

A change of scenery

By Lauren Carter

“IF I’M IN BED EACH night by ten, I may get back my looks again,” Dorothy Parker penned in her poem “Observation.”

Well-intentioned, but not likely for this notoriously fun-loving writer and poet who settled into a second-floor at New York City’s Algonquin Hotel in 1924. Throughout that decade, Parker, humorist Robert Benchley, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Edna Ferber and others met daily for a regular luncheon nicknamed the Algonquin Round Table. The favorite place of some of the city’s best satirists, the hotel earned a Literary Landmark designation in 1996 from the Friends of Libraries USA.

The Algonquin Hotel is a fine choice for writers looking to walk in the footsteps of Parker and other well-known wordsmiths—including former guests William Faulkner and Sinclair Lewis—but it’s not the only option. Several hotels, inns and bed-and-breakfasts across the continent offer a chance to connect with ghosts of the late great literati while also enjoying a bit of a break.

If you’re seeking inspiration or just a change of scene, check out these properties. They’re perfect for writers who are looking to work in the shadows of a few famous authors, or simply seeking a stimulating space.

1. New York City: The Algonquin’s a classic, but bookworms quite happily crawl into The Library Hotel’s comfortable digs in Midtown Manhattan. Numbered using the Dewey decimal system, the 10 floors are themed, from Social Sciences to Religion, and feature rooms furnished with books relevant to the topics within the floor category. On the 8th floor (Literature), read stories before bedtime in popular room 800.005 (Fairy Tales) or brush up on your solar systems in room 500.006 (Astronomy) on the Math and Science floor.

Steps from the New York Public Library, the hotel also offers complimentary beverages in the book-lined Reading Room. When inspiration strikes, head to the rooftop Poetry Garden or a greenhouse sitting room, or snuggle up by the working fireplace in the cozy Writer’s Den. Rates start around \$226, with breakfast. www.libraryhotel.com

2. New Orleans: Much loved by many U.S. authors, the historic Hotel Monteleone has appeared in several works, including a short story by Eudora Welty and Rebecca Wells’ novel *Little Alters Everywhere*. It even became Truman Capote’s birthplace in a tall tale he liked to tell (in reality, his laboring mother was rushed to a hospital from the hotel). Having also served as home away from

home for Faulkner and Tennessee Williams, the elegant French Quarter property boasts an official designation as a Literary Landmark from the Friends of Libraries USA. Rates sometimes as low as \$99. www.hotelmonteleone.com

3. Taos, N.M.: The views of the surrounding mountains and mesas from the adobe-styled Mabel Dodge Luhan House haven’t changed since D.H. Lawrence, Georgia O’Keeffe, and other artists and writers appreciated them. D.H. Lawrence didn’t write about Taos but “his descriptions of mornings in Mexico [in *The Woman Who Rode Away*] come closest to what it’s like here,” says Marsha Skinner, the inn’s receptionist. Stick to your own writing schedule in the room where Willa Cather stayed or opt for one of a number of workshops, including a combination writing and meditation retreat led by well-known writing teacher Natalie Goldberg, author of *Writing Down the Bones*. Designated a National Historic Landmark, the inn has rates starting at \$98, including breakfast. www.mabeldodgeluhan.com

4. Petoskey, Mich.: Key West might lay claim to Ernest Hemingway, but the iconic American writer was also attached to Northern Michigan. “He would write and hang out with the

Get away without going in the red

AT SOME POINT, the idea of taking off to parts unknown appeals to most people, but perhaps especially so to a writer with a pet project. Financial constraints often hold many of us back, but it doesn’t have to be that way. There are plenty of options for writers looking to get away without going in the red.

Take up (a) residence:

Arguably the most traditional way for writers to escape their daily chores is to take up a writer’s residency. Accommodations and stipulations vary, but all recognize that writers need time and space to work. The Alliance of Artists Communities (www.artistcommunities.org) hosts a subscrip-

tion-based Residency Directory, or just google “writing residency” for millions of hits.

Offer your services: One thing that writers retreats, workshops and conferences all have in common is that they need working writers to speak at them. Offering your professional services is a great way to attend these events at low or no cost, and perhaps with a paycheck as well. ShawGuides (<http://writing.shawguides.com>) hosts a fairly extensive Guide to Writers Conferences and Workshops, as does Writers’ Conferences and Centers (www.writersconf.org).

Volunteer abroad: Volunteering abroad is another way to see the world and do some good, both for yourself and others.

