

# ANNUAL TRAVEL GUIDE

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# YANKEE Summer Drives

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A large group of performers, mostly young adults, are singing enthusiastically on a stage. They are dressed in semi-formal attire, including dresses and blouses. The background is a solid, vibrant red. The lighting is warm and focused on the performers. The overall mood is joyful and energetic.

# *first* LIGHT

## The Sounds of Summer

Music and a bit of magic combine  
at this decades-old Maine family resort.

**By Hilary Nangle**

Fortified with recruits  
from top performing arts  
schools, the Quisisana  
staff fills the resort's  
theater with joyful voices  
during the Thursday-  
night musical revue.





Besides the talented stage performers who work at Quisisana, the other showstopper here is lovely Kezar Lake—whether glimpsed from a guest cabin, explored by kayak, or enjoyed with an after-dinner drink as sunset comes on.

**I**n the night, raindrops dance on my cottage roof, waves lap the shore, and a loon cries across the water. This night music is nature's coda to the professional musical performances staged at Quisisana, an all-inclusive, cottage-style family resort edging western Maine's nine-mile-long Kezar Lake.

Guests return here Saturday to Sat-

urday, summer after summer, generation after generation. They welcome newcomers into the fold, swim, sunbathe, water-ski, paddle, sail, play tennis and lawn games, hold porch parties, gather for meals, or simply relax. They marvel at fiery sunsets reflected in the lake, the clarity of the constellations in the night skies, the friendships made, and the sense of community. It's

all part of what they call "Quisi magic."

"It's a resort, but it's not a resort. It's fancy but not fancy. It's super-nice and elegant but comfortable," says Tiffany Goldstein, a Cleveland resident who first came on her honeymoon and now returns the same week almost every summer with her husband and kids.

Although the resort's lone TV and only Wi-Fi signal are in the main





Quisisana's onstage lineup spans everything from chamber music to opera to Broadway hits such as "Tap Your Troubles Away" from *Mack & Mabel*, performed with brio by Sean-Michael Bruno, left, and Logan Farley.

lodge, and one must leave the property to find a cell signal, no one seems to mind. Like most guests, I can't resist the allure of the waterfront. Two beaches, Quisi and Sunset, scallop the shoreline between three grassy points—one salted with cottages, the others with chaise lounges. Families favor Quisi Beach. I prefer Sunset Beach, where I read while listening to musicians rehearsing in the lakefront Music Hall.

Quisi, as devotees call it, isn't only a classic family summer resort; it's also a family with music at its heart. The resort stages nine performances each week, including a welcome show that teases the week ahead, piano and chamber recitals, a Broadway musical, a cabaret night, and a children's opera and musical. "The people you bring here as staff are as important as the guests," says artistic director Marshall Taylor, who maintains relationships with and recruits from the nation's top performing arts schools and venues. And since the performers double

as waiters and waitresses, beach and boat attendants, kitchen workers and housekeepers, personality is as important as talent. Alumni, many of whom also return season after season, help spread the word.

Potential staffers audition before Taylor and Quisi owners Sam and Nathalie Orans, who met when she came as an opera singer in 1994. Longtime guests and staff credit Sam's mom, the late Jane Orans, for creating a place where guests, performers, and staff were equal parts of the Quisi family. By pairing humbling work with stellar shows, young and budding professionals learn a lot about life and people. "I grow professionally and emotionally here; even the guests teach me," says tenor and waiter Sean-Michael Bruno, grandson of pianist Willie Tee and nephew of saxophonist Earl Turbinton Jr., both legendary New Orleans musicians.

Fostering relationships is Quisi's pixie dust. Young families, multigenerational families, elderly couples,

single guests, and staff mix easily on the beach, on the volleyball court, or over a board game or jigsaw puzzle. These daily guest interactions and the intimacy of the performance halls help form lasting bonds.

"I can sing in my apartment, but it feels empty if no one receives it. Onstage here, I know they're feeling it," says Georgia native Joseph McBrayer, a tenor with the Florida Grand Opera who has returned for his second season as a waiter, this time with his girlfriend, soprano Hayley Lipke. "The more I give, the more I get. It's an unbelievable high." That high is shared by the enthralled 5-year-olds sitting in the front row and sucking Tootsie Pops during children's matinees.

Adults enjoy the children's musical and opera (and Tootsie Pops) as much as, if not more than, the kids. I'm equally spellbound by the recitals, opera, concerts, and musicals. I also look forward to dinner, and not just because the food is excellent. When it's someone's special day, the dining room talent gathers around their table and performs a jaw-dropping rendition of "Happy Birthday" or "Happy Anniversary."

Repeat guests might say they're returning for the music or the ease of an all-inclusive vacation on one of Maine's prettiest lakes. But when prodded, they admit it's for that intangible sense of being among family, even if there are no blood ties.

"I don't know that there's another place as enriching and memorable," says Amanda Grant of New Jersey, when we chat after breakfast the last morning. "You take a piece of it with you every time you leave, and that makes you want to come back again and again." 🍷