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MARCH 2013

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Pay A Visit to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

FAMILY TRAVEL
 - by Deborah Williams

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I was up with the sun at the Verdant View Farm in Paradise, Pennsylvania. Cows and young calves have needs that must be met early. The cows demand milking and the hungry calves demand their milk bottles.

As a guest at this Lancaster County bed and breakfast I had the rare treat of trying my hand at milking and feeding the calves. Although the farm uses machines for milking, guests can squeeze the cow's teats until milk starts flowing. Calves are fed with very large milk bottles and they may just beat out my Lab puppy in the speed of their breakfast consumption.

Some of the milk from the cows goes right into the bottles for the regular calf feedings. A stay at a working farm offers an ideal introduction to the Lancaster County countryside in southeastern Pennsylvania. Farm B&Bs are perfect for families and offer children reared in a city or suburb an insight into another way of life.

Here, milk doesn't come from bottles but right from the cow. Some of the milk from this early milking found its way to our breakfast table — the farm is licensed to serve raw milk. It was my first experience with unpasteurized milk and it was rich and delicious. Breakfast is served daily (except Sundays) and includes eggs, fruit, yogurt, meat and homemade desserts (doesn't every breakfast include dessert?) This is a breakfast designed to give farmers and tourists the energy to get through the day.

The 115-acre dairy and crop farm has been operated by the Ranck family since 1916 and has been receiving guests since 1967. Take a wagon tour of the farm and fish in the farm ponds for large mouth bass and bluegills. Play with the many farm pets including kittens, Scooby the farm dog who has a passion for retrieving, goats, a miniature



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donkey, bunnies, exotic hens, and a rooster.

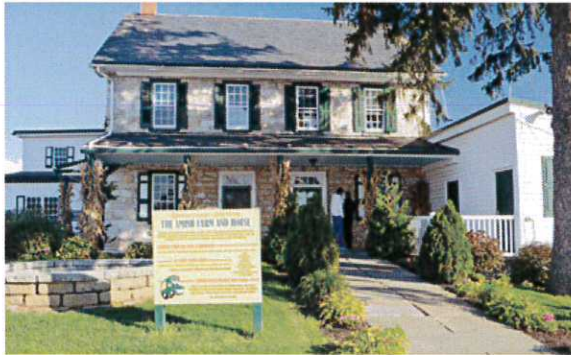
VerdantView Farm

The family has been in Lancaster County since 1728, a year before the county was founded. The large frame house was built in 1896. Don and Ginny Ranck enjoy welcoming guests from around the world who have come to learn about farm life.

March, April, and May are prime season for Mud Sales. A Mud Sale is the Lancaster County term for an annual auction/sale at local fire companies. The sales, appropriately named for the condition of the thawing ground, attract thousands of people looking for bargains on anything from Amish quilts and antiques to lumber, buggies, and lawn equipment.

Most sales begin at 8:30 am, but activities continue throughout the day for those who wish to catch a glimpse of some local color and enjoy sampling traditional area farm fare.

Amish Farm and House Museum



The county is home to the oldest and second-largest Old Order Amish population in North America. They are known for their simple, hard working 19th century lifestyles. Electricity, cars, tractors, telephones, and other modern conveniences are not part of Old Order Amish lives but ample food and plenty of sweets are part of their diets. Known for their farming expertise, the Amish

also cultivate a crop of diverse business enterprises, including furniture making, that is changing the face of their community.

Approximately 25,000 Amish call Lancaster County home. The region received international attention when the movie *Witness* starring Harrison Ford was filmed here. Watch for horse drawn carriages, the prime transportation for Old Order Amish.

They do not believe in photographs and ask visitors to respect their beliefs and not take photos in which their faces are recognizable.

The Amish Farm and House offers insight into the Amish way of life. An Amish family occupied this 1805 stone house and it is currently furnished like a modern Amish house. It is somewhat incongruous that the house is now located in the midst of a shopping plaza and is next door to a Target store. A developer bought the farmland and house. He was persuaded to keep the historic house that now operates as a house museum.

Our guide explained Amish history, clothing, customs, and culture as we walked through the house. Out back, wander the 15 acres, a parcel of land that remains from the original farm that was part of a 1715 land grant from the state's founder, William Penn. There are sheep, cows, chickens, goats, donkeys, and a miniature horse. There is even the Willow Lane One-Room Schoolhouse, the only Amish schoolhouse open to the public.

Strasburg Railroad Steam Engine

Lancaster County is a mecca for train lovers. The Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania is a world-class train museum exhibiting the state's strong history of railroading. Here visitors can sit in an engineer's seat, explore a caboose, experience a turn-of-the-20th-century passenger station, and inspect a 62-ton locomotive from underneath.

The museum displays more than 100 locomotives and cars from the 19th and 20th centuries. Many rare cars and railroad artifacts have been restored.

A popular exhibit for children and adults alike is the Locomotive Cab



Simulator. It is built from a real Norfolk Southern diesel locomotive cab. Sit in the engineer's seat, watch the track and signals ahead, and operate the throttle, brakes, and horn, all with realistic sounds. Learn what the "dead man's pedal" does.



Across the road from the museum is the Strasburg Rail Road that offers train trips through Amish country.

The train ride is one of best ways to experience the Lancaster countryside and is fun for all ages. A massive, coal-burning steam locomotive pulls comfortable passenger cars. The 45-minute train ride chugs along on America's oldest short-line railroad dating back to 1832. In addition to regular trips, there is a wide variety of special themed trips.

On March 29 Peter Cottontail will greet passengers on the Easter Bunny Express. On April 14, July 28 and October 20, passengers should be on guard for a gang of robbers rumored to be in the area. Not to worry though, law enforcement will be on hand to protect the passengers and see that justice is served. The Great Train Robbery was the theme of our ride in the countryside and added an extra bit of fun to the trip.

Thomas the Tank Engine is a perennial favorite. Ride a train pulled by Thomas, meet Sir Topham Hatt, and enjoy other Thomas and train-themed activities June 15-23, September 14-22, and November 22-24.

There are also Wine & Cheese Trains, Rolling Antique Auto Show rides, Santa's Paradise Express and the Night Before Christmas Rides.

An Amish buggy ride is another authentic way to immerse yourself in the countryside. Children and leashed pets are welcome on board. Abe's Buggy Rides in the whimsically named Bird-in-Hand offers a variety of rides. Traveling down some roads, there were no cars or trucks — just us and another buggy or two. We passed houses owned by Amish (no electrical wires) and a one room Amish schoolhouse. Amish children attend school through 8th grade in their own schools.

"This is a real Amish buggy and the only means of transport that the Amish own, although they do ride in cars driven by others," explained Ervan Stoltzfus, our driver, whose family arrived in Pennsylvania from Germany in 1760. He grew up Amish until his family left the community and religion when he was 15. For a truly unique theater experience visit the Sight & Sound Theatres, the largest Christian theater in the country. It brings the Bible to life with unmatched special effects, memorable music, a 300-foot wrap-around stage, 40-foot-tall sets, live animals, and a large array of performers. Currently the show "Noah" is back by popular demand for the 2013 season.

Travel Tip of the Month: For information on Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, visit www.padutchcountry.com or call **1-800-PA-DUTCH**. Lancaster County is close to both Gettysburg and Hershey.

Deborah Williams is a veteran travel writer and the author of "The Erie Canal: Exploring New York's Great Canals." She lives in Holland, NY and is a long-time contributor to WNY Family. Learn more at www.deborahwilliams.com.

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