

Touring the Southern Brandywine Valley

Matt Freeman

WHERE DOES THE BRANDYWINE Valley begin and end?

The waterway for the Brandywine Creek is right there on the map, but the region—that’s a bit fuzzier. Still, if you drive, bicycle or walk down Creek Road heading south from Chadds Ford, the road follows the Brandywine’s many meanders, sticking close by as if too enchanted to let it out of sight for long. The wooded hills and occasional stately home glide by as you pass, literally, through the Brandywine Valley.

The fabled Brandywine Creek finds its way to the Delaware border and beyond as it traverses what’s also sometimes called Chateau Country—dotted with stately former du Pont homes and landmarks—but that’s fuzzy too. Travel writers will sometimes say it’s an area you ought to see, and then just list the famous destinations such as Winterthur.

So let’s keep it simple and say there are indeed things you ought to see and do in this part of our area, a sort of borderland between southern Chester and northern New Castle Counties.

And we’ll assume you’ve heard of those big, world-famous places—no need to revisit Winterthur, Hagley Museum, Longwood Gardens and the like. They’re fabulous and worthy of a destination trip. But there’s so much more.

Southern Brandywine Valley is a place of great natural beauty and architectural interest—this in-between place, with historic towns and villages to dine and shop in, natural areas to enjoy, and plenty of other things to discover along its many scenic byways.



1. Hindu Temple of Delaware
2. Penns Woods Winery
3. The Inn at Montchanin



1



3



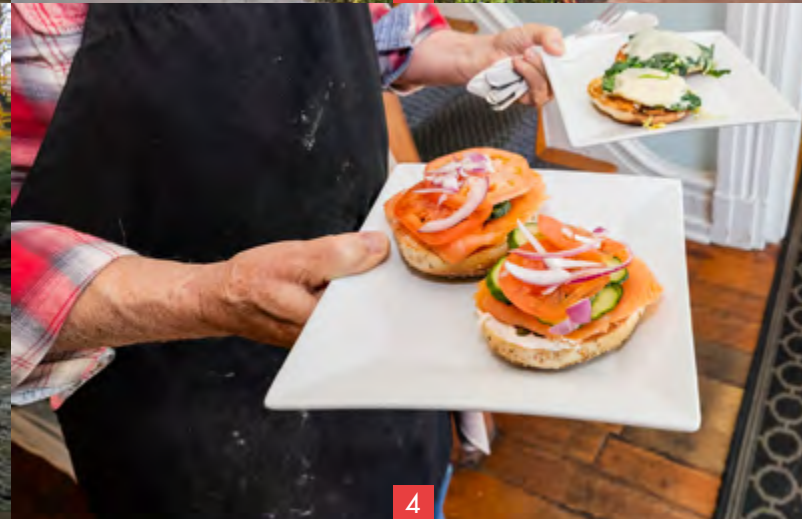
5



7



2



4



6



8

SURPRISES ALONG THE WAY

Highways and other well-traveled roads crisscross the area, so unless you have a reason to be on those back roads there's much you can miss. For example, there's the **Hindu Temple of Delaware** on Yorklyn Road near Hockessin.

This is not one of those houses of worship based in a converted rancher. Far from it. This is a large building with an immense multi-story facade like any you'd see in South Asia. On the grounds is the largest statue of the god Hanuman in the country. Never heard of it? This is what we're talking about. So let's keep exploring.

The **Inn at Montchanin** is another serendipitous discovery just off the beaten path. This village-like collection of cottages includes a charming inn and spa along with an equally delightful on-site restaurant, Krazy Kats, serving fine, seasonal fare. It's among the Historic Hotels of America.

Of course, most of the other tucked-away places you might want to know about are

a bit more familiar. **Penns Woods Winery** (the former Smithbridge Winery) on Beaver Valley Road just west of Route 202, obviously offers wines to taste as well as space for picnicking, along with live music and a variety of other activities.

There are, of course, other wineries and breweries in the area. For details, check out *BVWineTrail.com* or *BVBrewScene.com*.

NATURE PARKS

If you feel like doing something outdoorsy—a popular pastime since a few springs ago, for reasons we needn't mention—there's a swath of preserves and natural areas across the region for hiking, birdwatching, fishing and just generally enjoying nature.

West to east you've got the **White Clay Creek Preserve** on the Pennsylvania side that becomes the **White Clay Creek State Park** (both named for the clay that was mined in the area) on the other side of the border. Then there's the **Middle Run Valley**

Natural Area, with 10 miles of biking and hiking trails linked to White Clay Creek State Park. **The Ashland Nature Center** is farther east, just off Barley Mill Road, and is the headquarters of the **Delaware Nature Society**, which has a variety of educational activities as well as outdoor recreation.

