



PHOTO BY MEERAH POWELL

CHRISTMAS AT THE VILLAGE

EW heads to Cottage Grove to explore the Village Green Christmas Market

When I'm looking to take a vacation and get out of the Eugene-Springfield area, my destination has historically not been Cottage Grove. Nothing against Cottage Grove, I just usually tend to lean toward Portland to visit friends, to Bend for a slight change of scenery or to somewhere on the coast to relax, be close to the ocean and get some good fish and chips.

But Cottage Grove for the holidays?

It turns out that despite being less than a 30-minute drive from Eugene, this town of fewer than 10,000 residents has some fun attractions to make it worthwhile.

If you take the drive (or the LTD bus) to the Grove, most people know to check out Axe & Fiddle (a downtown pub with good food, drink and live entertainment) or, of course, Dorena Lake (a nice place to cool off during the summer). So, when *Eugene Weekly* got an invite to stay at Cottage Grove's Village Green Resort, I thought, "Why not?"

Every year around the holiday season, the Village Green Resort hosts a Christmas event in which its grounds are decorated in string lights for a Christmas festival.

This year's event is specifically inspired by German Christmas markets. Guests can walk around, hang out by fire pits, check out artisan vendors and grab food and drink at booths around the marketplace. *EW* was invited to a "VIP preview party" to check out the festivities a week before they opened to the public.

The Village Green Resort, located just off the Cottage Grove I-5 exit, is a quaint but charming spot. In first pulling up, the hotel, located directly across the street from an Arby's and Taco Bell, seems pretty standard, but upon getting checked in and settling into our room, my partner and I were pleasantly surprised by how comfy and cute the setting was.

We got a deluxe room with a king-sized bed. That particular room setup ranges in price from \$67-\$159 for this time of year, depending on what day you're staying — during the time of the Christmas market, you can get a lodging package that includes an overnight stay, admission to the market, a drink voucher, a commemorative mug (that's shaped like a boot!) and complimentary breakfast for a starting rate of \$109.

Our room was inherently homey, with vintage-looking furniture and lamps that had a handpicked feel. It was complete with a fireplace in the corner as the heating source and a private patio out the back door.

The hotel also has a pool and hot tub (although I came without a swimsuit).

I should note that the Village Green has dog-friendly rooms. We have a cat, so he had to stay at home. But, if I were a dog mom, I would definitely be taking this into account.

Locals and I-5 travelers alike will enjoy not only pet-friendly rooms, but the Village Green also has a 14-acre garden to walk around with your furry friend and even a fenced-in dog park.

(and I mean *huge*) fully lit Christmas tree, complete with giant lit-up presents at its base.

Inside the market area are a variety of artisan vendors — booths with handmade candles, birdhouses, comfy blankets and more.

Throughout the grounds are a multitude of spots to sit by a fire pit and get warm with some hot cocoa or apple cider; also, if you're of drinking age, you can add alcohol to those drinks for an extra charge, just FYI.

The food booth includes a menu of German-inspired eats like Bratwurst on a hoagie, Bavarian pretzels, beer cheese fries, tasty cinnamon rolls (that I got to sample) and more.

Live music and carolers perform some days. For the preview night, our group was entertained by a wonderful three-piece band playing Christmas classics.

The event will also feature visits from Santa for the kiddos and appearances from live reindeer (which, honestly, I might have to come back for).

After walking around for about an hour and a half, my partner and I headed in for a nightcap at the hotel's Fireside

This year, the event doubled its lights (from 250,000 to 500,000) and greatly expanded its space. The light displays include a plaza area with a colorfully lit gazebo, trees and a small lit up tunnel (perfect for photo ops).

I should also note that of the other "VIPs" who were at the preview night, I met a few Instagram famous dogs (namely @ScoutGoldenRetriever and @KyzerTheHusky) and their owners, which was a treat.

Just off the room and amenities alone, I'd already found another spot to add to my quick getaway list. But wait, there's more.

We got a chance to check out the main attraction: The Village Green Christmas Market. This year, the event doubled its lights (from 250,000 to 500,000) and greatly expanded its space. The light displays include a plaza area with a colorfully lit gazebo, trees and a small lit up tunnel (perfect for photo ops).

Walk a little farther past this plaza and you'll arrive into the Christmas market; its entrance is marked by a huge

Lounge. The lounge, which is open to the public (and is open to minors until 8 pm), is incredibly cozy. It features two fireplaces surrounded by couches, a stage for live music and a few TVs — this was crucial for people trying to catch a Duck football game the night we were there.

Although the Village Green Christmas Market is obviously very Christmas themed, it could be enjoyed by anyone looking to celebrate winter time, eat some tasty food and gaze at beautiful light displays.

Whether you come during the holiday season or not, the Village Green Resort itself is worth checking out to get some well-needed rest and relaxation. Don't forget to bring your dog! ■

The Village Green Christmas Market is open 5-9 pm most dates through Dec. 23. Visit villagegreengreenchristmas.com for more info.