

A Quick Getaway for Mom's Who Need Them

By Vera Holroyd | @passportsandspice

It hasn't been an easy year at home. Two zoomed out teens in remote learning, one of them applying to colleges, the other one navigating the first year of high school, a husband working from home on non-stop (and loud!) conference calls and a travel writer Mom who has not been traveling due to the pandemic and not writing much either (due to her home office and peace being overtaken by the aforementioned family members). The quarantine brought on many anxieties, frustrations and limitations for all of us, but it was extra hard on us, Moms. By the end of this school year, I felt worn out, in need of a break and some revival.

Enter Garver Feed Mill in Madison, Wisconsin.

If you have not heard of it yet, Garver Feed Mill is a new foodie, wellness, art & culture and... simply fun destination in Madison. I received an invitation to visit in early summer. Garver used to be a sugar beet processing factory about a century ago, then turned into a livestock feed facility which was eventually closed down. The giant building sat vacant, its walls crumbling, covered with graffiti and overrun with weeds for many years until it was bought and carefully restored by a group of entrepreneurs in 2017. Fast forward to today and despite the pandemic that interrupted its launch, Garver is one the hippest places in Madison. Among its carefully selected tenants are a pioneer kombucha maker, a local favorite pizza company, an adult gourmet ice-cream maker, an incredible ayurvedic spa,



a yoga studio, a very sophisticated floral shop, a chic photography studio and a modern art gallery. A trendy giant indoor space hosts art exhibits, concerts and weddings. There is the Garver Lounge where one can enjoy craft cocktails and hip bar fare and an outdoor patio, perfect for intimate concerts or simply hanging out with a pint of beer from a local microbrewery or an iced latte from Ledger Coffee, another tenant of the property. In winter months, Garver also houses the Dane County farmers market, the largest one in the nation.

The Garver team did not stop with merely populating their unique property with interesting and eclectic business tenants, they put together thoughtful and delightful wellness, foodie and art & culture packages that are perfect for a quick couples, Moms or a girlie getaway. For those who cannot decide on one or want it all (ahem), Garver also lets you customize your package. I did exactly that and loved it.

My favorite experiences? The treatments and peaceful time at the KOSA spa (part of the Wellness Experience), which left me feeling pampered, rejuvenated and inspired. The guided food tour on electric bikes through Madison's beautiful east side, run by Madison Eats Food Tours (part of the Foodie Experience). Fun and different, it treated my foodie taste buds and the adventurer in me. A Friday night jazz concert with tasty cocktails from Garver Lounge (which would qualify for the Art & Culture Experience, but I simply lucked out to be there that night). You can find more details on each experience package at www.garverfeedmill.com.

Another great thing about my mini escape to Garver Feed Mill was that I finally got to experience Madison. It is so close to Chicago, but I had never visited it before. I knew it was the state capital, big college town, close to several lakes and considered one of the most progressive places in Wisconsin, but that was about it. Madison charmed me. I really liked its super friendly, energetic, yet laid back vibe. The place is small enough to feel cozy, but has a big city feel with enough things to fill up a long weekend and entice you to come back for more things you did not have time to squeeze in. There are many great restaurants, shops, cultural venues and of course, that famous capitol building one can tour. And I can't forget all those lakes. I ran by one in the morning and caught a spectacular sunset at another one the night before. For nature lovers, there are botanical gardens and an arboretum and a lot more just outside of town (I actually ventured on a mini hiking trip to Devil's Lake State Park, which is only about 45 minutes north of the city and very much worth a visit).

So, there you have it. Several lessons learned. Sometimes, even superheroes need a break. They should take it! Some of the most delightful experiences come when or where we least expect it. Delight in them and then tell the world, so more can also enjoy (main reason I write this column). I need to explore more places close to Chicago. I also definitely need to go back to Madison and Garver Feed Mill, fall is beautiful there I was told.



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