

# OUT OF BOUNDS

... VENTURES AWAY FROM HOME

## TARA & THE BUHL MANSION

VISITORS COTTON TO OLD-FASHIONED SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY NORTH OF THE MASON-DIXON LINE



If Scarlett O'Hara had it to do over again, she probably would choose, as I did, the Buhl Mansion over Tara.

But she would, of course, have to drop that southern accent because both Tara and Buhl Mansion are about 90 minutes north of Mt. Lebanon, hardly a land of Cypress trees and Spanish moss.

And frankly, Scarlett would give a damn. So would Rhett Butler. They may have a hard time falling for each other but there's no question they would fall in love with Tara and the Buhl Mansion, arguably two of the finest inns in the nation. The Buhl Mansion, in fact, is one of only two bed and breakfast inns to have received the coveted AAA Five Diamond Award.

Tara—A Country Inn, as it is billed, and Buhl Mansion are Jim and Donna Winner's luxurious contributions to elegant living. Jim Winner is the man who made millions with a simple anti-theft device, The Club, which has saved many a car from falling into the hands of thieves.

I have been to Tara and Buhl Mansion twice, once on New Year's Eve of the millennium and again in mid-January of this year. It would be presumptuous of me to trump the AAA's five-diamond award for the mansion or the equally prestigious

**Top: Inspired by the grand mansions of the South, Tara was built in 1854 but added the Greek revival exterior in 1920.**

**Middle: Reconstruction-style opulence in the Carpetbagger's Room.**

**Bottom: Eight black and white swans enjoy their own pond on Tara's four acres. Another swan attraction is mirror-like Shenango Lake, a short walk from the mansion. The swans are beautiful but feisty if visitors get too close.**

Mobil four-star award for Tara, but, presumptuous me, I shall do just that. I confer on both my never-before-granted and just-now-created Unequaled Excellence Award.

Neither Tara nor Buhl Mansion is for the faint-of-wallet. Luxury is expensive. But expense, in this case, is met by value.

In both my visits, my wife and I stopped overnight at the mansion and, with a package price, had a seven-course dinner at Ashley's Dining Room at Tara and breakfast back at the mansion. Afternoon tea is included, as well as a bottle of champagne and a selection of cheeses and fruits in your room.

Just as the brochure says, "From the moment you enter the mansion, your heart will tell you that you are in a special place."

Indeed.

Let's start with Buhl Mansion, constructed in 1891 by Frank Buhl, founder of Sharon Steel Corp. for his wife, Julia. The building was in profound neglect until Mr. and Mrs. Winner restored it to its original opulence and reopened the doors on Dec. 31, 1998.

Its 10 rooms are elegant reminders of a Victorian past. Four-poster beds and thick, luxuriant bedspreads abound. So do warm, inviting fireplaces (gas-fueled in a nod to modern comfort). Every room has a large, two-person Jacuzzi and is exquisitely decorated.

I suggest you ask for the Tropical Nights room, which I had both times, because the Jacuzzi is right in the bedroom, instead of in the bath as it is in all the others. If you can't get that one, try The Steel Magnate Room. The view of the courtyard and gardens is reward enough. If you like round king-size beds, try either the Julia or Frank Buhl room.



**Top:** The impressive entrance to the Buhl Mansion **Below:** Buhl's "Tropical Nights" room (left) has a fireplace and (right) a vaulted ceiling over the spa. There is a spa in each of the 10 guest rooms.



Clarksville, now Clark. It was turned into a Greek Revival antebellum mansion in the 1920s by Samuel Koonce, Charles' grandson and a frequent traveler in the South. It, too, was in disrepair when the Winners took it over, restored it to its former grandeur and opened it to the public in 1986.

You will see at least some of the rooms during a tour of the building, led by a guide in antebellum plantation dress. You'll also see the charming gift shop (somehow, all gift shops are "charming"), the indoor pool, the outdoor pool and the dining rooms. View the dining rooms during the tour because you won't have time while having dinner.

On our latest visit, we sat down in Ashley's Dining Room at 8 o'clock on a cold Wednesday night. We pushed—yes, literally pushed—away from the table just four minutes short of three hours later. Need I tell you the food—from the full-size crab cake appetizer, to the bowl of fresh raspberries, to the tournedos of beef, which I had, to the signature swan-shaped whipped cream puff dessert—was superb? My wife pronounced her lamb chops both "exceptional" and "extraordinary."

Breakfast at the Mansion the next day was equally magnificent. Orlando, the engaging, tuxedoed waiter, called us by name as we came down the stairs, escorted us to our table and seemed proud to serve my Eggs Benedict with a boursin Hollandaise sauce. And well he should have been. What a way to start the day.

The entire staff at both Tara and the Buhl Mansion is well-trained, accommodating, military-efficient and as friendly as your Mt. Lebanon next-door neighbors.

The price for all this? With tax and tip, the package price during the January off-season will be quite close to \$500 for the night, a little more during the peak season. That's not just whistlin' Dixie but you do start your journey home with a song in your heart. 🎵

## ...if you go

### DIRECTIONS

**TARA:** I-79 North to I-80. West on I-80 to Exit 4B to Route 18 North, seven miles to Exit PA 258. 248 Lake Road, Clark PA.

**BUHL MANSION:** I-79 North to I-80. West on I-80 to Exit 4B to Route 18 North, then north to Route 62, turn left on State Street, follow Route 62 for 2.8 miles, mansion is on the left. 422 State St, Sharon, PA.

Telephones: For both 1-800-782-2803.

**GOLF:** Birchwood, Transfer, PA Buhl Farm Park, Sharon, PA (The nation's only FREE golf course, a perpetual gift from Frank Buhl.)

Tam O'Shanter, West Middlesex, PA  
Tanglewood, Pulaski, PA

### ATTRACTIONS

Avenue of 444 Flags, Hermitage, PA  
Brucker Blue Heron Sanctuary, Transfer  
Wendell August Forge, Grove City, PA  
Vocal Group Hall of Fame, Sharon

### SHOPPING

The Winner, Sharon  
Daffin's Candy, Sharon  
Reyer's Shoe Store, Sharon (Billed as the largest shoe store in the world.)

Even getting to your room is a pleasure. Delight in the ornate common rooms on the first floor then climb the wide and winding Grand Oak Staircase and listen to the homey old wood squeak so invitingly under your feet. Memories are made of this.

In the basement of the building is the spa, offering massage therapy, hydrotherapy, baths, facial skin care, skin smoothing and waxing and hair and nail salons. Both men and women are pampered at the spa. Arrive early, before the 3 p.m. check-in time, and take advantage of the complimentary sauna, steam room and monsoon shower, which sprays water on you from various directions.

Resplendent in white—even painted white brick and stone walls—the spa would have delighted Scarlett. Rhett probably would have had his mustache trimmed there.

And now to Tara, a 10-minute drive from the mansion in the tiny town of Clark, (population 633) but far below the Mason-Dixon line in comfort, grandeur and Old South hospitality.

Tara has 27 guest rooms (one of them Fiddle-Dee-Dee, which Scarlett probably would have said when the bill came for the spa services.) Inspired, of course, by the movie "Gone With The Wind," the Mercer County Tara was built in 1854 by Charles Koonce, the first resident of