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The Bounty of Southern Chester County

Matt Freeman

SHOPPING FOR THANKSGIVING DINNER OR GETTING A HEAD START ON YOUR HOLIDAY GIFT LIST, HEAD SOUTH.

OVER A DECADE AGO, A WELL-KNOWN Philly-based food critic journeyed all the way out to Kennett Square to visit newly opened Talula's Table and declared that the upscale food market and its quickly famous farmhouse dinners could "turn even the most far-flung agricultural hamlet into a must-stop destination."

He was right, especially, about Talula's Table, which locals and visitors alike were quick to embrace. But then and now, Talula's was not the only game in town. And even if meant jokingly, "agricultural hamlet" doesn't quite do Kennett justice or describe the food and shopping options offered in the region.

So, as the Thanksgiving season approaches, let's take a closer look at how to enhance your holiday dinner and early shopping with a visit or two to this section of the Brandywine Valley.

PLANS ARE EVOLVING

First, there's clearly no problem with this area being some kind of food desert where people have to churn their own butter or are hard pressed to find a variety of fresh, healthy food for lack of available markets. The problem is COVID-19.

But until those issues are resolved, local businesses have adapted and coped like everyone else. Kennett Square restaurants were quick to offer take-out options and then distanced indoor dining when that became possible. In addition, the borough closed part of State Street in the business district, Thursdays through Sundays, for more open-air dining space.

Historic Kennett Square's new executive director, Bo Wright, arrived in the area not long before the pandemic did and has focused on helping promote borough businesses. He said recently

that plans for the colder months were still evolving based on the weather and what will be feasible.

Kennett's street closings will end at some point, but Historic Kennett Square is looking into outdoor heaters to extend al fresco dining where possible. That includes a four-table "parklet," like a deck, that sits in the parking area outside Lily Asian Cuisine and will stay for at least three weeks in November.

Also, Wright says the downtown and Longwood Gardens are working on a collaboration during the holidays. Given the need for distancing, Longwood's restaurant won't be able to handle the throngs of people who visit to see the annual holiday displays there, so hungry diners will head to Kennett.

Long story short, things are happening, so keep checking for the latest developments.

So grab a mask and let's go shopping and make the start of the holiday season an unusual but really good one.

THANKSGIVING BLITZ SHOPPING

A first stop is at the **Country Butcher Fine Food Market**, a local institution on Cypress Street at the eastern end the hamlet since 1982. They can hook you up with a heritage turkey for your Thanksgiving table, if you need one. Check their regular and exotic meats and fish, plus a wide variety of cheeses, breads, all the spices you'd need and really everything else. Around the corner is the **Produce Place** with lots of fresh vegetables and fruits.

Boom—if you want to be, you're done. Though we suggest you plan your shopping to take advantage of the Friday afternoon **Kennett Square Farmer's Market**, covered later.



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LEISURELY SHOPPING

But that's not the kind of shoppers we are, is it? So cold blooded and efficient?

Let's make an excursion of it and work our way west through the business district. That's mostly on State Street, the next block over from the Country Butcher.

Why not start with a stop at the [Square Pear Gallery](#), to nourish the soul with some art. Across the street is [KSI Crafts](#), a high-end beer store in the lower level of the Kennett Square Inn, and more beer a bit south on Broad Street at the [Kennett Brewing Company](#).

For civilized sipping, there's [Mrs. Robinson's Tea Shop](#), and then head across the street for some Italian at [La Verona](#), mushroom-centric options at [Portabellos](#) or "refined American" at [Verberna BYOB](#). Back across the street again is [Byrsa Bistro](#), back in Kennett at a new location but still offering a fusion of Western Mediterranean cuisines.

[Talula's Table](#) is next, beyond the Union and State Street intersection. Lots of local and exotic cheese here along with other gourmet foods—salads, soups and stews, entrees, coffee and chocolate, plus a drool-worthy selection of pastries and baked good. Pretty much everything, frankly, and like many local food merchants, they've adapted to our interesting times with dinner-to-go menus.

[Lily Asian Cuisine](#) (more fusion) and [Grain Gastropub](#) are steps away. Need a break? You've got [Philter](#) to sit down with a handcrafted coffee or tea.

And farther on down State Street, find [Nomadic Pies](#) (the name comes from their start in a food truck), serving up every kind of dessert and main course pies. There's more food yet at [The Market at Liberty Place](#), a kind of mini-Reading Terminal crossed with a food court.



