



CLEAN AND DIRTY
Honeymooners in the heart-shaped tub at Cove Haven.

Tacky Mountain High

Romance meets retro in the Poconos. By MICHAEL BLANDING

If the essence of love could be distilled, it might assume the form of serene, snowy vistas in the northeastern Pennsylvania mountains. It probably wouldn't take shape as the flashing heart-shaped sign signaling the approach to Cove Haven, the premier property of Caesars Pocono Resorts, which advertises heart-shaped whirlpool baths with all the modesty of a six-foot-tall theater marquee. Yet 200,000 couples, many of them honeymooners, descend on the resorts each year for the ultimate in tacky love vacations.

A five-hour drive from Boston, the region has only gotten more popular this winter. The Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau estimates that, despite the sluggish economy, bookings have jumped 4 percent by couples presumably nervous about boarding a plane for the more authentic romance of, say, Paris or Venice. They opt instead for the so-called "Honeymoon Capital of the World," a moniker slapped on these hills after entrepreneur Morris Wilkins opened Cove Haven in 1958 with its signature cardioid bathtub. Wilkins—who retired last year—failed to patent the idea, and copycat resorts sprang up like randy rabbits, drawing couples eager for their first taste of conjugal fumbling.

A lot has changed since then, starting with the patented seven-foot-tall Champagne Glass whirlpools that are the resort's newest draw. But despite touting recent renovations ("in burgundy and cream!"), this is still the quickest trip back to the Vegas of the '60s. Most of the couples here are decidedly more *Newlywed Game* than *Temptation Island*, and the bungalow architecture is straight off a community college campus. Completing the time warp is the tacky red, glowing façade of the Champagne Palace nightclub, which serves up live covers of songs long out of radio rotation and jokes so stale they seem retro.

As for the surrounding area, don't expect the attractions to live up to the vistas. This is Springsteen country, where cars sit on blocks and houses run on wheels. There are plenty of outdoor activities, including hiking and snowmobiling, and fascinating diversions like "the world's largest general store." But the point of coming here isn't to admire the scenery—unless by that you mean the mirrors over the bed. The most surprising thing about all of the smut and kitsch is that after a while it actually starts to work its magic. Try taking a bath in a plastic, heart-shaped whirlpool and see if you can keep from laughing. And isn't laughter, after all, the very essence of love?

Caesars Cove Haven, Lakeville, PA. Call 800-233-4141 or visit www.caesarspoconoresorts.com.

Cost of Loving

Make no mistake: Pocono resorts aren't cheap. Rates at Cove Haven don't even include a log for the fire (\$4.50 extra) but do come with breakfast in bed—and dinner, if by that you mean group dining at a table with three other couples, plus décor and food direct from your junior prom. All rates are per weekend night.

Cove Harbour

\$504.75. Bilevel suite with fireplace, "celestial ceiling," and heart-shaped whirlpool tub.

Champagne Towers by Cleopatra

\$438.84. Includes four levels of chintzy paradise complete with heart-shaped pool, sauna, massage table, fireplace, and seven-foot-tall Champagne Glass whirlpool.