GoAbroad.com (www.goabroad.com) is a leading site for international education and alternative travel while Transitions

Feel the inspiration— and the footsteps— at these ‘writer hotels’

locals,” says Reg Smith, general manager of the Stafford’s Perry Hotel. The 110-year-old hotel put the author up after a hiking and camping trip in 1916, according to the Michigan Hemingway Society. Every fall, the lakeside property fills up for the society’s Hemingway Weekend, which includes talks and tours of the area immortalized in the Nick Adams stories. On the National Register of Historic Places, the inn boasts an old-fashioned pub, but Smith also recommends nearby City Park Grill with its antique bar where Hemingway’s elbows once rested. Rates from \$99, including a \$20 breakfast voucher. www.staffords.com

5. Hannibal, Mo.: This opulent mansion welcomed Samuel Clemens (aka Mark Twain) in 1882 during a trip home to work on *Life on the Mississippi*. Owners John and Helen Garth were childhood friends of the author and hosted him many times. Now a bed-and-breakfast, the Garth Woodside Mansion’s eight guest rooms offer plenty of space for writers looking to work or explore the hometown of America’s greatest humorist. Analyze his autographed photo from 1902. On cool evenings, enjoy the fireplace in the room he regularly stayed in, and when you’re at a loss for words, wander trails through 40 acres of gardens, hills and forests. Rates



Jumping Rocks Photography

The eight guest rooms inside the opulent Garth Woodside Mansion in Hannibal, Mo., offer a comfortable way to walk in the footsteps of frequent guest Mark Twain.

start at \$165, with breakfast. www.garthmansion.com

6. Newport, Ore.: With no TVs, radios or phones, the Sylvia Beach Hotel is the perfect place to hunker down and get work done. Named for a bookshop owner and publisher who hobnobbed with Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound and others in Paris, the ocean-side inn has 20 author-themed rooms. While enjoying the astounding view, guests uncover hidden clues in the window-lined Agatha Christie Room. Not for the faint of heart, the black-and-red Poe Room is occupied by a stuffed raven and a faux brick wall. “Published, unpublished, struggling,” assistant manager Charlotte Dinolt says, describing the many writers who stay there. Every guest room has a writing surface, but people also work in public spaces, including a stocked library with overstuffed chairs and an ocean view. Rates start at \$100, with breakfast. www.sylviabeachhotel.com

7. San Antonio: The historic Menger Hotel has hosted short-story master O. Henry and Oscar Wilde. “We all wonder what kind of attention [Wilde] drew when he went for a drink,” says the hotel’s Ernesto Malacara. Named a Literary Landmark, the hotel retains much of its original charm. The three-story lobby looks as it did when Wilde checked in, with the same marble floors and furnishings installed in 1859. Settle into one of the 316 guest rooms and soak in a big heated swimming pool. When you need inspiration, ask about the many spirits that purportedly haunt this hotel. Rates from \$215. www.mengerhotel.com

Lauren Carter

A writer of poetry, fiction and travel articles, Lauren Carter loves to write in hotels. Web: www.laurencarter.ca.

www.WriterMag.com

To read about more “writer hotels,” go to *The Writer* Web site and click on Online Extra.

Abroad.com (www.transitionsabroad.com) features voluntary opportunities by area and country, and some are even paid.

Exchange homes: If you’re looking for some time alone in a new location, then a home exchange might be a better option. The price is letting someone else live in your home, which means that even those with the most meager budget may be able to travel to far-

flung places. The International Home Exchange Network (www.iHEN.com) lists homes available for both exchange and rental, while Home Exchange (www.homeexchange.com) may well have the most exchange listings on the Web. Seniors Home Exchange (www.seniorshomeexchange.com) caters exclusively to those over 50.

Couch surf: The more adventurous may find that they

don’t need a whole house to travel comfortably, just a couch on which to rest. For these intrepid travelers, “couch surfing” is an almost no-cost alternative to traditional travel accommodation. CouchSurfing (www.couchsurfing.com), Stay4Free (www.stay4free.com) and The HospitalityClub (www.hospitalityclub.org) are three of the most recognized resources for those comfortable staying

with strangers.

Beg, borrow, but don’t steal: And of course there is the timeless tradition of traveling on a shoestring by crashing at a friend or relative’s beach house/country house/mountain retreat. Beg or borrow if you must, but whatever you do, don’t steal. You’ll ruin your chances of being invited back! —Beth Morrissey, a Dublin-based freelancer and instructor