



Glamping + Love: A Little Safari in Ithaca

WEST OF LI

bridget shirvell | AUGUST 6, 2015



image: allison usavage

Community campfires, homemade s'mores, twinkling fireflies; it's camping season in the Northeast. Fall asleep under the stars, hear the wind rustle through the trees, be one with nature but don't worry about having to sleep on rocks. [Firelight Camps](#) in upstate New York isn't a traditional campsite. A stay here includes the comfort of a plush luxury bed and a pre-pitched tent. Firelight Camps owners Bobby and Emma Frish have brought the idea of glamping or lux camping to New York.

"We have always loved how the serenity and relaxing nature of a campfire has brought people of all ages together," Bobby said. "That,

along with our passion for eco-tourism, sparked the idea for Firelight Camps.”



Firelight Camps Owners Emma and Bobby have thought of and provided everything needed to enjoy camping without roughing it. image: [allison usavage](#)

Fifteen safari inspired tents, think Moroccan Bedouin tents, hardwood floors with Persian rugs and bright textiles, a king or queen bed, furniture that is light, foldable and durable, each with a covered porch make up the campsite in the backyard of [Buttermilk Falls State Park](#). Bobby and Emma have thought of and provided everything needed to enjoy camping without roughing it: a bathhouse, lobby and lounge where a locally-inspired continental breakfast is served, happy hour featuring Finger Lakes wines, beers, ciders and spirits, bocce ball and a phone charging station, plus a bistro, steakhouse and spa. Not to mention those s'mores.



*Community campfires, homemade s'mores, twinkling fireflies. image:
[allison usavage](#)*

“We love that we are able to create a unique place for friends, couples and families to truly unplug and connect with each other,” Emma said. “We can offer a safe space for people to step outside their comfort zones a little and try something new. A lot of our guests have never been camping before – some have never even tried a s’more! The sense of adventure and immersion in the natural world is both exciting and peaceful at once. The constant, crackling campfire brings everyone together under the stars, a rarity in our fast-paced world.”



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The story of how it all came to be is a love story, an entrepreneurship story and even a growing up story. Bobby is from Potomac, Md., while Emma, Connecticut. As juniors at the University of Pennsylvania they met, fell in love and then traveled abroad. Bobby taught micro enterprise and entrepreneurship to high school students in women in Nicaragua while in the Peace Corps. Emma traveled throughout the Northeast U.S., Kenya and Ecuadorian Andes building farm-to-city relationships for families, schools, universities and hospitals and honing her love for cooking, rock climbing and eco-friendly tourism.



The story of Firelight Camps is a love story, an entrepreneurship story and even a growing up story. image: [allison usavage](#)

They brought their passions together to start their first hotel and café, [opening up La Buena Onda in 2009 in Matagalpa](#), Nicaragua and partnering with coffee cooperatives, a local chocolate factory, artisan groups, and outdoor adventure guides to bring eco-tourism activities to their guests.

“La Buena Onda was certainly our training ground,” Emma said. “We learned so much about how to run a hotel, from basic operations to

customer service. And especially, we learned how to work together as a team beyond our personal lives.”



Bobby pictured and Emma have brought glamping or lux camping to New York. image: [allison usavage](#)

While they loved La Buena Onda, the couple wanted to return to the States to create a new hotel that would have an impact closer to home. Bobby received his MBA from the Johnson School of Management at Cornell and continued to travel abroad, learning more about the eco-tourism industry. He worked with Contentment Camping at the [Bonnaroo Music Festival](#), helping to launch a village of glamping tents for the festivalgoers, and Emma started a food blog and was [a top finalist on the show *Food Network Star*](#).

“We’re also rock climbers and have spent a lot of time camping outdoors,” the couple said. “But above all, we are both extremely passionate about anything we set our hearts to, and through our travels and prior businesses, we’ve learned how to adapt and pivot in order to create a successful business. Things don’t always go as planned, and

that's the beauty of it!"



As juniors at the University of Pennsylvania Emma and Bobby met, fell in love and then traveled aboard. image: [allison usavage](#)

It was during this time the business plan for what would soon be known as Firelight Camps came about.

“We thought the Finger Lakes would be the perfect place to launch Firelight Camps,” Emma said. “Our community is so supportive of young entrepreneurs, and there was a wealth of knowledge and resources here to help us build the camp. The Finger Lakes is one of the oldest and most vibrant food and farming regions in the country and is quickly becoming known as an agritourism destination. It’s also home to an astonishing

number of waterfalls and lakes, which is a huge attraction for outdoor lovers.”



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Located less than four miles from downtown Ithaca, Firelight Camps is now in its second year and thriving. Bring the kids and even the dog or retreat for a romantic weekend with your significant other or simply some quiet time solo. Spend your days hiking or indulging in the emerging foodie destination. Ithaca is full of restaurants, markets, pubs and wineries producing goods that are truly Made in N.Y. There's even a world-class art museum. Think of Firelight Camps as a destination for those looking for a something a bit different but still wanting the serenity of nature.

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