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New and Noteworthy in the Catskills 2019

By Bracha Schwartz

Summer in the Catskills means fresh country air, lower temperatures and the ease of finding a kosher meal and minyan. When you have a summer home in the area, happiness is returning to your favorite places and discovering new ones to explore. If you're looking for an overnight getaway, or even a day trip, and thought the Catskills had nothing but abandoned hotels, you may be delightfully surprised at what's new in dining, staying and playing in 2019.

The glittering Resorts World Casino and Hotel, and Kartrite Resort and Indoor Water Park, near each other on Resorts World Drive in Monticello but with separate ownership, have opened in the area once home to the Concord Hotel. Both have kosher options if you want to visit for the day or overnight.

The Kartrite (<https://www.thekartrite.com>) opened April 19 with New York's largest indoor water park. The Textron roof lets the temperature stay at a constant



Kartrite Water Park. (CREDIT: COURTESY OF KARTRITE)

rector Talya Shlang Regan said that unlike most casinos, there are many windows so guests can enjoy the beauty of the Catskills. The casino is arranged so that everyone feels catered to, she said. In addition to the main casino, there are separate, private rooms for affluent, serious gamblers. Resorts World is also attracting specifically Asian gamblers with a casino within the casino, complete with bilingual staff, games that Asians favor and authentic Asian restaurants.

A helpad welcomes VIP guests who like to fly in above the traffic. For the more down-to-earth crowd, there is ample parking for cars and a spacious bus lobby where visitors can wait for their ride; new bus routes are being added, including one from Paramus. The bus-ride fare includes a food credit.

There are now several options for kosher visitors. All the restaurants now have at least one kosher option. A completely kosher grab-and-go section is in the works in a cafeteria across from the bus lobby, but there isn't a start date at this time.

Resorts World includes activities besides gambling. Jerry Seinfeld has performed there, and other entertainers are being booked. The Crystal Life Spa and salon, open to non-hotel guests, is an upscale experience that goes beyond the usual facials, massage treatments and hair and nail care, with options like wave-bed treatments for the ultimate relaxation experience.



Flow Rider at Kartrite Water Park. (CREDIT: BRACHA SCHWARTZ)



Sushi rolls at Sushi Tokyo. (CREDIT: BRACHA SCHWARTZ)

84 degrees all year round. The rides vary from baby- and toddler-friendly sections to slides and attractions like the simulated surfing Flow Rider for the very adventurous. Day passes are available from \$59 to \$99 dollars, purchased in advance online. Sales and Marketing Coordinator Danielle Schwartz, advises using sunscreen in the water park.

The water park is just one part of the Kartrite. The expansive indoor lobby has game arcades and there are playgrounds outside. Spa appointments can be made by both hotel guests and locals. Day trippers can enjoy the grounds and bring their own food, but outside food is not allowed into the water-park area. If you are a hotel guest, with advance notice you can pre-order a frozen kosher meal in one of the restaurants that will be reheated for you.

Rooms in the hotel have different price points but all have refrigerators and microwave ovens. The family bunk room includes a separate room with four bunk beds, available at a summer promotion rate of \$159 per night. On the higher end, a three-bedroom suite is available for \$1,019 a night; I was told it was being rented to a party of 12.

On the spot where the Concord once stood, Resorts World Casino and Hotel (<https://rwcatskills.com>) opened last year on 1,800 acres with 1.6 million square feet and an 18-story hotel. Public Relations Di-

The all-suite accommodations at Resorts World range from a larger-than-standard 600 square feet to themed garden suites with butlers, and 2,000-square foot penthouses. The suites have refrigerators but not microwaves. In the Alder hotel, a few steps outside the casino, the rooms are smaller and priced lower. The lobby has an open floor plan with different sections that flow into each other, including places to play Top Swing Virtual Golf.

Back on the heimish side of town, the long-awaited Sushi Tokyo has opened in Loch Sheldrake on Route 52. Order in front to take out, or dine on the two-level deck overlooking the lake. Choose from an assortment of appetizers, sushi, salads and cooked fish dishes. On a recent visit, my party of three shared perfectly pan-seared

vegetable dumplings served on a bed of carrots and zucchini and three different sushi rolls: tuna avocado, a tempura-fried combination of spicy salmon and spicy tuna with avocado, and a custom-made salmon roll with salmon inside and outside the roll. The tempura roll had a crisp exterior, without overcooking the fish inside, and the raw fish rolls had a silky-smooth, fresh texture.

Sushi Tokyo shares ownership and space, including a nice-sized parking lot, with the Boat Café, where you can get smoothies and juices, and rent a rowboat or paddleboat. Coming with a group? A motorized round boat will have you gliding



Boating on Loch Sheldrake. (CREDIT: BRACHA SCHWARTZ)

through the lake. With a table in the middle, you can have your sushi with a 360-degree water view.

Woodbourne, off Route 52 between Loch Sheldrake and South Fallsburg, has a stretch of stores and restaurants packed together on a street that pulses with life all summer, particularly on Thursday nights, when camp buses and newly arrived weekenders jostle for room, and Motzei Shabbos when mostly young adults schmooze and nosh. New this summer is Panino, an Israeli-themed restaurant with shawarma and falafel. The Woodbourne Shul overflows with indoor and outdoor minyanim throughout the day and evening.

The strictly kosher Chalet Hotel in Woodbourne is off the main street and up a hill into the woods. This year, the restaurant, Mountaintop Grill, has been transformed from trendy casual into a high-end steakhouse, with black fabric-covered chairs and white table cloths in a formal atmosphere. The managers told us that hotel guests preferred a previous steakhouse concept, so they brought it back. Had we known, we would have brought a bottle of wine. My husband and I split an order of duck and chicken gnocchi, with sous vide cremini mushrooms, braised duck confit and black truffle scent. Light, flavorful pillows of dough enclosed the potato filling, surrounded by savory shredded duck and chicken. The steak we split was cooked to medium rare as ordered, served with a cabernet reduction sauce and crisp, seasoned



Two-level outdoor dining area at Sushi Tokyo in Loch Sheldrake. (CREDIT: BRACHA SCHWARTZ)

haricots vert (thin green beans) and carrots. We ordered both dessert options, coffee ice cream and ices, expecting a scoop in a parfait bowl, Chinese-restaurant style. Instead, we received two beautifully composed presentations that tasted as good as they looked, garnished with a fruit sauce and served on brownie crisp. For a reservation, call the Chalet Hotel at 845-434-5124.

The Catskills have their share of cultural events. Check websites for dates and times. The Shandelee Sunset Concert series in Livingston Manor (<https://www.shandelee.org/sunset-concert-series/>) has classical music performances through August. Bethel Woods Center for the Arts in Bethel (<https://www.bethelwoodscenter.org/events/concerts>) has rock and jazz concerts through October, and partners with Shandelee for selected classical music events. See revivals of classic Broadway musicals at The Forestburgh Playhouse in Forestburgh (<https://www.fbplayhouse.org/2019-season>).