

# GOLF

TRAVEL

## From golf to arts and food: Inside the worldly experience of warm weather New England

By [Evan Rothman](#) / AUGUST 30, 2019

Consumers of golf travel writing could be forgiven for thinking that the playing season in New England begins on the first day of autumn and ends when the last Pro V1 is lost beneath a prismatic pile of fallen leaves, at which point everyone returns to the clapboard clubhouse for clam chowder, a Sam Adams, and a heated discussion about the Red Sawks. It doesn't have to be this way. My recent foray into the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts — in spring! — was anything but provincial. It was a varied, multicultural affair with tasty detours through Korea and Peru, a tip of the cap to Malcolm Gladwell and Wilco, and soul-piercing art courtesy of Degas and Renoir.

Traveling with my wife, Lorraine, who used to run a high-school arts program, and my golf-mad 11-year-old, Ike, who hungers for high culture about as much as the next kid, we began our trip in [Williamstown](#). Golfers know the place for one thing — [Taconic Golf Club](#), always rated among the top courses in New England, on the campus of Williams College. Art lovers know this idyllic town for The Clark, whose collection of European and American painting and sculpture is world-class. Would-be leaf peepers will get all the color they'd ever want in rooms featuring pastel masterworks by Renoir, Degas and Pissarro, and the majestic seascapes and portraits of Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent.

You could happily spend an entire day here, but then you would not have an 11-year-old boy in tow. Golf would begin tomorrow. Promise. To keep the wolves at bay, we drove 10 minutes into neighboring North Adams, Massachusetts' smallest and maybe scrappiest city. Giving Yelp the benefit of the doubt, we lunched at Korean Garden. Our reward for ignoring its drab interior was deliciously spicy pork bulgogi and seriously on-point bibimbop, Korea's most famous food export.

A full stomach and the specter of golf (tomorrow!) meant minimal complaints about a second museum loop, at MASS MoCA, or, for the acronymically challenged, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. This converted 19th-century mill complex, set on 16 acres, takes up a third of North Adams' downtown and sports 250,000 square feet of exhibition space. It's the [Bandon Dunes](#) of contemporary art. The museum's breadth means you can zip through work that doesn't appeal — my personal Kryptonite is Sol LeWitt's wall drawings — because what's in the next vast, bright, airy space might, and often did. Minds expanded (and feet a little sore), it was time for golf.

Taconic Golf Club's stout reputation, the rust on my game, and a firm belief that to get a feel for a place you should play where the rank-and-file play all pointed to an opening round at Waubeeka Golf Links in Williamstown. A links it is not, but on the front nine it is largely the kind of picturesque, playable parkland course expected: set in a valley, with pretty Berkshires backdrops. The 10th hole, a 230-yard, uphill par 3 with deep greenside bunkers, trumpets a metamorphosis on the back nine, which rises and falls and rises again in sometimes frenetic fashion. The blind-drive, blind-approach-overwater-and-rocks-to-a-shallow-green par-4 12th is followed by an almost 90-degree-dogleg short par 4 with a 45-degree uphill approach to a severe two-tier green. In a word, phew! If you like your golf on the border between heroic and hinky, Waubeeka's back nine fits the bill.



WAUBEKA GL

Our post-round cool down took the form of a lovely mile-long brookside amble in the forest to Cascade Falls, by the end of which I'd finished brooding over the state of my short game. From there it was a mere 10-minute drive to another of North Adams' outdoor attractions, Natural Bridge State Park, a naturally formed marble bridge over a deep gorge cut out by glacial runoff, unique in North America.

Golf pops up in strange places. As the only people to sign up for the guided tour, we had Kessa, the park interpreter, to ourselves, and upon learning that we were golfers, she reached into her backpack and took out a container of marble sand used in high-end bunkers, a profitable by-product of the mining done here until a fire decimated the operation and the state park eventually came into being.

