

A secret getaway in historic Galena

by Andy Cingolani

History, nature and serenity come together in northwest Illinois

From any of a handful of cities in the Midwest — Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis and Des Moines, to name a few — the drive to Galena is a pleasant one, through mostly open farmland and along highways that cut through horizons of corn and wheat fields. As you get to within 20 miles of town, however, gentle rolling hills begin to emerge, signaling a distinction between the town and everything around it.

The buzz of vibrating cell phones is replaced by an ever present breeze that caresses the treetops and carries the sound of birds flying about. “It’s an absolute gem out in the middle of nowhere,” says WorldMark Galena’s Resort Manager Keith Jakel. “Our resort is surrounded by nature, so people come here to relax and really experience how peaceful and quiet it is here. It’s fairly common to see all kinds of wildlife from the back of the resort, like bald eagles and deer. It’s a fantastic place to unwind.”

WorldMark Galena sits atop a hillside adjacent to a large wooded area. The décor is accentuated with rustic stone and wood, providing a warm and cozy atmosphere. The resort offers studios, one- and twobedroom suites, along with the amenities you’re accustomed to, such as full kitchens and stone fireplaces in most units. An indoor pool and spa, sauna, fitness center, arcade, barbecue grills, laundry room and video rentals round out your resort amenities.

According to Jakel, WorldMark Galena provides the perfect venue to complement the destination experience for guests. “A lot of people visit this area to get away,” he says. “From the quiet, secluded location to the warmth and friendliness of the staff, this resort caters to people who desire a relaxing vacation.”

A boom town is born

Downtown Galena is about a 10-minute drive from the resort through the rolling hills of northwestern Illinois. Upon arrival, you’ll feel as though you’ve been transported back 150 years in time. The city emerged into prosperity in the early 1800s when lead sulfide — also known as “galena” — was discovered and mines were opened.

Today, many of the structures built to accommodate the boom still stand, housing a variety of unique shops, galleries and restaurants. For this reason, the entire downtown

Galena historic district — about 85 percent of the town — is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The restaurants are Jakel's favorite part of historic downtown Galena. "The food is incredible here," he says. "Many of the restaurants use locally-sourced produce and meat from area farms as often as possible. The wine lists are really interesting and the service is very friendly. No matter what kind of food you like, you'll be happy with what you find here."

For visitors who appreciate the arts, Galena is home to a variety of galleries showcasing numerous styles and media, including pottery, jewelry, painting, glass and more. "Artists from Chicago began moving here and created an artists' colony," says Jakel. "Now, creativity and the arts are part of the community and who we are." And for artists visiting the area, regardless of skill level or experience, there are classes and do-it-yourself opportunities all over town.

Natural attractions: bird watching, golf, skiing and more!

WorldMark Galena is just minutes from the Eagle Ridge Resort, featuring 63 holes of spectacular golf, horseback riding, hotair ballooning, boating and fishing in warmer months, and sleigh rides, cross-country skiing, ice skating and sledding during the winter.

For bird watchers, northwestern Illinois is paradise. "During the winter and spring, it's bald eagle watching season," Jakel says. "People come from all over to see the bald eagles. You can watch them trying to catch fish and observe their nesting spots."

Still, it is Galena's historic sites that make the town truly unique. This includes the home where the 18th President of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant, lived. For a year before the Civil War, Grant lived in Galena, working as a clerk in his father's leather shop. Grant found a place in history as a Union Army General in the Civil War. When he returned to Galena after the war, town leaders in Galena presented him with a mansion overlooking the Galena River — known today as The Grant Home.

A great little secret

For many WorldMark® owners, Galena is somewhat of an anomaly. It isn't near a traditional tourist area, like Las Vegas, San Francisco, Orlando or Branson. However, as Jakel describes it, that mystique is part of what makes the area a uniquely appealing destination. "Most people don't know about Galena," according to Jakel. "But the

owners that I talk to are always pleasantly surprised to discover us because there are so many interesting things to do and the environment is so enjoyable. In my opinion, it's a great little secret in the WorldMark® portfolio of resorts."

Expanding your horizons

Venture out by car for several interesting day trips within easy reach. Just 10 miles from the resort, you'll find plenty of winter fun at Chestnut Mountain, including skiing and snowboarding. Several Frank Lloyd Wright homes are open for tours in Chicago and Oak Park, Ill., as well as sites in southern Wisconsin, such as Madison and Racine, all within a couple hours' drive.

"Many of our guests enjoy spending a day in Dubuque, just across the Mississippi River," Jakel says. "It takes about 25 minutes to get there and there's a lot to do right on the river."

For example, the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium sits on a five-acre campus located on the banks of the Mississippi and contains exhibits on the nature and culture surrounding the river. There are also several opportunities to take day cruises on the river, some on antique-style paddleboats.