

Give me the beaten path & keep your B&B

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By Joanne Cleaver

SHARELINES

 ▼ Staying at a B&B is like staying with a neurotic grandaunt

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It was invisible on Google Maps, but that was irrelevant anyway, as the reception bars had long faded from my phone.

Through the dimming mountain evening, detouring east on a trip north, I was searching for a bed-and-breakfast.

"It's the third house in town," read the directions in the email that confirmed the reservation.



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That was no help when I realized as I had arrived in town the same moment I left it. It was a picture postcard New England village, if that postcard had been stuck on the bottom of a tire. White clapboard houses, sure, with broken plastic lawn chairs on the porches. A village green, check, with a gazebo, roped off, perhaps to keep the few teenagers milling about from taking it over.

The lavender sky faded to black as I drove a quarter mile in each direction from the green. Where was this wretched B&B?

Nothing beats the frantic futility of searching for something you loathe. Thanks to a last-minute itinerary do-over, all the comfortably generic, blandly welcoming chain hotels in northern Vermont were booked. It was a B&B or a parking lot.

Staying at a B&B is like staying with a neurotic grandaunt.

"I know the stairs are steep. They keep me in shape!"

"This house has an amazing history! These daguerreotypes show all the original owners! Let me tell you about them. Later, I can show you the original architectural drawings."

"This house was condemned when we bought it, can you imagine? We did all the renovations ourselves! And you're so lucky, you have a room with the oversize whirlpool tub."



A few years ago, my mom and I perambulated through Springfield and environs taking in the historic sites. To stay in character, we tucked into a B&B that purported to represent a cushy sort of pioneer log ambience — first-generation "glamping" (i.e., "glamorous camping"), as it were.



**THIS IS AN EXCLUSIVE,
PREMIUM STORY.**

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Anyway, when my mother and I joined a dozen other guests eager for a hearty pioneer breakfast, we all sighed with happiness when we entered the dining

room to find an oasis of Regency-era civilization. The mahogany buffet sparkled with cut-glass compotes of fruit salad, baskets of fragrant muffins and browned quiches studded with asparagus.

We stood at attention next to our spindly chairs while our hostess introduced us to each item. Every dish had a genealogy worthy of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The quiche dulled and the muffins cooled as our hostess recited the provenance of every dish — smoked bacon from the farmer down the road; pumpkin-praline muffins that made her mother locally famous. We shuffled and stifled sighs. A fly circled the peaches. The bacon congealed. The owner continued her guided tour of food we weren't yet allowed to eat. After 20 minutes, we were seated and served a cold breakfast with a side of codependency.

Please, give me the beaten path. I am happy to accumulate points in your frequent-stayer program and to be greeted with a software-prompted smile scaled to my potential lifetime revenue, based on my recent history of stays with your company.



The recline of civilization +

by Josh Noel

I don't want the same person pouring my coffee and cleaning my room. I don't want to wonder how long it's been since anyone dusted under the doilies. I don't want to make a lifelong pal in the parlor when I just want to read a magazine after a long day of sightseeing. I don't want all the social pressure of being a good guest without the payoff of having a real friend who'd take me in even if my credit card was

declined.

And I really don't want to get lost on a two-lane road in rural Vermont at night.

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"Where have you been?" scolded the owner.

She sounded like my high-school cross-country coach, who only missed me when he realized that everybody else had cleared out of the locker-room.

"I'm at the Dunkin' Donuts."

"In our town?"

"Yes. I passed the welcome-to-your-town sign each time I went by the square trying to find you. Twice in each direction."

"We're the third house."

"In which direction?"

"From the square. You can't miss it."

"I just did."

Heavy sigh. "I'll come out and wave you down."

I pulled out and crept through town.

Past the leaning, shuttered general store was a huge turreted house, and ah, there it was, a carved wooden sign on a post under a pine tree, unlit and just one more shadow in the night. A woman wearing an apron waved from the side porch, silhouetted by a bare light bulb.

So glad I found it.

Joanne Cleaver is a communication consultant based in Chicago.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-bed-breakfast-hate-vacations-perspec-0925-20140924-story.html>