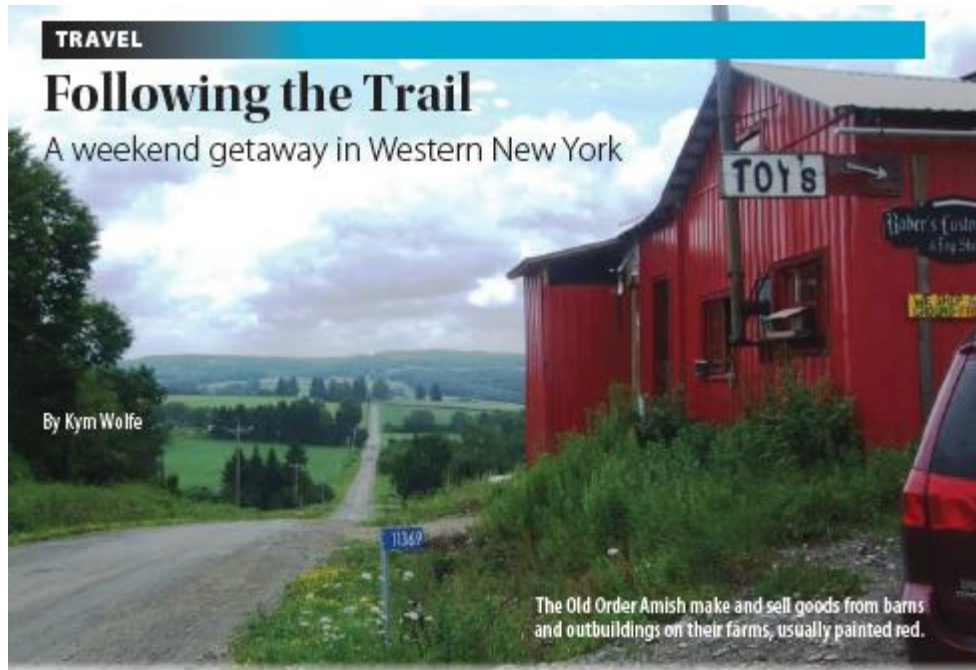


TRAVEL

Following the Trail

A weekend getaway in Western New York

By Kym Wolfe



The Old Order Amish make and sell goods from barns and outbuildings on their farms, usually painted red.

When my son signed up for a basketball camp in western New York State, I happily signed on to drive some of the team down for the weekend. Once the boys were safely delivered to their university dorm rooms, I'd have a day and a half to explore the Chautauqua/Cattaraugus region. As I researched the area, I was pleasantly surprised by the variety of activities and attractions offered. Whether you are an outdoor enthusiast, an art or music buff, looking for unique shopping and dining experiences, or seeking a peaceful escape, you'll find something here that interests you. I narrowed my weekend wish list down to three must-dos: Ellicottville, the Amish Trail and Allegany State Park.

Ellicottville, best known for its ski slopes, has rebranded itself as a year-round destination. Music, art and food festivals run almost every weekend during the summer, and there are outdoor concerts at the village gazebo every Thursday evening.

The historic village covers just one square mile, but is chock-full of interesting shops and eateries. I stumbled upon the Ellicottville Trading Company tucked away in a lower-level space on Washington Street.

The shop features glassware, paintings, giftware and natural-form furniture, all by local artisans. Another unusual shop was the Reclaimed Barnboard Furniture Company, offering rustic furniture, all handmade from wood salvaged from demolished barns in the local area. The smell of the shop triggered memories of childhood summers and time spent with cousins in the old barn on the farm where my dad was raised.

When it came time to eat, there was no lack of options from cozy, casual and comfort food to elegant fine dining. Regional specialties include beef on weck and beer-battered fish fry. Beef on weck is slow-cooked, thin-sliced, rare roast beef served on a kummelweck roll. The top half of the roll is dipped au jus. The weck — similar to a kaiser roll, but topped with kosher salt and caraway seeds — is what gives beef on weck its distinctive taste.

