

# Condé Nast Traveler



James Baigrie

HOTELS AND RESORTS

## Miraval Berkshires Resort & Spa: First In

*The luxury wellness brand launches its first retreat in the Northeast.*

BY TODD PLUMMER

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It's a complicated time, maybe even a strange time to open a hotel, but the arrival of the Miraval Berkshires Resort & Spa this summer feels unexpectedly right. This is the kind of place that has a lot to offer, whether or not we're in a pandemic.

When I mentioned to a few friends and colleagues that I had been tasked with visiting Miraval Berkshires, nobody inquired about the property's COVID-19 safety protocols, or about which spa treatments I would test drive. Nearly everyone asked: "But do they serve alcohol there?" As it turns out, Canyon Ranch Lenox, Miraval's most direct competitor in this regional wellness retreat market, is a dry resort. So, not to seem myopic or déclassé, but because I know many of you are wondering, it is worth pointing out that, yes, Miraval does serve alcohol. I suppose that under Miraval's "Life In Balance" motto, a nod to the brand's easy, equilibrium approach to wellness—no starvation diets here—this makes sense. A glass of pinot after a full day of beekeeping, yoga and gua sha does round it all out nicely. And rumor has it that since Miraval's opening, Canyon Ranch has applied for its liquor permits.



The pool at Miraval Berkshires James Baigrie

Alcohol aside, Miraval, which is owned by [Hyatt](#), has also done a marvelous job of making its spaces feel safe. Masks are required indoors at all times, and an abundance of hand sanitizer stations makes it a cinch to keep your hands clean. Sure, social distancing in the dining room felt a little lonely, and I would have enjoyed a good sweat in the spa's sauna. But aside from group encounters in your scheduled activities, the property is so sprawled out that it's easy to be completely alone—sun-drenched chaise lounges and quiet patches of lawn abound.

There was one thing about [Miraval Berkshires](#) that didn't end up being a big deal, but did strike me immediately as I pulled up to the hotel: Route 20 bisects the grounds. The lobby, guest rooms, spa, pool and dining are on one side, and most of the outdoor activities—equine, beekeeping, hikes, ropes courses—are on the other. It would be entirely possible to spend the duration of your stay on the main side and never have to venture across that busy road, but if you're looking for the full experience, you need to be prepared to go back and forth in the shuttle van. That said, the locale is bucolic and I had a nearly uninterrupted vista of the [Berkshires](#) from my room. And come sunset each night, I would throw open the doors to my private patio, kick my feet up, and watch the golden sky fade into twilight. There is a bit of distant noise from Route 20 when you're outside, but when my patio doors were closed, the room was as silent as a tomb and the bed—the bed!—was as fluffy and cozy as any I've slept in at any hotel anywhere.





Rooms are calming and have great views of the mountains. James Baigrie

Otherwise, there are many things that Miraval Berkshires gets exactly right. The spa, one of the largest in New England, is excellent. The locker rooms are spacious, and while the communal steam rooms and hot tubs are roped off for the time being, they aren't really missed—it's on to the main event that much quicker. Therapists take time to explain the PPE they're wearing and at what point during your treatment it's appropriate for you to remove your mask. At no time did I feel unsafe or uncomfortable. The Berkshires have long been a wellness destination ranging from earthy-crunchy holistic retreats to luxury hotels, so Miraval's spa benefits from a rich, deeply experienced pool of massage therapists and aestheticians. Polly, a Berkshires veteran, knew exactly what she was doing. Despite the face shield, she kneaded the knots out of my back like she was kneading a loaf of bread, and after months of remote work hunched over my laptop, it was the best my back has felt in ages.

That skilled of a massage is exactly what you want after a day diving into the retreat's activities. **Hiking**, kayaking, ropes courses, and encounters with rescued horses and birds of prey all become lessons in self-discovery and sustainability. It's a bit like summer camp for adults, and maybe that's part of the fun, but one in particular caught me off guard. Miraval's signature beekeeping experience wasn't solely about a photo opportunity in the apiary suit—although I did that, too—but instead, the hour-long workshop became a powerful lesson in the human and emotional aspects of wellness. Our group of five began as **strangers**, but when one woman revealed that getting close to an active hive was a chance for her to overcome a lifelong **phobia** of bees, the experience took on a whole new meaning. She trembled and held back tears while reaching towards the open hive, and bit by bit our group cheered her on. By the time she stood in front of us, holding a tray crawling with at least a hundred busy, unbothered bees, there wasn't a single dry eye in the group. It's been a strange and isolating year for everyone, but the act of helping a stranger in this seemingly small way gave a sense of purpose and connection to an otherwise disorienting period—and proved that maybe we do need hotels like Miraval to open up in times like these. Because what I thought would be a short, sweet stay in the Berkshires ended up being one of the most powerful experiences I've had in 2020.

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