You'll also find the **Mt. Cuba Center**, a renowned botanical garden with spectacular wildflowers, **Valley Garden Park**, one of the best little-known parks with landscaped grounds perfect for wedding photos, and **Brandywine Creek State Park**, once part of a du Pont family estate, located on the other side of Winterthur Museum.

And that's by no means all. It really is an area of unusual natural beauty and charm.

CENTREVILLE

But of course we're social animals, and if you're interested in being with other folks, there are places for that too in Southern Brandywine Valley. **Centreville** is a village with many of its 19th-century structures

on the National Register of Historic Places. It's not tucked away, exactly—it sits astride Route 52—but it does have old-world charm and offers opportunities to stroll, shop and get something to eat and drink.

Buckley's Tavern is a Delaware landmark, a popular eating, drinking and gathering place for many decades, with seating these days by reservation. A different option would be to get a bottle of wine at **Collier's of Centreville**, offering a well-curated inventory and owners who love to talk wine. Then walk a block or so to the **Centreville Cafe & Montrachet Fine Foods**, which has indoor and outdoor seating and serves gourmet goodies for breakfast, lunch and appetizers. Their motto: "We coddle our clients."

There's shopping too, with a collection of specialty shops sprinkled through town. **Adorn Goods** features up-scale home goods, while **Found** offers distinctive antiques. **The Marblehead Fly Fisher** has exactly what you'd expect. It's worth a stroll to discover more.

HOCKESSIN

While there are historic homes in **Hockessin**, it's more of a commuter/bedroom town. Like Centreville it was built up around a main road—Route 41, a

well-traveled road—so it's not exactly off the beaten track. That said, there are many reasons to check it out.

The Back Burner is a longtime favorite New American restaurant, having started in the 1980s before moving to its current location in 2000, known for great crabcakes and pumpkin mushroom soup. **Six Paupers** is a lively bar and restaurant with a slightly upscale but easygoing atmosphere.

For shopping the **Gateway Garden Center** is a well-stocked garden supply market, and **Harvest Market Natural Foods** sells what its name suggests it's stocked with. Nextdoor is **Wild Birds Unlimited**, a kind of paradise for people who like to have a bird feeder in the yard and a pair of binoculars on the kitchen windowsill. See if you can score the popular Wingspan board game—on every birder's wish list.

That's just a sample for this not-so-small town. So if you're in the area, don't just fly through the intersection. Check it out. You're bound to discover something.

YORKLYN

Of course, if you really want to feel like you've found something special that not everyone knows

1. Brandywine Creek State Park
2. White Clay Creek State Park
3. Buckley's Tavern
4. Centreville Cafe & Montrachet Fine Foods
5. Auburn Valley State Park
6. The Back Burner
7. The Gateway Garden Center
8. Six Paupers



1



2

1. Marshall Steam Museum
2. Dew Point Brewing Company
3. Center for the Creative Arts



3

about, go down Route 82 until you come into **Yorklyn**. You can't miss the historic mills along the Red Clay Creek or the charming Queen Anne mansion on a hill above them.

Once the mill owner's house, this mansion is now part of **Auburn Valley State Park**. There you can tour the mills and mansion, fish and hike, and check out a large collection of vintage steam cars at the **Marshall Steam Museum**, which, to be honest, you can't do in all that many places. The best time to visit is during monthly Steamin' Days—November 7 and 27—when you can climb into an antique automobile, board a train and experience travel as it was at the turn of the 20th century.

If the lovely winding roads have rekindled your interest in bicycling, you can stop in at **Garrison's Cyclery** on Creek Road to select from their extensive collection of local road and trail bike maps. Then head out for your personalized tour of the back roads.

But if you're thinking more about just relaxing and it's a Thursday through Sunday afternoon, you can visit the **Dew Point Brewing Company** in the Garrett Snuff Mill. It's Delaware's newest family-owned and operated microbrewery. They don't sell food, but you're welcome to bring your own to pair with a pint of Nit Wit (Belgian wit bier) or Hopworks Express (West Coast-style IPA).

The mills were padlocked long ago, and the rest of the village mostly seems dreamily detached from the hectic outside world. But there's one more place that's a going concern—the **Center for the Creative Arts**. You can take classes in a variety of art forms—music, art, dance, drama—attend an array of events, including shows where you can buy an example of the often-excellent work by some of the area's best local artists. Visit November 20 & 21 for the CCArts Artisan Show to find unique gifts.

These are just a few reasons to get off the main roads and explore this charming and often overlooked part of the Brandywine Valley. ♦