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Staying Connected with Our Kids: A Weekend Getaway at Chateau Elan

Written by Carl Danbury

Staying connected to your children doesn't always require a Facebook account, although social media sites couldn't hurt, particularly if you'd like to really know what's going on with them. My wife and I conversed about spending quality time with our three youngest children before the school year starts and we discussed a number of ways and venues to accomplish that late last week.

We didn't want to spend a lot of time in the car to get to our destination, nor did we want to take a chance with the ever-changing weather patterns we endured for most of this summer. Enter Chateau Elan, located just north of the Mall of Georgia off I-85!

While we had spent a few weekends at the winery and resort during the past several years, unlike my wife and me, the girls never really had a chance to experience a chef's demonstration, extended time in the spa, nor did they have an opportunity to sample the resort's high-end dining offerings in the past.

We swung into action late on Friday afternoon, making a last-ditch effort to secure room, spa and dining reservations. While we got shut out of Saturday evening's Steakhouse favorites cooking class that sounded fabulous, we managed to arrange — with the assistance of Chateau Elan's always helpful sales staff — a spot for all of us for a Noon culinary demonstration with chef Jake Orr. In addition, we arranged facial appointments for the girls in the late afternoon and then dinner reservations at Café Elan for 7:30 p.m.

For the two oldest girls and herself, my wife also arranged nail care appointments for Sunday morning after brunch at Versailles, while our youngest and a friend opted for a last-minute opportunity to swim at the pool by the inn before returning home.

We arrived just in time Saturday for Orr's demonstration involving scallops from the north Atlantic and stone ground grits from north Georgia. Orr explained the finer details of how to prepare the grits while showing us how to craft tarragon-corn emulsion that he planned to serve with the scallops. The large, two-inch thick scallops, procured from Halpern's (an Atlanta purveyor of fresh steak and seafood) for \$25 per pound, are extremely difficult to prepare correctly. Using a 75-25 blend of canola-olive oil, Orr explained the proper heat, what to look for while cooking them in a stainless steel pan and how to use all your senses during preparation.

Each of us received a sample of the dish Orr prepared, along with a glass of wine for those of age, or water or iced tea for those who weren't. The scallops were beautifully presented and were simply scrumptious. The girls seemed to appreciate the experience as much as we did.

After checking into our rooms, the girls prepared for their spa appointments while I took the opportunity to lounge poolside with my favorite book. Little did I know that live music was offered that afternoon at the pool, so I opted for a quieter spot inside the inn near the soothing sounds of the atrium fountain. It was there I ran into two other couples we know, who also took advantage of last-minute preparations to enjoy an impromptu getaway. I asked them why they enjoy Chateau Elan, which confirmed how I feel about the nearby escape.

"It's one of our favorite weekend getaways," one offered without hesitation. "We truly feel the relaxation and tranquility begin to flow as soon as we arrive here. The peacefulness and amenities help eliminate the stress of the work week. It might be close to home," she offered, "yet it allows us to feel far away."

The spa is one of those underrated amenities at Chateau Elan. The facial appointments were a hit for all of the girls, as each texted me about how much they were enjoying their time at the spa.

Once the treatments were finished, we all dressed for dinner and made the short walk to Café Elan, one of two dining areas inside the winery (not including the Cask Room, which is typically only offered for private groups). While Le Clos is the more exclusive and intimate venue, Café Elan is a warm venue, particularly if you're seated closer to the interior wall of the restaurant and offers many of the same wines you'd find at Le Clos.

Among the appetizers offered at Café Elan were French onion soup, lobster bisque, roasted red pepper hummus and a sumptuous Greek salad, which we shared among the group. Entrée choices for the evening included bouillabaisse, rack of lamb Persillade, filet Wellington, grouper and Osso Buco. Three of us chose the filet Wellington, which came highly recommended, while two others opted for the subtly spiced bouillabaisse and decadent rack of lamb. For dessert, the highlight of the evening was the cream puff Profiterole served with an extraordinary French toast ice cream. It was so good that we ordered another of these to split.

Despite the large number of guests at Café Elan Saturday evening, we were able to converse easily without the four teenage girls



Chateau Elan's culinary studio



Cafe Elan

feeling intimidated by other guests or the surroundings. That is no easy task at stuffier hotels or resorts, while still being able to enjoy an impeccably prepared meal. Our servers, Deborah and Robert, could not have been more amenable and treated the teens as if they were as important as any other guests in the restaurant, which is another novelty these days.

Each of our rooms inside the Inn at Chateau Elan offered us plenty of space, flat screen televisions, garden tubs as well as a shower with a rain-style shower head. A complimentary bottle (for my wife and me) of Chateau Elan 2008 cabernet sauvignon was included in our package and we each enjoyed a glass prior to turning in for the evening.

After another excellent experience in Versailles for Sunday brunch and the girls' nail appointments, we sadly checked out just 25 hours after we arrived at Chateau Elan. And even though our schedule was pretty full during our stay, we arrived home 35 minutes later, feeling relaxed, refreshed and much better about spending quality time, and connecting, with our three teenage girls and one of their friends. And after all, that's a status we'd all like a little bit more of, whether the kids are home or at school.

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