

Why You Should Spend a December Weekend in Brandywine Valley

It's a perfect holiday wonderland.

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Longwood Gardens. Photograph by Harold A. Davis. #TWEET \$SHARE



The Brandywine Valley, which straddles Pennsylvania and Delaware, is one of those impossibly pretty places that become even lovelier in winter. When you encounter rolling hills, stone fences, historic barns, and winding lanes, you might think: This should be a painting. And you'd be right. Three generations of Wyeths—N.C., Andrew, and Jamie—have created lasting testaments to this landscape.

It's also home to opulent mansions and gardens of the Gilded Age rich, mostly the du Pont family, whose legacy has imparted a sophisticated sheen that holds firm today. Meanwhile, in recent years, the valley has become a hub for artistic and entrepreneurial transplants who have come seeking unspoiled space and a vibrant sense of community.

No matter your vantage point, spending time amid the snow-dusted fields feels as if you're experiencing the very best of winter.

Along the Way

About an Hour In

In Baltimore, two locations within two blocks of each other provide a trove of period furniture and estate-sale treasures, making Ryan's Relics (8100 Belair Rd., 443-384-2777; 7900 Belair Rd., 410-870-6493) a solid spot for antiquing on a budget.

About 90 Minutes In

Stretch your legs in Havre de Grace, Maryland, a handsome waterfront town where you can check out the Decoy Museum along the Susquehanna River (215 Giles St.; 410-939-3739) or stop in at family-owned Joseph's Department Store (122 N. Washington St.; 410-939-4114), in business since 1937, or brave the winter chill and stroll along the waterfront.

About Two Hours In

Hungry? At the 17th-century-era pub Jessop's Tavern in New Castle, Delaware (114 Delaware St.; 302-322-6111), mammoth beef-and-ale pies are served on pewterware, and the bar pulls a staggering number of pints, both local and international.

Do

Looking to crank up your holiday spirit? Head to Longwood Gardens (1001 Longwood Rd., Kennett Square, Pa.; 610-388-1000), with half a million outdoor lights, dramatic dancing fountains, and a 4 1/2-acre conservatory where visitors carol alongside one of the country's largest organs.

Nearby, Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library (5105 Kennett Pike, Winterthur, Del.; 800-448-3883), a historic mansion, decks its halls with high-end finery. Through January 7, an exhibit called "Royal Splendor" displays the magnificent

coronation gown from Netflix's *The Crown*.

One hour away is Saint Peter's Village, a former mining town that's now a postcard-cute hamlet. Stop at Saint Peter's Bakery (3441 Saint Peter's Rd., Saint Peter's, Pa.; 610-459-7501), which churns out tasty breads such as a crusty kalamata-olive sourdough. At Glasslight Studio (3611 Saint Peter's Rd.; 610-469-9066), you can pick up gifts, including handblown tiles, vases, and artsy menorahs.

About 20 miles down the road, browse for holiday gifts such as hand-poured candles at the indoor Artisan Exchange (208 Carter Ave., Suite 13-B, West Chester, Pa.; 610-719-0282). Many of the 40 chefs and purveyors create their offerings on-site, including Rebecca's Dumplings, hailed by Food Network as some of America's best.

Works (432 S. Walnut St., Kennett Square, Pa.; 484-732-8586), a buzzy new design space where artists and designers showcase their work, has been named a top shopping destination by *Philadelphia* magazine.

Close by is the Brandywine River Museum of Art (1 Huffman's Mill Rd., Chadds Ford, Pa.; 610-388-2700), which displays paintings by three generations of Wyeths, along with other great American artists. A short shuttle ride to the Wyeth studios yields the views that inspired their work.

Eat

Terrain's Glen Mills Garden Café (914 Baltimore Pike, Glen Mills, Pa.; 610-459-6030) is popular for dishes such as rainbow trout with freekeh tabbouleh. Partially in a greenhouse, the cafe is owned by the founder of Anthropologie. After lunch, you can pick up a holiday wreath at the chic nursery.

The lavish brunch at the Hotel Du Pont's Green Room (42 W. 11th St., Wilmington, Del.; 302-594-3100), with its coffered ceilings and heavy chandeliers, delivers a dose of high style and fine service along with scrambled eggs and smoked salmon.

For dinner, reserve a coveted seat by one of the many fireplaces at Dilworthtown Inn (1390 Old Wilmington Pike, West Chester, Pa.; 610-399-1390), a candlelit 1780s gem that delivers a worthy rack of lamb as well as lobster mac and cheese spiked with bacon.

Eat in or take out at Carlino's (128 W. Market St., West Chester, Pa.; 610-696-3788). At this family business, favorites include house-made meatballs, slabs of gooey eggplant Parm, and baked goodness such as the signature cake, made with

Granny Smith apples laced with cinnamon.

Stay

The aristocratic grandeur of the Hotel Du Pont lobby (42 W. 11th St., Wilmington, Del.; 302- 594-3100) will make you think you've been cast in your own BBC series.

Location is king at the Inn at Mendenhall (323 Kennett Pike., Mendenhall, Pa.; 610- 388-2100), a family-friendly hotel with a bountiful complimentary breakfast and a lounge with good cocktails, less than three miles from Longwood Gardens.

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