

Family getaways that aren't too far away

These suggestions offer fun activities with – or without – relatives

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If you believe there's no such thing as a "fun" family reunion, you may be right.

Babies need naps, Grandmother probably wants a cocktail at noon, the cousins are plugged into computers, your brother lives on the golf course and your Great-aunt Betty prefers campfires over cuisine.

As George Burns said, "Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city."

But there are ways to reunite safely this summer and beyond. I've found a couple places where family combines easily with

togetherness. And it might even be "fun for the whole family."

Migis Lodge, Sebago Lake, Maine

If Grandmother loves loons, Migis Lodge holds the jackpot.

ONE-TANK TRIP

Nestled in a secluded corner of Sebago Lake, Migis is a place

where loons bugle their love songs from the shadows of inlets and coves.

Hammocks swing between pine trees. Adirondack chairs are paired in gardens filled with yarrow, aster, phlox and hollyhock.

Kayaks await slow paddles to distant islands.

Quiet. Peace.

It's also a place where

you can hide from the ones you love, if needed.

Opened in 1916 as a "cure-all to city-life," Migis is a luxurious Girl Scout camp without the Scouts. Covering 125 acres of forest along 3,500 feet of shoreline, Migis cottages are spaced privately between groves of oak and pine.

The main lodge, sitting like a fieldstone-encrusted Queen Mother, is lit with evening candlelight and glowing fireplace.

The sun sets in tones of ruby and amethyst across the lake.

If you have a "very fun" family, Migis also offers a kaleidoscope of activity and excitement.

Grandmother can hook herself to their 1936 Chris Craft and careen around the lake. The Terrible

Two-year-olds can go to the Zoo Kid Fun program and spend their day picnicking, going on treasure

hunts, eating peanut butter and sand sandwiches and squawking at Deets, the parrot. Aunts can meet for golf, while uncles get facials and massages.

A full panel of activity awaits, if you're so inclined.

I sit on the porch that first morning in our cabin – aptly named Beach – because it sits square on a patch of pink sand. A dock floats swim distance from shore, but I choose to rock in a chair and read while the "more fun" family members row and kayak, jump from rocks and snorkel.

At 4, the steward delivers a pile of firewood and fresh ice for cocktails. And the adventuresome come back from the lake. There's talk of jumping from Frye's Leap – an 80-foot cliff across the lake – tomorrow.

"I'm leaping from the cliff," my daughter, Haley, says. "From the highest point."



Courtesy photo

Migis Lodge, Sebago Lake, Maine, at sunset.

"Watch out for the wild woman who lives on the top of the rock," the steward says.

"Who's that?" Haley asks. "A ghost who steals things from the farms around here then leaps from the rock."

"Oh." That stops Haley in her tracks.

Frye Island is the largest island on Sebago Lake and was named for Captain Frye, a woodsman who was rumored to be the first to

Getaway | Historic Wentworth by the Sea was built in 1874

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jump off the cliff. Supposedly, Frye leaped from the top of the cliff into a snowbank in the middle of the winter.

"He sounds crazy," Haley says.

"His ghost is rumored to leap there, too," the steward says with a nod. "Frye's Leap could be haunted."

That night, we walk on moonlit pathways with our flashlights shining through shadowed rhododendrons and azalea. The pines shiver and shake and a loon's cry echoes.

"That's probably the ghostly wild woman," my husband says.

"No, it's not," a cousin says.

"I think it is."

"Or it could be Captain Frye."

"No, it's not."

We make it to the glowing lodge. Inside, knobby pine mixes with candlelight mixes with laughter from tables filled with grandchildren in sundresses, cousins clinking glasses, uncles making toasts to great-grandmothers. A fire crackles.

A table is spread with iced lobster and shrimp, smoked salmon, Maine scallops encrusted with herbs, crab cakes in lemon butter.

Another table is given over to salads: wild mushroom, corn and black bean, asparagus vinaigrette, tomatoes topped with mozzarella, cucumber with dill, artichoke, chicken liver pate, Asian noodle and red pepper.

There are carving stations of beef tenderloin, turkey, chicken breast, breads by the basketful and



Courtesy photo

Latitudes restaurant at the Marina at Wentworth by the Sea.

the muted strings of symphony. It's polished cuisine pleasure.

