



NEPA is the destination point *'Staycation' brings opportunities for exploration*

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

If ever there was a time to take advantage of the great things to do right under our noses, it is now! Gas prices are astronomical, and the country is in an economic tizzy, with savings accounts earning less interest and stock prices in a downward spiral.

Despite a few sweltering days in early June, the weather here is better than just about anywhere in the country. The rain has kept the flowers blooming, and the landscape is verdant and lush than ever. Much of the rainfall has come at night, with thunderstorms keeping us guessing during the day. Finally, considering the extremes of flooding, high temperatures and water scarcity throughout the United States, not to mention tornadoes, forest fires, and the classic battles of man versus nature, Northeastern Pennsylvania has become a geographically desirable destination!

Not only that, but we have the opportunity to be economical and cutting edge at the same time! The hottest trend this year is "staycations," that is home-based vacations. Even the two or three day trip to the Jersey Shore is becoming increasingly expensive, making the rich recreational, cultural and historical resources of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley an amazing value. It is the perfect time to take advantage of the great "destinations" of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The region is dotted with lakes of all sizes, inviting boating...from rowboats, canoes, and pontoons, to speedboats and sailboats. The increasingly sparkling Lackawanna River has become famous among fisherman as a great place to catch trophy trout, while anglers of every ilk can enjoy their sport at ponds and lakes throughout our Heritage Area.

The Pocono and Endless Mountains beckon, sometimes in views from our own windows, as visitors from distant places spend hours to each these popular destinations, paying big bucks for accommodations in fancy hotels, inns, and resorts or more modest cabins and lodges. We can be there in minutes.

How lucky can we get? Using our own homes to rest our heads, the residents of the Lackawanna Valley have the advantage of living close to many popular vacation destinations. As locals, we have the advantage of knowing just where the hidden treasures lie! The Lackawanna County Coal Mine Tour is acknowledge by mining cognoscenti from as far as Great Britain and South Africa as the best coal mine tour in the world. The Pennsylvania State Anthracite Museum can occupy you for hours, immersing you in the immigrant cultures and industrial past of the region.

Each year visitors from 50 states and dozens of foreign countries come to Steamtown National Historic Site, yet many local residents have no idea how to get there!

The Electric City Trolley Museum entertains and educates visitors on the same property. Families can board a train for a ride to Tobyhanna or the Delaware Water Gap, or take a Trolley to Montage Mountain, to visit the Trolley Restoration Shop or attend a Yankees game at PNC Stadium. A downtown architectural walking tour guided by the Lackawanna County Historical Society teaches, among other things, about the Scranton Cultural Center, Albright Memorial Library, Courthouse Square, and the many architectural gems built during Scranton's heyday. And there is the great renaissance of Nay Aug Park and the fascinating, ever-evolving, exhibits at the Everhart Museum as well as the wonderful new Tree House overlooking the Gorge at Roaring Brook!

Some might prefer to pretend to be away from home and eat out for every meal. Locals have the inside track on the weekly church festivals, with their extraordinary offerings or mouth-watering ethnic foods, games and other traditions unique to each community. How many tourists know about the delicious restaurants, many with family names and hidden in neighborhoods, that have thrived for decades in our midst? Or about the new bistros with modern cuisine and ethnic dishes that haven't been available here before? This area is getting more cosmopolitan all the time!

Others might just want to take it easy...to enjoy the leisure of hanging out with friends, cooking or gardening if that is their pleasure, lounging in the backyard, reading good books from their local library. It can be fun to just spend time with the kids without the constraints of work schedules, having family cookouts, going to the city, county and state parks, hiking or biking the local trails, and exploring the neighborhoods. (LHVA is hard at work developing forty miles of trail along the Lackawanna River!) Look at the local papers to keep track of concerts, plays and other performances at nearby venues.

Whatever your preference, you can have the perfect summer vacation right here without spending a fortune. Use your vacation days...life is too short for all work and no play!

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