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For something to wash it all down, head south of downtown to Birch Street to stop in at [Brae Loch Brewing](#) or [The Creamery](#), a popular spot to gather, eat and drink for a while now. The Creamery also currently hosts the [Kennett Square Farmers Market](#), the new-ish location for local produce, flowers for your table and more, including Malvern-based Canter Hill Farm, which offers high-end meats including heritage turkeys. (Don't dawdle if this interests you. They sell out every year.)

If you sampled even half those places—wow!

LOOP TWO—EARLY GIFT SHOPPING

Best to make a separate loop if you're on a mission to start shopping local for holiday gifts. Again, most shops line both sides of State Street for easy strolling.

On the east end, you'll find [Green Eyed Lady](#) has women's clothing and accessories. There's more women's clothing and accessories at [Fab and Boujee](#), No. 109. [Chantilly Blue](#) has denim, [Penny Lane Emporium](#) has clothes and everything else for kids. Farther down State Street, [The Growing Tree](#) has even more kid stuff.

You'll also find a branch of [Trail Creek Outfitters](#) for you outdoorsy folks, as well as [Bove Jewelers](#) with [Kennett Square Jewelers](#) across the street for a bit of bling. We were sad to see local jewelry designer [Alexis Kletjian](#) close her shop early in the pandemic. Luckily you can still find her creations online.

Final stop: no visit to Kennett is complete without a stop in [The Mushroom Cap](#), with its fungus-oriented gifts in the Mushroom Capital of the World. About half the nation's mushroom supply is grown in the area, simply because long ago one florist started growing them on the side and the thing—uh—took off and grew overnight, let's say.



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HEADING SOUTH

Having toured the sights on State Street, let's head further south down Kaolin Road to pick up some specialty mushrooms at [The Woodlands at Phillips](#). They have mushroom-oriented gifts here, too, but if you enjoy cooking with mushrooms and adding them to your Thanksgiving menu, it's a good place to know.

Up north, east of Unionville on Route 842, is [Barnard's Orchard](#). (Psst—try the Staymans. Just try one.) Buy a bushel or a few for a pie. Like hard cider—cold, hot or spiked? Then visit [Rebel Seed Cidery](#) in Toughkenamon.

VISIT OXFORD

Next time you're up for an excursion, we recommend a visit to Oxford, another agricultural hamlet, this one with a population in the middle four figures and with many thriving businesses. It's flung a bit farther west of Kennett off Route 1.

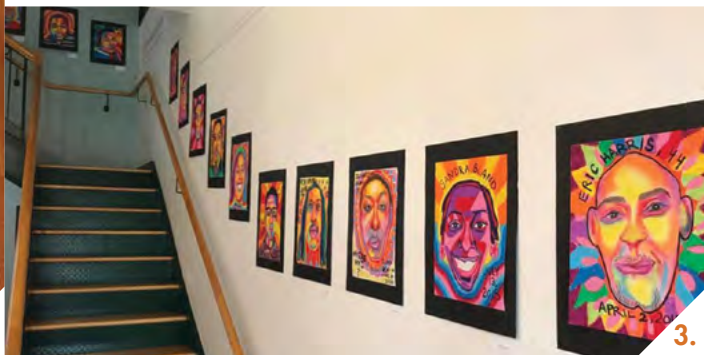
Restaurants include the [Octoraro Hotel](#) and [Sawmill Grill](#), but there are plenty of others, plus shops to browse before or after a meal here.

Like Kennett, Oxford and environs are home to a thriving arts community. Its second annual arts festival in August 2019 was a blast, as is its well-known Halloween parade. All that is (sigh) on hold this year, but the [Oxford Arts Alliance](#) on Third Street will have its annual artisan gift shop on the weekends of November 20th and December 4th, 11th and 18th.

First Fridays will continue, says Oxford Mainstreet Executive Director Christianna Hannum. She adds that you shouldn't miss [Small Business Saturday, November 28th](#), when the shops stay open late and offer discounts and giveaways.

That's not all there is in southern Chester County. But even if this charm-filled area is 30 miles or so from the city, it's not exactly a Swiss Family Robinson situation here. Everything you could possibly want is on hand for a somewhat different, probably, but also simply awesome Thanksgiving and start to the holiday season.

It's harvest time, remember, so enjoy. ♦



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