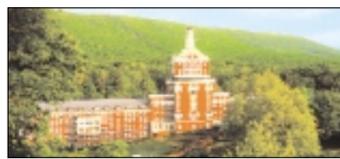


# Greenbrier vs. Homestead

They sit in the foothills of the Alleghenies—two grand old mountain resorts with spas, golf, horseback riding and fine dining, just a four-hour drive from D.C. How to choose? Read on.

## THE GREENBRIER



## THE HOMESTEAD

|                    |  |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| ARRIVAL            | <p><b>WOW! Factor</b></p>  | <p>Rears up like a <b>Federal Reserve bank</b> in the rough foothills of the Allegheny, a stolid shoebox of <b>five-story columns and Jeffersonian symmetry</b>. Inside, there are about a dozen lobbies, all decorated in <b>grandly garish sherbet tones</b>, checkerboard tiles and <b>mutant floral patterns</b>, as exuberant as they are elegant. Even if you think you've seen some of this upholstery at K mart's patio shop, once your retinas stop quivering you'll begin to revel in the Greenbrier's <b>surprisingly offbeat decor</b>.</p>  | <p>Sprawls against a mountain backdrop like a <b>horizontal, red-brick wedding cake</b>, complete with <b>12-story clock tower</b>. And that's just the <i>back</i> view. Around front, there are <b>stately columns, topiary</b> and a <b>250-foot-wide porch lined with rocking chairs</b>. Inside, the 215-foot lobby—oops, Great Hall—is lined with white Corinthian pillars, hanging lamps and <b>dozens of identical chintz wingback chairs</b>. No glitz here, but a quiet air of understated gentility.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Robustness of Greeting</b></p>   | <p>A <b>pit crew welcome under the portico</b>: One doorman greets you; a valet parks keys; two bellmen scour the trunk for bags. Inside, another bellman directs you to the desk where, through some sort of staff telepathy, the clerk <b>knows your name before you open your mouth</b>.</p>  | <p><b>Effusive welcomes</b> from an array of bellmen, doormen and valet parkers as we made our way from the portico to the front desk, and a cheerful greeting from the desk clerk. But our room wasn't ready—we arrived 45 minutes before check-in time—and the clerk told us to <b>"wander around."</b> When we returned an hour later, she <b>didn't remember who we were</b>.</p>  |
| THE ROOM           | <p><b>Elapsed Time To First Tipping Moment</b></p>   | <p><b>15 minutes</b> (bellman with luggage in room). The Greenbrier has a peculiar tipping culture. A <b>daily fee of \$26 per person per day</b> is meant to cover gratuities for dining room servers and room housekeepers. <b>Total tips disbursed in two-night stay: \$13.</b></p>   | <p>Approximately <b>one minute</b> (doorman—\$3), followed immediately by bellman (\$3). The Homestead says it "pays room attendants, doormen, bellmen, spa attendants and dining personnel in lieu of normal gratuities." But we felt awkward not tipping, and while no one had his hand out, no one turned us down, either. <b>Total tips disbursed in two-night stay: \$18.</b></p>   |
|                    | <p><b>Room Check</b></p>   | <p>The Greenbrier's 800-plus rooms are individually decorated. The standard room is just spacious enough for one spouse to <b>bustle around dressing for dinner</b> while the other does <b>pushups</b> and a couple of preschool gymnasts do <b>floor exercises on the two queen beds</b>. Big <b>walk-in closet</b> with safe, iron and muscular hangers. Bathroom is <b>charmingly old-house</b>: big enough for two, with vintage fixtures and an <b>excellent magnifying makeup mirror</b> at a <b>separate vanity nook</b>.</p>  | <p>The Homestead's 506 rooms offer a range of options, including <b>sun porches and wood-burning fireplaces</b>. We didn't spring for the luxury perks. But our standard double was comfortably turned out with king-size bed, chintz (of course) bedspread, yellow-and-white striped wallpaper, entertainment console and a couple of nightstands. Sweet, non-glitzy bathroom with white wicker towel stand.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Bathroom Amenity Check</b></p>   | <p>In <b>handsome wire basket</b>: Gilchrist &amp; Soames Skin Silken <b>bathing gel, shampoo</b> (two bottles), <b>conditioner, mouthwash</b> (two), <b>body lotion, vanity pack</b> (two, each with Q-Tips, cotton balls, emery board), <b>shower cap, shoe mitten, sewing kit</b> and <b>shoe horn</b>.</p>   | <p><b>Uninspired trio of shampoo, conditioner and body lotion</b> (Homestead brand), plus a sewing kit and shower cap. On the other hand, does <b>bath soap</b> count as an amenity? The Homestead's is terrific—smells like <b>Christmas</b>.</p>   |
|                    | <p><b>Heft of Bathrobe</b></p>   | <p><b>3 lbs.</b>—King Arthur's mantle in white terrycloth. Cost to purchase: <b>\$89.50</b>.</p>   | <p>3 lbs.—a <b>classic midweight kimono</b> in white velour terrycloth. Cost to purchase: <b>\$73</b>.</p>   |