I had dinner at the Ellicottville Brewing Company, a micro brewery that cooks up fifteen of their own beers. I managed a sampler of six: blueberry wheat, cuvée, summer wheat, German stein, raspberry beret and Buchan nut brown. The cuvée, a seasonal, was one of my favourites. It is aged in oak cabernet sauvignon barrels, giving it a rich earthy taste.

Blueberry wheat is a lovely summer drink, light and not overly fruity, and is served here with blueberries bobbing in the glass. "The local farmers will bring us bags of freshly picked berries, and take home a jug of the beer. We freeze some and use them year round," said restaurant manager Brett Mazec, who gave me the tour, since the brewmaster, Dan Minner, was away that weekend.

I enjoyed the German stein, which is brewed just twice a year using Old World, labour-intensive techniques. "We heat granite stones in a cherry wood fire, then drop them into the brew kettle to boil the wort," Mazec explained. "We've turned it into an event — last year we had a pig roast and almost 80 people came out. Part of the deal is they have to help carry the hot rocks from the fire to the kettle."

The brewing equipment is open to the restaurant, and temperatures can get pretty high on summer brewing days. Thankfully, there is a delightful beer garden in the back, and that's where I met Lisa Coyle — newly married and having a quick drink with her bridesmaids before heading to the wedding reception at the Holiday Valley resort at the edge of the village.

The Victorian beauty and boutique feel of Ellicottville was a sharp contrast to the simplicity of the Amish Trail. The Old Order Amish who live in this region make quilts, rugs, jams, pies, furniture, toys, leather, iron and metal goods using traditional methods and no electric machinery or tools. They open their doors to tourists and shoppers every day except Sunday. There is produce in season and a cheese cooperative offering locally made cheeses.



Mike Trainor has filled his Ellicottville Trading Company shop with locally made art, giftware and furniture.

I took a tour with Paul Fisher, who grew up in the area and has been conducting Amish Trail tours for six years. Paul and his wife Linda own Fisher's Amish Country Store in Randolph, and he is a virtual library of information about the local Amish and their history, practices and lifestyle. His grandfather farmed alongside the Amish and in his retirement provided a "taxi service" for necessary appointments that were too far to reach by horse and buggy. "He used to give the kids candy," says Paul. "Those kids are all grown up now, they're my age, and they still remember him."

Driving through the rolling hills and pastoral countryside is a relaxing way to spend a few hours. Hand-painted signs point you to the different items for sale, usually in barns and outbuildings. Sometimes the production space spills into the selling space, as we found in Baber's Toy Shop, where they store patterns and jars of screws and other hardware on the shop ceiling. I wanted to take some pictures of the Amish at work and their children at play, but photos of people are strictly forbidden.

This past year the Amish agreed to put their homes on an Amish Trail map, which has made finding specific places much easier. Interestingly, although the Amish eschew technology, the website, <http://amishtrail.com>, includes GPS coordinates for each Amish Shop location.

My last planned outing was a morning walk in Allegany State Park, but pouring rain kept me indoors. I was disappointed because people I spoke with raved about



Paul Fisher, owner of Fisher's Amish Country Store, gives guided tours of the Amish Trail.

the beauty of the park, its trails, waterways and sandy beaches. The 65,000-acre park has both nature trails and paved pathways where you can hike, bike, cross-country ski, rollerblade, ride horseback, mountain-bike or snowmobile. I had driven through the park en route to Randolph, and enjoyed my glimpse of the miles of rugged forest. If I ever get back that way, I'll pack a picnic and hit the trails!

KYM WOLFE is a London-based freelance writer. She's always up for a road trip!

Western New York Travel Guide:
www.westernny.com

Ellicottville:
www.ellicottvillenyny.com

The Amish Trail:
amishtrail.com
enchantedmountains.com



Restaurant manager Brett Mazec in the Ellicottville Brewing Company's beer garden.