We're reunited by happy bellies. Even the cranky are less so, and this weekend romp of togetherness is quickly making for "memories to last a lifetime."

Especially when the dessert corner is unveiled and it features all things decadent and chocolate.

The next morning, we board the vintage Chris Craft and head toward the cliffs. We make up stories of the wild woman, the ghostly Captain Frye. There's nervous laughter as we see the ledge covered in pine – 80 feet of ghostly granite. In the distance, a pair of loons pop up from below, surprising us all.

Wentworth by the Sea

When we arrive at the "grand dame" of a hotel in New Castle, the gray sky has melted into the grayer ocean. Storm clouds hover low, mist covering the painted skiffs and sailboats tethered for sunnier days.

"Can't do anything about the weather," the front desk clerk says.

Northeasterly wind sprays raindrops against the picture windows.

"Can't do anything about family, either," I say with a shrug as I watch the youngest family members splash in huge puddles outside, their bright yellow boots duck-like in the gloom.

Great-grandmother has her plastic rain bonnet on, and she isn't taking it off.

"Maybe it will clear," the

front desk clerk adds.

There's a hint of humor to the edge of her lips as if she, too, knows the secret to New England spring.

"Or maybe it won't," an uncle says.

It doesn't clear. This family getaway feels one part marooned and the other, luxurious in a weather-beaten way.

Wentworth by the Sea has the feel of a ocean liner as it curves in angles resembling a bowed and bedazzled deck followed by a promenade of lit windows. It's almost as if you should see a mermaid figurehead protruding from the front of its whitewashed frame. Starboard and port, the views are of deep bay and rocky inlet.

Built in 1874, this 127-year-old hotel has a

history of negotiations, peace treaties and Nobel Peace Prizes. It's perfect for a peaceful reunion in the rain.

"What do you want to do?" a cousin asks, staring out the window.

"I dunno, what do you want to do?"

"Swimming pool!" Nana yells.

In 1905, Russian and Japanese delegates stayed here and devised the Treaty of Portsmouth, ending the Russo-Japanese War.

That afternoon, Nana diverted the War of the Cousins.

Located on the island of New Castle, the hotel offers a location near ocean, island, river and the harbor-quiet town of Portsmouth. Filled to the brim with theater, bookstore, boutique and dining, Portsmouth is a less torrential day.

We opt for a place by the indoor pool and a soak in the outdoor hot tub. There are steam rooms and saunas as a way to warm up from outdoor windswept adventure.

Another time, another trip for a sunset dinner cruise, whale watch, kayak tour or harbor jaunt. There are marine warnings and high tides, perhaps some flooding that evening, and it's better to be holed up inside than braving the elements.

Nana floats with the children and makes whale noises in the deep end. An aunt roasts in the sauna while two uncles bubble outside in the windstorm.

"They'll open the outdoor pool Memorial Weekend," the pool attendant says.

"It's right on the bay."

"Pretty hopeful," an

uncle says.

The paned glass surrounding the pool is steamed. Branches from a thin pine smack the windows.

"There's an outdoor bar. Tables with umbrellas. A barbecue grill."

"You know, every year they kill a lot of poets for talking about New England's 'beautiful spring,'" Nana adds, floating past. "Twain quote."

In New England, we have "weather enough, weather to spare; weather to hire out; weather to sell; to deposit; weather to invest; weather to give away." It's all about sharing the spring weather with the ones you love, or at least the ones you're related to.

"No more reunions in the spring," Nana states.

We agree to come back in the deepest part of New England summer, once the black flies are gone, the mosquitoes thinned out. Nana wants a cocktail with a tiny umbrella in it – Singapore Sling. That'll have to wait a couple months.

Twain said it best: "I could speak volumes about the inhuman perversity of the New England weather, but I will give but a single specimen. I like to hear rain on a roof."

That evening, I almost feel buoyant as I make my way to Roosevelt's Lounge, a piano bar dressed up in muted mahogany. Nana orders a Bentley Sidecar while I sip a Crimson Tide.

Outside, the wind howls. Nana croons along to "Blue Valentine" and soon, both family and newfound lounge friends sing along with her.