

But will they invite you back again?

BY ROZ USHEROFF

Summer is here and you've received a weekend invitation to a friend's cottage. While you're looking forward to relaxing in a hammock with a good book as the loons sing their doleful tune, remember: There is an art to being a good summer guest — that is, one who gets invited back. So, consider a few of my dos and don'ts for summer guests, compiled from a lifetime of observation, conversation and choicest trial and error.

Be on time If you say you will meet them at the marina at 7 p.m., be there by 6:45. Cottagers have their own schedules, dictated by weather and darkness. Start off on the right foot by respecting theirs.

Bring gifts A no-brainer. Gifts don't have to be elaborate, just thoughtful. New magazines, music, a tankful of gas for the boat, anything that will make your hosts happy to have you. One of the most appreciated gifts is a selection of good wines, some for consumption on the weekend and some to stock your host's bar. When they open your wines later, they will remember your thoughtfulness.

Bring a meal and cook it The gesture alone is priceless. Give your hosts a break by planning, cooking and serving an entire meal, complete with wines. It doesn't have to break the bank, although no one ever com-

plains about beef tenderloin on the grill. It can be as simple as precooking and bringing a lasagna, complete with garlic bread, salad and wine. This is especially appreciated on Friday nights. After a long week at work and stop-and-go traffic en route to paradise, the last thing your hosts want to do is feed the masses. Do it for them. And don't forget to do the dishes. Always.

Pitch in Whether you call it a cottage, a cabin or a camp, there is always something that needs to be done. Help clean up, sweep the paths, sharpen the kitchen knives, scrub down loose boards on the dock, etc. And don't forget to hang up your own towels and bathing suit, and to collect and bring in everyone's after they dry. **Sleep on their schedule** Out of the city, even creatures of habit can

revert to their natural wild state: Late risers become 6 a.m. fisherfolk and night owls hit the sack by 9 p.m. Whatever time your hosts arise, try to follow suit. If you rise before them, make the coffee and slip away with a book or go for a walk. If they are early risers, rouse yourself and nap later. **Bring your own stuff** And keep it in your room. That means batteries, cameras, books, MP3 players. The last thing your hosts need is to have their last eight double-A batteries, or to have your belongings strewn all over their common living space.

Go with the flow You may find yourself playing Scrabble, Monopoly or Trivial Pursuit on a rainy afternoon. You hate games. Today, you love them. **Clean your room** Make your bed, hang up or fold your clothes and towels every day and treat your room

as if you live in it. You do, by the way. When it's time to return home, strip the beds, offer to do the laundry and leave your room cleaner than when you arrived.

Sign the guest book Many cottagers of long standing maintain a guest log, which in itself makes for a fun read about times past. Use the opportunity to write something witty and gracious that will make your hosts remember you fondly.

Send a handwritten thank-you note In our hyper cyberworld, the handwritten thank-you note is a lost art, but it is one that will put you in good standing with your hosts. Use fine paper and a fountain or calligraphy pen. You may also send your host a gift as long as it is useful and not ostentatious. A new fishing net, for example, or a set of gardening tools for the cottage horticulturalist.

WHAT NOT TO DO

their neck of the woods, whether it's best late at night or if you can sneak in a discreet swim before anyone else is up.

Don't expect to be entertained It's not your hosts' job to make sure you are having fun. Arrive with plenty of ways to entertain yourself — a good book, your personal music system, a birders' guide and binoculars or a walk in the woods.

Don't leave things behind Some people chronically forget things. Don't leave your jackets, raingear, sweaters, fishing tackle, etc., behind. Space is limited at most summer vacation properties, and you don't want your hosts to think that you are a thoughtless person who leaves things for others to look at all summer. Or, worse, that they think you might have conveniently forgotten something to cadge a return invita-

tion. Take inventory when you arrive, and check things off as you leave.

Don't bring your office appliances Leave the laptop, cellphone or BlackBerry at home. Some hosts are strict about drawing the line between weekends and work. If you must bring your office toys with you, keep them in your room. Under no circumstances should these devices be used in the company of others, unless your hosts ask if they can use them. It's just plain rude to bring your office into someone's vacation spot.

Don't overstay your welcome Sometimes, warmed by wine and collegial conversation, your hosts may be having so much fun that they ask you to stay on for a day or two. This sounds great, except that by the morning they may be looking for some peace and quiet, and wished they had exercised less *vino* and more *veritas*

before making the offer.

Your response? Express gratitude, but beg off graciously on

account of pressing work back in the city. Reiterate what a relaxing time you've had and how much you enjoyed your hosts' company.

My rule of thumb on this statute of limitations is the same as Ben Franklin's: After three days, both fish and guests begin to smell.

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Weekend Post