| SERVICE            | <p><b>Minibar Atrocity</b></p>   | <p><b>Doritos</b> for <b>\$3.75</b>.</p>   | <p>Small jar of <b>cashews</b> for <b>\$14</b> (but you get to keep the jar).</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Newspaper at the Door?</b></p>   | <p>Yes, every day but Sundays: USA Today weekdays, Roanoke Times on Saturday.</p>  | <p>No, but lots of regional and national choices in the <b>gift shop</b>.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Ice Without Asking?</b></p>  | <p><b>Yes</b>. Refilled daily.</p>   | <p>Yes. Refilled daily.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Turn-Down Pageant</b></p>  | <p>The top eight or nine layers of <b>sheets, blankets and duvets peeled back, chocolate wafers on each pillow, TV turned on</b> internal channel.</p>   | <p><b>Covers turned down and robes laid on bed</b>, along with a <b>chocolate on each pillow</b> and a little <b>love note</b>: "We wish you a perfect rest, and a splendid new day!" Also, trash emptied, towels replaced.</p>  |
| ACTIVITIES         | <p><b>Forgotten Bag Test</b></p>   | <p>A guest leaving a small canvas tote bag with clothes in the bedroom was notified by the hotel <b>one day later</b>. The bag was returned by mail <b>five days later</b>.</p>  | <p>A guest leaving a small canvas tote bag with clothes in the guest room was notified . . . well, two weeks later, we're <b>still waiting</b>.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Toothbrush Test</b></p>  | <p>Minutes after call to front desk that toothbrush arrived: <b>five</b>. Tiny, <b>single-serving tube of toothpaste</b> included.</p>   | <p>Minutes after call to front desk that toothbrush arrived: <b>five</b>. <b>Proper mini-tube of toothpaste</b> included.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>What To Do (Free)</b></p>  | <p><b>Hiking</b> on miles miles of trails. <b>Fitness center</b>. <b>Swimming</b> (Olympic-sized indoor and outdoor pools). <b>Billiards</b>. <b>Parlor games</b> on innumerable porches and lobbies. <b>Small video arcade</b>. Daily <b>hotel tours</b>. <b>Cooking demonstrations</b>. First-run movies.</p>  | <p><b>Hiking</b> on miles of trails. Use of <b>fitness center</b>. <b>Swimming</b> in indoor and outdoor pools. Historical programs and <b>hotel tours</b>. Nightly <b>movies</b>. <b>Small video arcade</b>. <b>Billiards</b>. <b>Board games</b>.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>What To Do (Fee)</b></p>   | <p><b>Horseback riding</b> (\$46 an hour). <b>Mountain biking</b> (\$40 for two hours). <b>Fly fishing</b> (\$35 a day). <b>Bowling</b> (\$7 a game, including shoes). <b>Tennis</b> (\$40 an hour for indoor courts, \$30 for outdoor). <b>Croquet</b> (\$22 per person). <b>Golf</b> (\$175 a round in season, free in winter). Gourmet <b>cooking classes</b> (\$110). <b>Carriage rides</b> (\$29 a person, one hour). <b>Land Rover off-road driving clinic</b> (\$185 for an hour). Falconry (\$75).</p>   | <p><b>Horseback riding</b> (group trail ride, \$75). <b>Mountain biking</b> (\$12 an hour). <b>Fly and trout fishing</b> (\$40 stream usage for trout, \$20 rod rental). <b>Canoeing</b> (\$60 per person). <b>Guided hikes</b> (\$15). <b>Bowling</b> (\$5 a game, including shoes). <b>Tennis</b> (\$32 an hour/doubles). <b>Golf</b> (\$110-\$175 a round in season, \$65-\$70 in winter). <b>Shooting sports</b> (clays, \$60 for 50 targets; skeet or trap, \$35 for 25). Falconry (\$75). <b>Carriage rides</b> (\$105 for one to five passengers). In winter, downhill and cross-country <b>skiing, tubing, snowmobiling, ice-skating</b> on Olympic-sized rink.</p>  |
| <p><b>Golf</b></p> | <p><b>Three championship courses</b>. Won Conde Nast Traveler's <b>top golf resort award</b> for 2002.</p> | <p><b>Three courses</b>, including the Cascades, a mountain course rated by Golf Digest as <b>one of the top 100 of America's Greatest Golf Courses</b> and <b>Virginia's No. 1 course</b> in 2002.</p>  |  |
| FOOD               | <p><b>Fabulousness Of Indoor Pool</b></p>  | <p>Near maximum fabulousness: an enormous <b>mosaic-tiled pool</b> (Olympic scale) under a shrouded skylight, surrounded by <b>Hollywood-ready lounge chairs</b> and <b>all the 10-pound towels you can eat</b>.</p>   | <p>Spring-fed, bathtub-warm and <b>fit for a diva</b>, with a vaulted, skylit roof, potted palms and Palladian windows. In the locker rooms, hairdryers, shampoo, conditioner, piles of towels and—nice touch—plastic bags for wet bathing suits.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Colo-Rectal Exam On Premises?</b></p>  | <p><b>Yes</b>. (The Greenbrier Clinic is a complete diagnostic and healthcare screening facility.)</p>   | <p><b>No</b>.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Shopping</b></p>   | <p>More than <b>30 shops</b>, including <b>artisans in the rows of historic cottages</b>. The small galleria off the lower lobby includes Ralph Lauren, Orvis Outdoor Gear, a <b>fancy antique boutique</b> and a bridal shop (that's horses, not weddings).</p>   | <p><b>Two dozen shops</b> with upscale doodads, including figurines (porcelain terriers wearing golf clothes), toys, jewelry (Tiffany), outdoor gear, golf and tennis stuff, resort wear (flowered pants a specialty), kitchenware, Virginia wines and Homestead logo items (beer stein, \$60).</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Taking the Waters</b></p>  | <p><b>Least expensive way to stick a toe in the spring waters</b>: \$35 for the 25-minute Sulphur Soak. <b>Most expensive spa treatment</b>: \$144 for an 80-minute facial. <b>Weirdest stuff they'll rub on your body</b>: black walnuts, Hungarian mud, Canadian clay.</p>   | <p><b>Least expensive way to stick a toe in the spring waters</b>: \$15 for an hour in the gloriously antiquated Jefferson Pools (see below). In the main spa, \$28 for a 15- to 25-minute mineral bath. <b>Most expensive spa treatment</b>: \$145 for a 70-minute "lift defense" (wrinkle-reducing) facial. <b>Weirdest stuff they'll rub on your body</b>: African Karite Tree Nut butter, mineral clay, seaweed.</p>   |
