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above: White wooden gates open to the courtyard garden entrance to Fearington House, a 33-room luxury hotel. **left:** Belted Galloway cattle graze in the pastures at Fearington Village. **above, left:** Fresh-cut gladioli brighten a stall at the market.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ART MERRILL

An Elegant Country Hotel

Summer is sweet at this wonderful resort near North Carolina's Triangle.

Fearington Village gets top marks on our list of favorite getaways. The hotel wraps around a fabulous restaurant tucked into a historic house. Beautiful gardens paint dollops of color along the edges of emerald green pastures.

The entire property has a dressy, country-gentleman air about it. Even the distinctive Belted Galloway cows look as if they're sporting tuxedos as they graze. That ought to clue you in to the fact that stays at the inn are pricey. But if you can afford a weekend splurge, this could be just what you're looking for.

Fearington Village blends romantic lodging, delectable dining, great shopping, a planned residential community, and glorious gardens in a rare combination that you'd be hard-pressed to find anywhere else.

From U.S. 15/501, the main highway out of the tri-cities, you'd swear

that the community looks like a gentleman farmer's spread. In fact, the village was built on the site of an 18th-century dairy farm. Today, you might catch R. B.

Fitch, the proprietor, digging in to a plate of sausage, eggs, grits, and gravy for breakfast at the restaurant.

R. B. is just a regular guy with a gift for knowing what people like. "My wife and I wanted this to be a world-class place for people to visit that was convenient to the Piedmont area," R. B. says.

To say the village/hotel concept works may be a bit understated. "Wow" suits the place a little better.

Spend the Night in Luxury

Starting at \$220, the rooms are a splurge, but even if you can afford only one night, we'd suggest staying in this marvelous inn. Each room comes

furnished in English antiques, and fresh-cut flowers enhance the luxurious feel. Guests are welcome to walk or ride bicycles to the Swim and Croquet Club or explore the trails that curl through the 1,100-acre residential development. If you'd rather save on lodging, stay at the Hampton Inn in Chapel Hill (\$79-\$89); (919) 968-3000. Then make your way to Fearington for a day full of activities. (See our box on a Fearington day trip on page 34.)

Ready, Set, Shop

The area you'll enjoy the most is the main village center, where shops, cafes, and boutiques cluster around a central area accented by gardens. Everything lies within easy walking distance, so you can buy until your bags get heavy and just drop them back in the car.

Start out at The Market Café, a gift shop/country store/cafe in the farm's renovated granary. You'll find all sorts of Fearington stuff here, including replicas of those cute cows (\$9). They've tucked an ice-cream parlor into the corner, as well as Galloway's Deli (great sandwiches for around \$5),



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above: Superb dining in a romantic setting awaits at the restaurant. **left:** The nursery sells more than 200 species of plants propagated at Fearington.

and a cafe upstairs for more sit-down fare such as pasta and salads (entrées range \$8.95 to \$14.95). Both offer lunch on weekdays and brunch on weekends.

After lunch and some ice cream, wander over to McIntyre's Fine Books & Bookends, a terrific shop with all sorts of books and nooks to call your own. Across the way sits Dovecote: A Home & Garden Shop, with home furnishings and accessories, including garden tools, Vietri dinnerware, and other items. Wander upstairs to A Stone's Throw, a gallery selling jewelry and gifts.

Next door is our favorite place, The Potting Shed, which carries a large assortment of plants propagated from Fearington Gardens. You'll also find practical and whimsical garden items and tools, statuary, and other neat stuff. You may want to sign up at the shed for a free tour of the gardens; ask for times.

Even if you don't get a guided tour, you'll want to admire the astonishing tapestry of perennial gardens, which opens into the 17-acre open space of Camden Park. You're sure to come away with some great ideas (and plants) for your own yard.

Fine Dining at Fearington

For a fabulous dinner you won't soon forget, make reservations at the restaurant. (**Note:** Jackets are recommended for gentlemen.) We loved the prix fixe menu (the restaurant offers two menus for \$45 or \$75). The offerings change, but when we visited they included

pecan-crusted catfish, seared foie gras, and black-eyed pea cake. The restaurant does not serve à la carte items, but you have lots of choices. The vanilla bean crème brûlée was worth fighting for the last scrape. To finish your perfect memory of Fearington, don't forget one of those stuffed Belted Galloway cows. It fits into the car so much easier than a real one.

MARK G. STITH

Fearington Village: 2000 Fearington Village, Pittsboro, NC 27312; (919) 542-2121 or www.fearington.com. **Directions:** Fearington is located 8 miles south of Chapel Hill on U.S. 15/501. ♦

FEARRINGTON FOR A DAY

You don't have to be a guest at the inn to enjoy this place. The public is welcome to visit all the shops and restaurants. Keep in mind, though, that toddlers might get bored—this isn't the zoo or an amusement park.

Here's a budget-friendly idea we suggest. Arrive midmorning and sign up at the nursery for the free garden tour later that day. Shop at the market (maybe pick up something special for dinner), then have lunch over at the cafe. Browse the bookstore until it's time for the garden tour. Then walk the gardens, where you'll be inspired to buy a plant at the nursery.