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## Big Cedar Lodge Ridgedale, Missouri

By Linda F. Jarrett



If the notion of a few days in Missouri the Ozark Mountains makes you think of efficiency cabins and one-boat slips, think again. How about an Adirondack-style lodge with spa services? That would be Big Cedar Lodge in southern Missouri. Driving along the narrow road to the lodge this past fall, my husband and I had to stop the car to shoo away a chipmunk that would not move. Big Cedar Lodge might be just ten miles from Branson, but those ten miles make a huge difference. When we finally emerged from the woods into a grassy clearing, the main building of Big Cedar Lodge—a two-story wooden structure with windows looking out onto Table Rock Lake—came into view.

People were checking in. Couples were walking hand in hand amid the wildflowers. Children dashed to and fro, laughing and playing. Big Cedar Lodge offers a choice of accommodations, including a number of private log cabins and knotty-pine cottages as well as three lodges. We were staying in one of the log cabins. Like most of the accommodations here, it had a fireplace, a full kitchen (with dishes better than mine!), and a huge bathroom (including a hot tub and a walk-in shower room), plus tree-branch table lamps and other touches designed to evoke rusticity. When we first walked in, I looked up—and then looked again—at a raccoon peeking around a roof beam. Upon closer inspection, I saw that it was stuffed. Animal mounts make up a large number of the accessories here.

This getaway has its roots in the 1920s, when two businessmen bought 300 acres near the White River and each built a grand lodge. (Dorothy Worman, wife of one of the businessmen, met an untimely death, and it is said that her ghost haunts the premises. The gift shop is named after her: Dorothy's Presence.) The property became a resort in 1947, and in 1958 the White River was dammed, creating Table Rock Lake. John Morris, owner of Bass Pro Shops, purchased the place, restored the original lodges, and developed Big Cedar Lodge.

Today the resort offers horseback riding through the rugged Ozark hills, boating and fishing and waterskiing on the lake, golf at the Jack Nicklaus-designed par-3 course, tennis, a fitness trail, nature walking, and numerous facilities for children. But it is also permissible to lie beside the pool and simply enjoy the lake view. Don't miss Dogwood Canyon, a 10,000-acre nature preserve 18 miles from the lodge. An open-air tram takes visitors through the hollows and past waterfalls, limestone bluffs with ancient Indian caves, and spring-fed creeks that lure fly fishermen. Dipping into Arkansas, the tram passes into a meadow with bison and long-horned cattle, as well as white-tailed deer and wild turkeys. Courageously, I gently nudged a baby snake away from another visitor's shoe.

I've learned to burn as many calories as possible at Big Cedar Lodge, because its restaurants serve top-notch cuisine for every taste. Try the praline rainbow trout at the Devil's Pool Restaurant or the home-smoked meats at the Truman Smokehouse. And don't miss the Champagne Sunday Brunch at the Worman House, one of the two original mansions. At the Top of the Rock Restaurant, the view alone is worth the price. We watched the sun slowly slide behind the hazy Ozark Mountains while we sat on a terrace and feasted on wood-smoked pork tenderloin. On our last night we took a sunset tour of the lake in Goin' Jesse, a 1920s wooden runabout. Afterward we thought about getting a massage back at the lodge, but ended up just relaxing in our cabin's hot tub, then lounging on our deck, drinking wine and admiring the moon glistening on Table Rock Lake. Doubles start at \$105, but I suggest springing for a one-room cottage (\$119) or a double queen in Falls Lodge (\$165). A private log cabin costs \$229. Call 417/335-2777 or visit [www.bigcedarlodge.com](http://www.bigcedarlodge.com).

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