For travelers of an upscale bent, North Adams is pretty cut-and-dried: You have dinner at Public, and you stay at TOURISTS. The former features modern American food done beautifully and unpretentiously; the 45-minute wait and worst table in the house were soon forgotten after crispy-skinned duck, buttery pork loin, and "the best hamburger ever." The latter is a former one-star motel revamped, by Wilco bassist John Stirratt and friends, into something inarguably hip and tasteful, with mid-century wrought-iron patio furniture outside and a trio of soaps presented like a cheese plate inside the bathroom, to cite just two examples of curating to swell the heart of any designer. When author and podcaster Malcolm Gladwell (*The Tipping Point*, "Revisionist History") walked past me as I watched Ike gambol in the pool, I was surprised not a whit and, to be polite, ignored him completely.

Fun fact: Last season, Williams College had both the 2019 men's and women's Division III individual national champions in golf. There's no doubt that having the phenomenal Taconic Golf Club as one's home course helped prep for every other test. Designed in 1927 by Wayne Stiles and renovated a decade ago by Gil Hanse, this is PhD-level stuff. Forget the yardage, which tips out at 6,808 yards — with the vast majority of greens elevated (but generally open), Taconic plays at least 10 percent longer.

Its front nine sits so perfectly on the rolling terrain and features such inspired routing that it evoked, for me, the outward nine at Crystal Downs, which remains the most compelling golf architecture I've ever experienced. Taconic's back nine doesn't flag either, especially the dogleg-left par-4 12th, which features a ravine left off the tee (found, alas) and narrows as one approaches the green — it's the rare standout that balances uniqueness with coherence to the whole. All this praise from a graduate of Williams' great rival, Amherst College. Enough said.



LARRY LAMBRECHT

The region's other big-reputation course, [Crumpin-Fox Club in Bernardston](#), is a verdant and occasionally vertiginous 75-minute eastward drive away, mostly on the Mohawk Trail through the Savoy Mountain State Forest. The course, a Robert Trent Jones Sr./Roger Rulewich design, could pass as its own state forest — it's from the Pine Valley school of each-hole-is-its-own-world. That said, extensive tree removal has helped improve turf conditions, and the sale of timber and wood chips has gone into helping finance the club's five-year upgrade plan, currently in Year Three: Redo the Collars. (That's famous New England thriftiness in action.) The place has an intimate, private-club feel, often puts a pucker on your lips with driver in hand, features lots of forced carries, and is as handsome and imposing as a New England lobsterman out of central casting.

There is an Inn at Crumpin-Fox for those who want to linger and retry their luck, but to hit for the Berkshires cycle, you'll want to drive another 75 minutes, this time along mundane I-91 to I-90, to the historic and, yes, impossibly quaint town of Lee. [The Red Lion Inn](#), established in 1773, is the inverse of TOURISTS — all floral carpets, fainting couches and four-poster beds. Its low-ceilinged, dark-wood Widow Bingham's Tavern is the perfect spot for a zingy Bloody Mary and good old-fashioned fish and chips. The place is classic New England, and no apologies necessary.



LARRY LAMBRECHT

The perfect partner for the Red Lion Inn: the nine-hole Greenock Country Club (pronounced “GREN-ock”), established 122 years later, in 1895, and redesigned in 1927 by Donald Ross. The elegance of its routing and the grace of its holes moved Lorraine, not exactly Top 100 Course Rater material, to say, “It just looks like it’s always been here — it’s so... natural.”

Exactly. Greenock is the everyday course of your dreams: high character, low stress, effortless class, endless fun. We had started the morning with breakfast at Joe’s Diner in town, memorialized in Norman Rockwell’s iconic 1958 painting, “The Runaway,” of a police officer and a young boy sitting side-by-side at the counter. I suppose the appropriate follow-up would have been a visit to the Norman Rockwell Museum in nearby Stockbridge, but I worried that Ike might call Child Protective Services if we dragged him in front of another framed canvas.

Instead, after our loop at Greenock, we drove back into Lee for lunch at a Peruvian place named Alpamayo. As rain began to fall on an unseasonably cool day, the fragrant parihuela seafood soup was the perfect antidote and exclamation point. What, you were expecting clam chowder?

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