walls and lush



green plants. The English countryside theme featuring hunting dogs, pheasants, ducks and, of course, geese roams free here. Wicker furniture with deep cushions invites guests to pick up the binoculars and bird-watching books on the table while enjoying the lively birdfeeders outside.

The view here and from the adjacent dining rooms is of Lake Palomara, named for Pat, Lon, Mary and Ray, the children of wealthy businessman Lon Schneider, an automotive industrialist from Grosse Pointe, Mich., who built the home as a vacation retreat for his family in the 1930s. His portrait hangs at the entrance to the inn.

Tim showed us the freshly baked treats and other snacks tucked in the galley kitchen against the wall in one dining room. There is a refrigerator available to guests, who can also help themselves to corkscrews and wine glasses, coffee mugs and other utensils for use during their stay.

We followed Tim up the curved staircase to the second floor, where chambers

and suites open off the long hall lined with hanging tapestries and portraits of people who certainly must have been important long ago. Each room has a private bath, and suites feature fireplaces or whirlpools. Our Mallard Chamber held a pretty four-post bed, a painted dresser, chaise lounge, writing desk, television and a large closet bearing cozy robes. Floral and stripe patterns wove throughout the room, and fresh carnations and chocolates gave it all a touch of luxury. We were pleased to find everything impeccably clean, especially the bath stocked with fluffy towels and toiletries.

Tim had pointed out a stack of menus from area restaurants downstairs, so we skimmed them and settled on Northern Italian fare at Lucrezia, a short drive through downtown Chesterton. The small restaurant sports an eclectic contemporary style inside and garden dining on warm days. Service was so efficient it surely required sleight-of-hand, and my dish, a pasta special of the day, was filled with more flavorful capers,



Norman Rockwell would be proud

There is hardly a more classic Christmas setting than the Hometown Christmas Celebration November 26-28 in downtown Chesterton. Santa arrives in a twilight parade where cookies, cider and hot cocoa are free for all. Sleighs jingle about with or without snow, and the shops are open late. The Gray Goose Inn takes part in the merriment, decorating trees inside and out and offering extended hours at its gift shop. See www.chestertonchamber.org.

spinach, olives, tomatoes and chunks of garlic than the price should allow.

We took advantage of the corkscrew to enjoy a glass of wine in the large, screened gazebo back at the Gray Goose Inn. Wooden gliders face away from the road's clutter and toward the acres of mature woods that surround the peaceful lake. The honking and splashing of the resident geese were interrupted only by the frequent whistle of the nearby trains.

The trains pierced the quiet before and after sleep as well, with a long chord that one hopes eventually fades into the background. Morning brought a wonderfully hot shower quickened by the occasional scent of breakfast cooking downstairs. Sun poured in the large dining room windows, where tables were set with china and silver. Other guests offered a nod and a warm good morning before returning to their conversations.

Breakfast every morning is a full-service gourmet affair with an ever-changing menu. Tim first brought us a glass of fruit sweetened with a dollop of cream and sprinkled with granola, sharing a

plate with freshly baked walnut strudel. A southwestern-style quiche and moist, buttery cornbread came on its heels, with a constant supply of coffee, tea and juice. We were able to linger over the newspaper before heading out for a stroll around the lake.

Summertime guests can venture on a one-mile hike or bike down a second four-mile path. In winter, the trail around the lake offers a picturesque route for cross country skiers. Indiana Dunes State Park, just minutes away, also offers cross country skiing, while those seeking the ski slopes will enjoy Pines Peak, between Chesterton and Valparaiso.

There are many other attractions in the area. The Dunes draw a number of guests on the weekends, as do football games at Notre Dame, just a 35-minute drive away. Art galleries, sledding and ice skating are available in winter months.

Shopping opportunities start right on site. The Gray Goose Inn's own Flights of Fancy gift shop stocks home decor, upscale bath products, clothing and more. Downtown Chesterton is

home to a quaint cluster of antique and specialty stores. And those seeking more cosmopolitan shopping can take the South Shore Line into Chicago for less than \$15 round-trip. The Dune Park Station, source of the persistent whistle, is less than five minutes away, making the Gray Goose an easy retreat after a busy day in the city.

The inn stays busy weekdays, too, says Tim, who converted the home into a bed and breakfast 20 years ago. Its proximity to steel industry operations makes it ideal lodging for corporate travelers.

Area attractions and business meetings could seem less appealing, however, than the prospect of a long day at the Gray Goose Inn spent curled up in a cozy chair with a book off the shelf, soaking up the soft music, the chimes of the grandfather clock, the flicker from the fireplace and the view of the calm lake. The charm and hospitality make it a place and a pace one will long for already at the end of that short drive out the gate.

—Julianne Will