

VISIT BUCKS COUNTY 2016

DOYLESTOWN: DAYS AND NIGHTS OF FOOD AND DRINK, FASHION AND FUN



New Hope is only one of the hot spots in Bucks County with great restaurants, shopping and festiveness. Doylestown is another.

Even though it is the county seat and has roughly three times as many residents as the little sister on the river, Doylestown gets overlooked too often. Let's change that.



ART IMITATES LIFE: Edward Hicks' "Noah's Ark" near the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown was seen on a drizzly day in May. It is one of 13 reproductions on display in Doylestown as part of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's InsideOut Project. The Michener Museum hosts one-hour walking tours through the duration of the display event. Visit Discoverdoylestown.org for more details. Photos: Scott A. Drake

Had we let weather determine our decision or enjoyment factor when we were scheduled to go to Doylestown during this recent wet spell, we probably would have said, “No thanks” and stayed home. And that would have been tragic. Never forget that travel is about the journey and the destination, not the temperature and humidity.

Whereas a day trip can be one way to get away, making it an overnighter and having an extended evening of food and drink is really a great idea. You don't have to worry about the drive home or what time the train leaves. (The Doylestown line deposits travellers right on the Doylestown downtown front doorstep.)

We stayed at the historic and fabulous Hargrave House Bed & Breakfast (hargravehouse.net) for two wonderful nights. The location on Main Street, just a couple blocks from the train station and town center and right next door to the Historical Society, makes it a splendid location from where one can truly walk anywhere in town.

The 1813 house is quite large but has the comfort of a cozy B&B that is unmatched. Our room even included a Jacuzzi tub! There's a common room for reading or relaxing and another for breakfast, with tables and chairs included along the front of the house for spectacular days.

Hostess and owner Lorna greets each guest as though they're old friends and is a pure delight. She moved to the area in 1960 (“When you could stand in the middle of Main and State shouting and no one was around to notice”) and has been a credit to the town ever since. Her warmth and good nature are cheerily infective.



Two streets, many directions

In the best towns for strolling, shopping, eating and drinking (like Provincetown, New Hope, etc.), there is one, maybe two, main street that is the heart of town. Doylestown is no different: Main and State streets. Add a couple of interesting side streets and you have a great space to wander around and run across whatever tickles you.

Main Street is slightly less developed than State, but it has special places along it and is the road you would come in on from Philadelphia. State Street has the lion's share of the businesses and is likely the road you will come in on if travelling from New Hope.

We also found, slightly off State Street and sharing parking, two great places: Empanada Mama's (yoemama.com) and The Zen Den (zendencoffeeshop.com).

Coffee first!



The Zen Den is the kind of coffee/tea shop that is the pinnacle of sipping. Beans are roasted locally by Backyard Beans (backyardbeans.com) in Lansdale and it makes a superb cuppa! The space is large enough to have live music a couple of nights a week but still set up with a variety of tables and chairs, sofas and barstools so that you can have your quiet space the rest of the time. Sandwiches and other treats complete this stop in place for rejuvenation and caffeine.

Just steps away at 21 Donaldson St. is Empanada Mama's. A total of three barstools and a window seat are all the place has room for, but take-out seems to be the usual way to go. Take out can be ready to eat, or ready to heat. The owner lived in Rio for a spell so she knows what's cookin' when it comes to these perfectly baked pastries. Yes, they are baked here, not deep-fried, and they are splendid!

There are specials every day (closed Sundays) and decisions can take a hot minute. A lunch box of three w/sauce is about \$10; get a half-dozen or a dozen for discounts and mix the empanadas as much as you like. The buffalo chicken, Korean beef and

ham and cheese were all excellent choices and we split a brie and pear empanada for dessert that was delicious.

You know you're going to the right places for meals when Lorna or another local asks you where are you having dinner and their face lights up. That happened with both The Hattery Stove & Still (hatterydoylestown.com) and "Mom's" Maxwell's on Main (momsdoylestown.com). Each has a distinctive look and diverse menu to accommodate any taste.

At Mom's, one is faced with the happy dilemma of Southern-style dishes that scream home-cooking. The aromas coming from the kitchen are inspiring and the food lives up to the reputation. A full bar menu and some unique draft beers make menu perusal fun. After starting with fried pickles with Mom's sauce (the pickles are made in-house also, by the way) and a crab cake that had a nice celery root and green apple slaw on it, you'd think about maybe going a different direction for the entrée.



Nope! The gumbo that was on the daily special board was delightful and had just the right seasoning level that gave it that Creole flavor without overpowering the sausage and shrimp. Add a dash of hot sauce and bam! There is also a daily stuffed meatloaf

special, which the day we visited was corn and Gruyère. An individually prepared meatloaf “ball,” it had all of the classic flavors and the imaginative filling spilling onto the plate.