| REALITY CHECK      | <p><b>Afternoon Tea?</b></p>   | <p>Yes. In the Main Lobby, with <b>piano and violin</b>. Unlimited tea and coffee with <b>rich petits fours</b>, tiny cheesecakes and excellent cookies.</p>   | <p>Yes. Stations are set up in the huge Main Dining Room, but if you ensconce yourself in a wing chair in the Great Hall, a <b>server will materialize</b> by your side and <b>pour out from a proper teapot</b>. As you nibble tiny sandwiches and cakes, a pianist holds forth on the <b>baby grand</b>.</p>   |
|                    | <p><b>The Evening Meal</b></p>   | <p>In an opulently draped Main Dining Room the <b>size of a soccer field</b>, seemingly half of Greenbrier County is at work as waiters and sommeliers. There is no dance floor, but a <b>piano and violin duet</b> play at the 50-yard line as 63 servers tend to up to 475 well-dressed diners at a time. The menu, which changes daily, is a rotating mix of <b>hearty huntsman fare</b> and <b>spa cuisine</b>. When we were there: the menu offered seven appetizer choices (including seafood lemon grass consomme, bay scallops with wild mushrooms, chicken liver parfait), three salads and seven entrees (beef tenderloin with shallot confit, <b>pan-roasted venison with bitter chocolate</b>, eggplant cannelloni with chevre cheese and spinach). The dessert menu includes the usual <b>chocolate-heavy resort indulgences</b>, plus fruit cobblers and bread pudding that are house specialties.</p> | <p>The Main Dining Room—such a prosaic name for such a <b>grand space</b>. With its white linens, pale yellow walls, huge white columns, arched windows and domed roof, it's a glorious place to kick back with a glass of Chardonnay after a tough day at the spa. But the food passes the test too—a <b>surprisingly modern menu</b> with, yes, prime roast sirloin of beef, but also <b>pan-roasted Japanese-crust Atlantic coast grouper with fruit caprice</b>, wasabi and red pepper sauce. The service is at once unobtrusive and attentive—we never had to look around for our waiter, who seemed to know exactly when and what we required. A <b>jazz combo</b>, playing everything from "Moon River" to "Margaritaville," keeps the dance floor hopping.</p> |
|                    | <p><b>Cheapest Glass Of House Wine</b></p>   | <p><b>\$7.25</b> (De Loach, White Zinfandel)</p>   | <p><b>\$5.50</b> (Caywood, merlot)</p>   |
| DETAILS            | <p><b>Best Place for a Nightcap</b></p>  | <p>The <b>Old White Lounge</b>, a wood-paneled clubroom with a view of an outdoor fountain courtyard, a <b>princely chandelier</b>, live music and a dance floor.</p>  | <p>The <b>Presidents' Lounge</b>, with floor-to-ceiling views of the grounds, and oil paintings of <b>every president who's ever dropped by</b> (George Washington to Bill Clinton).</p>   |
|                    | <p><b>Dress Code Rigidity</b></p>  | <p>Coat-and-tie at dinner, no jeans in the main lobby after 5. <b>No violations spotted</b>. Very by-the-book, but self-policing.</p>  | <p><b>Coat and tie</b> required at dinner. <b>"resort wear"</b> in the Great Hall. Most guests cheerfully comply, but jeans, sweatpants and—horrors!—<b>Daisy Dukes</b> were spotted in the Great Hall one weekend afternoon.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Happiest Surprise</b></p>  | <p>Based on a passing mention of a birthday to a staff member, an <b>unordered, unbilled, full-size chocolate birthday cake</b> appeared at dinner.</p>  | <p>The funky, timeless <b>Jefferson Pools</b>, mercifully spared from development and retaining their 18th-century charm. The great man himself took the waters here in 1818, and the whitewashed, octagonal frame structures (one each for men and women, skinny dipping encouraged) haven't changed much since. Seldom crowded, water a constant 98 degrees, and a refreshing change from swanky spa goings-on.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Best Cheapskate Perk</b></p>   | <p>The <b>free heavy hors d'oeuvres</b> during 5-to-6:30 p.m. cocktail hour in the Old White Lounge. (Crab dip!)</p>   | <p><b>Unlimited tea</b>, itty-bitty sandwiches and <b>house-made sweets</b> in the Main Dining Room every afternoon.</p>   |
| DETAILS            | <p><b>Down-To-Earth Moment</b></p>   | <p><b>Radiator pipes</b> in Main Dining Room banged a <b>20-minute, conversation-killing tattoo</b> until a workman in blue coveralls came and disabled the thermostat to a round of applause.</p>   | <p>View of <b>giant rooftop air-conditioning units</b> from our room.</p>  |
|                    | <p><b>Most Outrageous Charge</b></p>   | <p><b>\$30 per hour</b> to use outdoor tennis courts.</p>  | <p><b>\$32 an hour</b> to use outdoor tennis courts.</p>   |
| DETAILS            | <p><b>Nuclear Blast-Proof Bunker on Premises?</b></p>  | <p>Yes. A once-secret <b>112,000-square-foot underground hideout</b> suitable for entire legislative branch of federal government. Now open for tours (\$27).</p>  | <p>No, but in its own nod to history, the hotel did <b>intern a group of prominent Japanese diplomats</b> during World War II.</p>   |

