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Buffalo
Niagara

Anne's Girlfriend Getaway



Girlfriends get the royal treatment in Buffalo

You know it's going to be a great girlfriend getaway when your weekend starts with an eager-to-please butler jogging out to your car to unload your bags even before you've popped the trunk. "James" (yes, that's really his name) is one of a half dozen butlers on staff at the elegant 28-room [Mansion on Delaware](#) in downtown Buffalo that dates back to 1869. The butlers are happy to drive you around town, pour you a complimentary drink in the drawing room at cocktail hour — even run you a hot bath in your whirlpool tub. Their white glove treatment sets the stage for a couple of days of being spoiled rotten in Buffalo.

I've visited Buffalo from Hamilton, Ontario, a couple of times in the last year – once last summer with my husband to visit the [Albright-Knox Gallery](#) and [Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House](#) and then again for a quick Christmas getaway with the whole family. The city was starting to grow on me and I was keen to show my pal Donna around town. She hadn't been to Buffalo in over a decade. "Things have changed," I promised her. The butlers are just the first promising sign of what will prove to be a wonderfully indulgent weekend.

Star treatment at Groom Service

The pampering continues when we head to [Groom Service](#), an upscale beauty bar on the ground floor of the elegantly restored [Hotel @ The Lafayette](#). Here, positive feminine energy abounds, and not just because this grand neoclassical hotel was designed in the early 1900s by Lousie Blanchard Bethune, the first American woman who worked as a professional architect. Katie Ambrose, a New York makeup artist to the stars who recently moved back to Buffalo to open the salon, gives her clients the kind of luxurious beauty experiences usually reserved for celebrities. My girlfriend Donna and I spend a couple of glorious hours with Katie that begins with a mini meditation session involving crystals and "angelic spray" to help balance our chakras and continues with a facial, "intuitive make-up lesson" and hair styling. A final application of feathery false eyelashes has us coquettishly batting our eyes over our lunch menus when we pop in next door to the Pan- American Grill & Brewery to fortify ourselves for an afternoon of shopping with scallop cakes and sugar beet salad.

Emporiums on Elmwood

It's no secret that Canadians love to power shop Buffalo's outlet stores, but we opt to bypass the mega malls for some good old fashioned street shopping. We spend a few hours strolling the mile-long [Elmwood Avenue](#), checking out the eclectic range of dozens of retail offerings. We peruse furnishings made by local craftspeople at [Ro](#), float in the aroma of hundreds of exotic seasonings at the elaborately stocked [Penzeys Spices](#), ooh and awe over the unique gift selections (dragonfly salad tongs anyone?) at the charming [Everything Elmwood](#), browse bestsellers at [Talking Leaves](#), the city's oldest bookstore, and try on flowing summer dresses in a range of boutiques, from [Anna Grace](#) to [Blush](#) and [Second Chic](#), an upcycle consignment shop where I pick up a vintage halter dress for a bargain basement \$22. When we stop to fuel up on

caffeine, even the [SPoT](#) coffee shop is a delight with its powder blue Victorian settee and tempting display of red velvet donuts, a local specialty that proves irresistible.

Out on the town

Our extended shopping trip means there's little time for dinner so once again the butlers at the Mansion accommodate us by preparing plates of pizza and fresh fruit before driving us to the opening night of the raucous musical, *The Book of Mormon*, at [Shea's Performing Arts Center](#). The restored theatre, which features a full season of blockbuster Broadway musicals, boasts eight-foot tall crystal chandeliers and intricately painted ceilings in the lobby, recalling its glory days as an elaborate movie house dating from 1926.

After the show, we aren't quite ready to call it a night. Fortunately, another theatregoer recommends a stop at [Buffalo Proper](#), a restaurant and bar that tips its hat to the prohibition era when wealthy Buffalonians found a way to sneak a drink in defiance of the 18th amendment. Here, master barman and cocktail curator Jon Karel regales us with further theatrical antics, displaying his frenetic energy while concocting fancifully named drinks such as Bare Knuckle Boxer, Snake Charmer and Killer Bee's.

It's the perfect end to a perfect day. Tomorrow, we have a couple more stops to finish our Buffalo getaway – including an afternoon outing to [Canalside](#), a beautiful new waterfront area with free events from pilates classes to classical concerts, and what will prove to be a very memorable five-course prix fixe menu with wine pairings at [Martin Cooks](#), the city's first example of chef's counter dining where guests look on while the chef prepares his signature dishes in an open kitchen.

But right now, as the clock hits midnight, we're ready to head back to our fluffy beds at the Mansion. We ring our butler who arrives in minutes. As I climb into the backseat I utter words I've been looking forward to saying all day: "Home, James."

— *Anne Bokma*