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HOONEYMOONS / ROMANTIC TRAVEL: IRON HORSE HOTEL IN WISCONSIN

BY LISA DAVIS

The Iron Horse Hotel in a Nutshell:

The Iron Horse's historical details turn this Milwaukee boutique hotel into a living museum. From the antique Bank of London library chairs to the building's original 1907 fire door used as the entrance to Smyth restaurant, every room has a conversation piece. Romantic touches include love seats on the outdoor patio. Don't be surprised if you see a motorcycle or two parked outside. While not a "biker" hotel, The Iron Horse does welcome motorcyclists since Harley-Davidson is headquartered in Milwaukee.

Accommodations at The Iron Horse Hotel:

This urban retreat's rooms are anything but cookie-cutter. You'll find masculine elements such as leather chairs, solid oak wood bed frames, flat screen TVs, and life-sized wall murals of sexy but tastefully photographed women. These complement feminine designs — full-length velvet drapes, rain dome showers for two (or whirlpool tubs depending on the room) separated from the bedroom by fluted glass. All rooms have full-size refrigerators stocked with wine, beer, and champagne. Motorcyclists will appreciate wall hooks to hang their jackets and benches to remove and store riding boots in the rooms' entryways.

Dining at The Iron Horse Hotel:

Any meal can be served in-room. When you do venture downstairs, enjoy breakfast by the fireplace in the Library on tables made from reclaimed factory parts. Lunch and cocktails are available at Branded, where you'll sit on 1920's Toledo Drafting stools while sipping classic cocktails with "modern twists" such as the Branded Old Fashioned with house-made bacon-infused bourbon. For dinner, Smyth serves classic Wisconsin food like the Blue and Blue" — Lake Erie Blue Gill fillets with Wisconsin Billy Blue Cheese tartar sauce. Quench thirsts with wine or choose from the large selection of local beers.

Spa at The Iron Horse Hotel:

Although The Iron Horse Hotel does not have a full-service spa, it does have two treatment rooms for massages. Couples can also arrange in-room massages. On the treatment menu: "biker rejuvenation massages" that rev up motorcycle guests.

Destination Weddings at The Iron Horse Hotel:

This former factory turned boutique luxury hotel has plenty of options for rehearsal dinners and wedding receptions including a ballroom on the lower level. For a more intimate setting, book the outdoor patio called The Yard with couches, tables, hanging white lights, and a sheer canopy cover that doesn't block views of Milwaukee's skyline. Biker Couples can also entertain guests in the upscale Smyth's restaurant where bartenders create signature drinks, including an Apple Jack with Granny Smith apple-infused Sazerac Rye, ginger liqueur, lemon juice, ginger beer, and freshly muddled ginger root and basil.

Romance Package at The Iron Horse Hotel:

Although the Iron Horse Hotel doesn't have a specific romantic package, its Director of Desires can create custom ones that include in-room dinners and massages. You might also find flower petals on your bed and specially selected wines and adult toys stocked in your room. A limo can also be reserved to take you out for a night on the town.

Activities at The Iron Horse Hotel:

Besides staying in bed all day, or playing pool on the hotel's 100-year-old billiards table, or challenging your significant other to a board game by the fireplace in The Library, on-site activities at The Iron Horse are scarce. If you want to work out, there is an exercise room. The hotel can also arrange for you to rent a Harley-Davidson and take a motorcycle tour of Milwaukee.

Nearby The Iron Horse Hotel:

The Harley-Davidson Museum is within walking distance. Doable by car are the Milwaukee Art Museum on Lake Michigan and the Historic Third Ward District with the Broadway Theatre Center and the Milwaukee Public Market, a recommended spot for lunch. Other city highlights include the Safe House on Front Street designed to be a James Bond hideaway and requires a secret password to enter. Baseball fans can watch a game at Miller Park and beer connoisseurs shouldn't miss a tour of the Lakefront Brewery.

Is The Iron Horse Hotel Right for You?:

If the sandalwood scent pumped through the lobby doesn't put you into a romantic trance, then the in-room shower built for two or the comfy couches on the outdoor patio will. The hotel is ideal for couples on a romantic urban getaway but also attracts bikers who account for 10 percent of the hotel's guests but 90 percent of its atmosphere.

Although Milwaukee might not be the ideal vacation spot (especially in the winter), The Iron Horse Hotel could go head-to-head with any luxury boutique property in Los Angeles or New York City, helping to give the city more than memories of Laverne & Shirley.

Iron Horse Hotel Info and Reservations:

Iron Horse Hotel
500 West Florida Street
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Phone: 800-543-4766
Official Hotel Web Site

The Iron Horse Hotel is located about 90 minutes from Chicago. It is a 20-minute cab ride from Milwaukee's airport, and a five-minute ride from Milwaukee's Amtrak Station. Cars can be rented at the airport.

If you arrive by motorcycle, the hotel has a 24-hour, secured parking area as well as a self-service bike wash.

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