## DETAILS

The Greenbrier, on the spot of resorts dating back to 1780, sits on about 1,500 acres in White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., just a few miles over the Virginia line. It's a pleasant four-hour drive from Washington; Amtrak also stops at the Greenbrier's own depot on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The hotel has more than 800 rooms, suites, cottage-style guest houses and larger estate houses. During peak season (April through October), standard rooms are \$300 per adult, per day, which includes breakfast and dinner. Children under 17 are free, but all guests over 4 pay an additional fee of \$26 per day. During winter, rates dip to \$219 per adult. Various golf, tennis and family packages also available. Details: 800-453-4858, [www.greenbrier.com](http://www.greenbrier.com).



## DETAILS

The Homestead, founded in 1766, is situated on 15,000 acres in Hot Springs, Va., about 75 miles north of Roanoke. It's about a four-hour drive from the Beltway, or you can take Amtrak to Clifton Forge, 25 miles from the hotel (shuttle to the hotel \$35 per person, \$70 minimum). Rates start at \$198 per person on weekdays, \$236 weekends in peak season (May through July), dipping to \$118/\$148 in winter. A mandatory 15 percent service fee is tacked onto that. Rates include breakfast and dinner. Children under 4 stay and eat free; ages 5 to 12 pay \$47 each per day; 13 to 18, \$68 per day. Variety of golf, family, spa and "romance" packages also available. Details: 800-838-1766, [www.thehomestead.com](http://www.thehomestead.com).



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