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**Great Wolf Lodge and Water Park, Wisconsin Dells**

**By Michael Meister – WisconsinGuide Magazine**

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For years the Wisconsin Dells has been known to travelers as a summer getaway for fun in the sun while enjoying some of the nations best water rides. Now the excitement doesn't have to end when Labor Day comes around.

The Wisconsin Dells now hosts a variety of Indoor Water parks that are a great alternative for winter vacations. One such resort is the new Great Wolf Lodge. For a while I've watched it being built on my travels up north on I90/94 and this past Christmas got to experience it first hand with our family.

My wife and I arrived on Saturday where we were warmly greeted by the front desk clerks. The lobby featured a giant cuckoo clock which would give a performance at set times during the day. We met up with our family on one of the floors where the little ones were busy decorating Christmas cookies as part of the many activities sponsored by the Great Wolf.

Some of our family was found down at Youkon Jack's, the Great Wolf's own game room. We could test our skill on over 70 different games to win tickets which could be cashed in for a any number of prizes. The big prize in our group was an Angelica doll from the Rug Rats that little Brooke's dad won for her. There was also a 3-D theater show featuring Biko the Bear next to the arcade.

One of the biggest parts of our stay was the huge indoor water park. You could climb around in the "Tree House" There were tube rides where guests could go solo or ride double as they splashed there way down and around curves, through water falls, and into dark tunnels that would open up into a gaping pool of water. We had a great time as we carried our inflatable tubes to the tops and anxiously awaited our turn down the slide. There were body slides for those brave enough to go with out a tube where all you have to do is lay on your back and head feet first through a series of twists and turns that are sure to get your heart racing. I had to remember to plug my nose at the end of the slide or else I would get a snort of water. The lodge also boasts a giant 50 gallon bucket that sits high on top of the rides and fills up every 5 minutes. A bell sounds, warning that the bucket is about to empty its contents

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and all who are in range are sure to get drenched. I expected everyone to run away when the ringing started, but instead they all fled toward the center to experience the bucket's full dousing force. For those of us not up for thrills and spills, the water park also offers "Spirit Island", a more relaxing part of the water park which features smaller tube rides and a lazy river where one can kick back and relax in the water as the current carries you around in a circle. There are also a couple kiddie pools with mini water slides for those too young to enjoy the bigger rides.

We enjoyed dinner at the Great Wolf's Loose Moose Bar and Grill. It was a decent menu where you could enjoy anything from sandwiches to prime rib. You could even try an elk burger. While dining, some of our younger group members were pleasantly greeted by the lodge's own furry mascots, Biko the Bear and Wiley the Wolf.

After dinner, a walk through the bakery across the hall made us almost

forget how much we had already eaten. It would be hard to go down the water slides tonight, though some of us did try it. We then checked out the Buck Horn Exchange gift shop where we looked for souvenirs to remind us of our stay.

For those not up for water rides that afternoon, they could enjoy time at the Great Wolf's Cameo Spa and Salon where you could get your hair done or have a nice massage. If you felt like working off some of your meal, you could check out the Iron Horse fitness room also located in the lodge.

The next morning we were treated by my Mom for a breakfast brunch in one of the Great Wolf's private party rooms. It was a nice buffet setup with scrambled eggs, sausage, bacon, fruit and muffins. The kids were then surprised by a visit by Santa Claus who was also around the lodge that weekend. He brought gifts to a lot of smiling faces.

The group then went on an old-fashioned hay-ride where a tractor pulled everyone around the outside of the resort to view Elk and other wildlife. We were joined by Wiley the Wolf who I suspect was looking for some stray elk.

There was way too much to see and do for just a weekend stay. The best part was being able to enjoy everything right at the resort and not have to go elsewhere for food and entertainment. A lot of times I find a hotel room is just for sleeping, but it was nice being close to the water park and activities. It was a perfect alternative for a winter getaway.

For more on Where to go & What to do in Wisconsin, check out <http://www.WisconsinGuide.com>

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**What's to do at a waterpark? Lots!**

**By Debra Illingworth Greene – WisconsinGuide Magazine**

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Indoor waterparks make for great family getaways in the dead of Wisconsin winter. The humidity alone will transport you to the tropics, and the kids will wear themselves out in the water. Of course, families come to the Great Wolf Lodge in Wisconsin Dells for the 42,000 square feet of waterpark action, but a visit here won't leave you all wet - there's so much more to do than swim!

### Fun in the water

The indoor waterpark at the Great Wolf Lodge is actually two large rooms connected by a bar area where hair-braiding and temporary tattoos are available.

The main feature of one room is a four-story treehouse water fort with 60 sprays and geysers that pour and squirt water from 12 levels. The treehouse also includes an 8-foot tall bucket that dumps up to 1,000 gallons of water on the heads of all those gathered every five minutes. The other room has a variety of water slides, hot tubs and a lazy river.

Most adults can't resist the fun, and all ages can be seen walking excitedly from one water feature to another. However, if your kids are old enough to get in the water without you, relax at a patio table with drink in hand.