The Hattery is in the Doylestown Inn (18 W. State St.), another distinctive place to consider staying in, though we did not have the opportunity to do so this trip. Specialty cocktails such as the Grapefruit Julip and The Hattery are delish and quite popular. And the atmosphere in The Hattery is nothing short of festival-like. Our server, Melissa, was just the best at keeping us entertained and well-taken care of.

The best for me was the chicken pot pie: the size of a pie plate, but baked shallow. The rest of the menu sits perfectly with option of salads, French onion soup, burgers, lamb chops, scallops and more.

Now for brunch on the weekend, either of those places would be just as favorable. But we got the opportunity to eat at Genevieve’s Kitchen (genevieveskitchen.com). Genevieve and her partner Karen run this cute little bistro with indoor and patio seating and a fantastic fresh menu. Located directly across from the County Theater, it makes a before- or after-film meal perfectly situated. Karen works the front of the house and the two complement the place perfectly. Out back in season, Genevieve grows fresh herbs and selects salad items in raised beds, but indoors in the kitchen she really cooks.

Brunch runs from salads to grilled asparagus with prosciutto di Parma and burrata, topped with balsamic glaze, to crepes and French toast. For some, like me, brunch frequently means eggs. I love a good poached egg so when I saw the hash maiale tirato — slow-roasted pulled pork shoulder, duck fat-fried potatoes and onions, two poached eggs and avocado — I was instantly sold. Both the lunch and dinner menus offer attractive options as well.



The old and the new

Of course, visiting a town isn't all dining, though it can be. As mentioned, County Theater (countytheater.org) sits on State Street and shows first-run films, with classics nights as well as special events. The locals have put the money and effort into revitalizing the old theater (instead of selling it to the highest bidder like we do in Philadelphia) and it's quite special. Also across the street from it next to Genevieve's is Siren Records (sirenrecords.com), which I mention because not only can you peruse the vast roomful of music in a variety of forms, but it's also a distribution point for PGN.

If old records and CDs aren't your thing but books are, you're in tremendous luck. Doylestown boasts several bookstores that cater to everyone who wants new releases to first-edition collectables and every nuance between. I got a bargain on a copy of "Last of the Mohicans" at Bucks County Bookshop (abebooks.com), which specializes in older and out-of-print books. Sharing the building is Central Books (doylestownusedbooks.com), with a collection of more-recent books on two full floors. There is another brand-new bookstore also on Main Street.

Where you really want to wander off to, though, this spring is the James A. Michener Art Museum (michenermuseum.org). Currently, it has several excellent exhibits, but the primary one is “Philadelphia in Style” and it is only running through June 26. The collection shows and tells the history of fashion in Philadelphia that includes Wanamaker’s, Nan Duskin and Strawbridge and Clothier and includes stunning (and sometimes whimsical) outfits by Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, Christian Dior, Callot Soeurs, Halston and Elsa Schiaparelli. It’s mesmerizing and certainly a unique opportunity to see such designs.



Get your drink on

Getting on the road for a couple of options isn’t too difficult as the county is overflowing with covered-bridge tours and the Bucks County Wine Trail and Ale Trail. Pick one or choose them all. Just about any direction you point your car, you’ll find signs for all of the above.

We first tried Wycombe Vineyards (wycombevineyards.com) on free-tastings Friday. On Saturdays and Sundays, there is a small charge (\$5) but that includes some cheeses, crackers, breads, veggies, sweets and other wine accompaniments missing on the free Fridays. Host and owner Richard is extremely knowledgeable of not only wines but also local geography and history. Learning here whilst tasting is heavenly.



One of the most unique parts of any vineyard we've visited was that Wycombe asks for grape pickers from the public. Starting the first Sunday after Labor Day through October, registered volunteers harvest the bounty and are treated to a patio barbeque for their efforts. Sweet!

Crossing Vineyards and Winery (crossingvineyards.com) has such a variety of tours and special tastings on its calendar, everyone can find one that speaks to them. We happened on a wine and chocolate pairing one afternoon that was divine. Pierre's Chocolates (360 W. Bridge St. in New Hope) is the partner on this tasting and it is highly recommended. The next one is May 15. They also have dates for cycle and sip, wine tasting and yoga, pairing wine and cheese, pairing wine and cupcakes and a singles tasting. (That's a tasting for single people, not tasting singles.)

Crossing Winery is just up the road from Washington Crossing Historic Park and the Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve on River Road and near Bowman's Tower, another worthwhile stop when in Bucks County. If you bring your bike along, there are some delightful paths along the canal in the park as well.

Newest on the Visit Bucks County (visitbuckscounty.com) tours list is the Ale Trail. Doylestown boasts its own stop with the Doylestown Brewing Company. Possible stops include Bucks County Brewery in Pipersville, Vault Brewing Company in Yardley, Neshaminy Creek Brewing Company in Croydon and Triumph Brewery in New Hope.

Whatever your Bucks destination in whatever time of the year, slow down and explore, experience and engage the local scenes. New friends and good cheer are the best souvenirs to bring home.
