

# MEN'S JOURNAL

## 15 Offbeat Places to See This Summer

### David Webb's Camp Orenda

When David Webb traded the discomfort of New Zealand's mountainous backcountry for the relative comfort of New York's **Adirondack woods**, he brought the trappings of civilization with him. He now runs **Camp Orenda**, an all-inclusive outdoor retreat that offers an immersive nature experience enhanced by state-of-the-art amenities and thoughtful design.

"It's a place for people who appreciate traditional camping, but logistically need something a little more modern," says Webb, 37. "My clients care about fresh linens."

The resort, which opened in 2012, is located in Johnsbury, New York, an hour from the Vermont border and four hours north of Manhattan. Although Webb isn't the first to jump on the upscale camping trend, there aren't many in the Northeast that offer a similar level of luxury.

Webb grew up in Bethlehem, New York, and his family has owned the Johnsbury property where his Camp sits for more than 50 years – he vacationed there as a child. In his twenties, Webb worked in construction on Manhattan skyscrapers and as a chef in Brooklyn restaurants, but traded city life for the outdoors in 2000 when he became a high-altitude mountain guide. He earned backcountry first responding certifications from Cornell University and in 2002, uprooted for New Zealand where he led tours from Christchurch to some of the island nation's highest summits.

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"It was romantic, but it was rough," he says. "Living out of a backpack was exhausting and I couldn't appreciate where we were most of the time because I was so concerned with keeping our clients alive."

He moved back to New York in 2004 and rejoined the construction industry. In 2008, his only brother, Chris, was diagnosed with cancer. The pair took six months to travel together and wound up spending most of their time in the Adirondacks. Chris died later that year at the age of 35. "My family, who saw how much this place meant to me, suggested I turn it into a retreat and share it with others," says Webb.

Webb's initial vision for Orenda was bare bones. He wanted an authentic camping experience that mirrored the trips he and his brother would take as kids (i.e., no bathrooms, saunas or Perrier). But the demand wasn't there. Many of his client inquiries came from residents of New York City or Boston who didn't have camping gear on hand and wanted to bring their wives or families.

Today's Orenda is still woody, but hardly rough hewn. Webb designed a modern lodge for the main site that can be accessed from a dirt road. Around the grounds are five canvas cabins with wood burning stoves that serve as guest houses (he's adding a sixth and final cabin this year). To assist his head chef, he recently hired a full-time baker and two additional cooks. But don't mistake Orenda for a rustic Ritz Carlton – there isn't any electricity or propane in the main kitchen area, so all of the meals are cooked over an open wood flame and served family style. "Everybody eats together," he says. "Some of my fondest memories from my explorations off the grid are the dinners with people I'd meet on the way."

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Despite its indoor accommodations, Webb says it's the outdoor concierge service that separates Orenda from other east coast camping sites. Webb and his staff customize itineraries based on each guest's interest and skill level, including kayaking, horseback riding and hiking neighboring Crane Mountain. There is also an on-site yoga instructor and a masseuse.

Looking forward, Webb wants to expand into the Smoky Mountains or possibly **Belize**. He'd likely keep the brand name "Orenda," which is an Iroquois term for a spiritual force that brings about human accomplishment.

"The way I see it, not everyone is up for the bug-bites-and-all experience, and that's fine," Webb says. "It doesn't matter how people come back to nature, so long as they come back."