Since our visit, Great Wolf has added another waterpark attraction - the Howlin' Tornado. Adventure seekers can climb the enclosed stairwell to the top of the giant funnel, which is covered by a clear "sky dome." Heading straight into the eye of the storm on four-person tubes, riders whirl and swirl back and forth across the 65-foot funnel, dropping 30 feet every second before shooting down through a dark tunnel and into the plunge pool below. Also new in the waterpark is a 25-foot climbing wall.

### Lots more for kids

With lodge-style furnishings in every room and a full-size stuffed moose in the lobby, the décor is definitely "Great White North." However, the pace is more like a cruise ship, with activities galore.

From the morning "Wolf Walk" for kids, which includes craft time and a tour of the Great Wolf's impressive lobby, to bedtime stories by the animated clock tower, there is always something to do at Great Wolf.

My kids spent hours at Wiley's Woods, a four-story interactive video game adventure, complete with slides, bridges, cargo nets and 25,000 foam balls. The main activity is to feed foam "berries" into various machines to earn points. Young children can wander around and play with the foam balls, while older kids and their competitive adult companions can rack up points to redeem for prizes in the arcade. Our family especially enjoyed shooting foam balls at each other from multiple air "cannons."

When we redeemed our points at the arcade we couldn't help but notice the seventy games there. If you budget your quarters right, you could spend hours there too. The prizes are decent, and the black

lighting is festive.

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Next to the arcade you'll find a 3-D theatre that shows virtual reality movies, with family movies shown each evening. Then there's a coloring contest every day for the kids and a character breakfast à la Disney World each morning with Great Wolf's mascot, Wiley the Wolf.

### Lodging in style

With so much to do there's not much time to spend in your room at Great Wolf. But that's really a shame, as even the smallest room at the lodge is spacious. Our room, at the more modest end, had a fireplace, a living room area, two televisions, a refrigerator and microwave.

If you want to splurge, consider a Kidcabin Suite, where the kids can sleep in their own log cabin built into one end of the room. The cabin has bunk beds, a daybed and its own TV. The Wolf Den Suite is the same idea, only the kids sleep in a "cave." The Loft Fireplace Suites sleep up to eight people, have two levels and a bath and a half.

### Fun for adults, too

If you tire of the lodge theme and have another adult with you to watch the kids, schedule a visit to the Cameo Spa Salon. Tucked away on the lower level of the Great Wolf, this full-service spa is a completely different scene than the rest of the family-oriented hotel. Serene, with the soothing scents of Aveda products wafting through the air, consider this an escape from your escape.

Cameo offers several spa packages, or you can go à la carte. If winter has chilled you to the bones, try a hot stone massage, which combines a relaxing massage with the touch of smooth, hot river rock.

After a little time at the spa, you'll be ready for more excitement back at the waterpark.

### For more information

Great Wolf Lodge is near the intersection of Highway 12 and I-90/94 at the entrance to Wisconsin Dells. For more information, call 800-559-9653 or visit [www.greatwolflodge.com](http://www.greatwolflodge.com)

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### Don't miss the Dells

Like a cruise ship, Great Wolf Lodge has everything you need for a weekend - or more - of family fun. But you'll miss out on the local color if you "stay on the boat."

Just a few miles down the road is Lake Delton, where you can experience classic Dells. If you've had enough lodge food, consider dinner at House of Embers. You can't miss their retro neon sign and the décor will take you back in time.

But the food is thoroughly up-to-date, created by brothers and Culinary Institute of America graduates Mark and Mike Obois. This is definitely fine dining, but they offer an extensive children's menu, with everything from grilled cheese and fries to a kid-size portion of their signature hickory smoked barbequed ribs. If a sweet tooth runs in your family, don't skip dessert. They're outstanding, and an order of Bananas Foster is a show in itself.

For another local dining experience, try The Cheese Factory. This down-home diner serves a wide

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range of vegetarian fare for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

When it comes to attractions, Tommy Bartlett made the Wisconsin Dells famous. Unfortunately, you won't catch his renowned water ski show in the dead of winter, but you can visit the Tommy Bartlett Exploratory, which features 150 interactive exhibits and a display of the Russian Space Station MIR. Circus World Museum is also open year-round, as is the Rick Wilcox Theater, billed as the Dells' premier illusion show.

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### More Wisconsin waterpark fun

\*Green Bay: Tundra Lodge celebrated its first anniversary this fall. 877-886-3725 or [www.tundralodge.com](http://www.tundralodge.com)

\*Sheboygan: on the shores of Lake Michigan, Blue Harbor Resort brings indoor waterpark excitement to the beach. 920-452-2900 or [www.blueharborresort.com](http://www.blueharborresort.com)

\*Wausau: the all-suite Lodge at Cedar Creek opened in June 2004. 888-365-6343 or [www.lodgeatcedarcreek.com](http://www.lodgeatcedarcreek.com)

\*Wisconsin Dells: the Kalahari just added the FlowRider, designed to simulate surfing. 877-253-5466 or [www.kalahariresort.com](http://www.kalahariresort.com)

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