

Cabin Crashers

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The trouble with living in paradise is that everyone else wants to be there, too. For many of us, going to the Lake is like a day trip to heaven. But will there be accommodations when we get there?

Owning a cottage can be both a blessing and a curse. Summer, in particular, is the season for cabin crashers. Those “friends” who cruise out to the lake and crash at your cabin for a weekend retreat – all expenses paid, by you.

Now if you happen to own the quintessential nature retreat – complete with duvet-covered beds, wafting wood-smoke, grilled meals and flowing beverages ... well, then, you’ll get what you deserve: cottage guests.

Visitors to the cottage aren’t all bad and, in fact, some are perfect. Perfect cottage guests are easily recognizable. Firstly, they’ve been invited. Secondly, they arrive at the scheduled time with wine and fresh baked goods in hand.

They also are self-contained and self-entertained. While you, the charming host, may have a lengthy list of Club-Med activities to turn

lake time into play time, the perfect guest can find his (her) own way to the deck, the dock or the beach.

In addition to whatever they’ll need for a few days in the sun, packed into their colorful beach bag is their own agenda of how they plan to relax, put the “out” in outdoors, or be one with Nature. That means you, the host, don’t have to answer ever-annoying questions such as “What’s the plan for today?” Because when you’re at the lake, often no plan *is* the plan. That’s why you have a cottage.

So, after morning coffee (for which the perfect guest got up early to prepare a fresh brew) said guest leaves the cottage (with or without you, as is your wish) and returns at cocktail hour. He (she) is also adept at keeping the Happy in Happy Hour. After serving up some highly entertaining stories, conversation or local lake area gossip to accompany the chips and salsa, he (she) offers to help with dinner. Or, better yet, in some parallel cottage universe your guest makes dinner reservations at a nearby resort.

However, imperfect cottage guests appearing at your summer residence can be as common, and irritating, as mosquitoes. Like the other pests that proliferate around bodies of water, there are ways to control an infestation.

To save your strength and sanity in hosting the inevitable cottage-crashers, it might help to have a clear, up front and personal Cottage Philosophy. And that could include a set of rules for the house/cabin/dock.

Here are a few rules that may be worth posting before hosting:

- ▶ This cottage is not a hotel on the water. There is no concierge, no maid, no room service and no life-guard.
- ▶ Do not leave food, garbage or your coco butter lying around. Bears are the ultimate uninvited guests.
- ▶ Do not leave children unattended – especially if they are yours.
- ▶ Boats, canoes and kayaks may be borrowed, if you know how to operate them and will return them unharmed (same goes for anyone who accompanies you).
- ▶ Respect the owner’s personal space and lake life routine. Do not wake the host(s) unless there is a life-threatening situation (otherwise it may be your own).
- ▶ Checkout is no later than 2 p.m. on the agreed day
- ▶ Maximum stay is three nights, unless other arrangements (bribes) have been made.

As the perfect cottage guest will understand, that last rule is perhaps the most important. Like fish, many guests lose their freshness after a few days. Overstaying one’s welcome is a big cottage visit faux pas, and almost guarantees that there will not be another invitation to lakeside paradise.

Sometimes, however, the stars and weather align to have the perfect guest arrive for a weekend with you, the perfect host. Those times can be magical and memorable. But in that perfect world looms a less than perfect future...as soon as word gets around, your friends and family will be calling to book in advance. **☐**

