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Cool Down with Indoor Fun





Courtesy Photo

To get a better look at the Amish lifestyle, visit the Amish Village for the 40-minute guided tour of an 1840 farmhouse and detached summer kitchen.

Take the Family to Lancaster County, Pa.

By Traci L. Suppa

At the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country, Lancaster County is known for its landscape of farms and its Amish community. And while it is the perfect destination to introduce your kids to this religion-based culture, Lancaster is also home to a variety of family attractions and activities. In just a few days, you can learn how ice cream is made, have lunch on a historic train, explore how pulleys work, play at a water park and more.

KID-APPROVED ATTRACTIONS

The giant cow standing outside the Turkey Hill Experience in Columbia gives you the first inkling of where ice cream comes from. Once inside this 26,000-square-foot attraction, you'll follow the production process of everyone's favorite sweet treat. Through this hybrid factory tour and children's museum, you'll milk mechanical cows, stand in the blast freezer and create your own ice cream flavor. Everyone's rewarded with a free sample at the end.

Lancaster is home to the Dutch Wonderland amusement park, open from late April to mid-October. In addition to 30 rides, there is a "Duke's Lagoon" water play area open from Memorial Day through Labor Day. First opened in 1963, Dutch Wonderland offers a lot of old-fashioned fun – a car ride along the rails of the Sunoco Turnpike, a leisurely Gondola cruise, or an open-air Sky Ride. The dinosaur-themed "Exploration Island" opened last summer. Along the walking path you'll observe 15 growling dinosaurs, including the Ankylosaurus with its spiky armor, and the Psittacosaurus with its bird-like beak.

A rainy day is the perfect excuse to take the kids to the Lancaster Science Factory, where 60

hands-on exhibits are designed specifically for kids in the third through eighth grades. Several exhibits sent my daughter into experiment mode to see what would happen with the Gravity Racer, Kinetic Energy Machine and Tennis Ball Launcher. Kids can build their own creations at the Electrical Circuits and Dam the Creek exhibits, or in the Kid K'Nex Building Zone.

For more family fun, check out the North Museum of Natural History and Science with the region's largest planetarium; or the Hole in the Wall Puppet Theatre, home to one of the few resident puppet companies in the U.S.

ALL ABOARD! IN STRASBURG

If your kids love trains, then Strasburg is a must-see day trip with stops at the National Toy Train Museum and the Choo Choo Barn with its huge model train display. The Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania is home to more than 100 locomotives and significant collections of historic railroad artifacts.

At the Strasburg Rail Road, you can visit its indoor railroad museum, yard and restoration shop, as well as ride a miniature steam locomotive, or operate a hand-powered pump-car. But the main attraction here is riding America's oldest "short line" railroad in a restored passenger train. The 45-minute ride takes you nearly 10 miles from East Strasburg to Paradise, then back. You can have a casual lunch on the Lee E. Brenner Dining Car, an experience that my daughter is still talking about. In 1930, there were more than 1,732 registered dining cars on the rails. Built in 1909 and elegantly restored, this is one of the 100 dining cars left in existence today.



Courtesy Photo

At the Strasburg Rail Road you ride America's oldest "short line" railroad in a restored passenger train and even have lunch on the Lee E. Brenner Dining Car.

HISTORY AND THE AMISH

This is an area rich in history, and plenty of sites are open to the public with kid-friendly programming. The Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum is more than just a museum, it's an actual neighborhood of historic buildings. Kids can work on coloring sheets depicting the roles of the blacksmith, miller and potter, or take the "Where's Wassser" tour, and try to find the hidden pictures of Wassser the dog in different spots on the property.

To get a better look at the Amish lifestyle, visit the Amish Village. You'll take a 40-minute guided

tour of an 1840 farmhouse and detached summer kitchen. We learned that Dutch settlers arrived here in 1720. Today, they're referred to as "Old Order Amish," while non-Amish are "English." There are 29,000 people in Lancaster today representing this most conservative sect.

The tour made an impression on my daughter, especially when she learned that the homes have no heat, electricity or phones. She was also interested in the description of children's clothing, including the pinafore and prayer cap that girls wear once they turn 16. After the tour, you're free to explore the blacksmith shop, one-room schoolhouse and barn where the draft horses live.

Similarly, at the Plain & Fancy Farm you can visit the Heritage Site nine-room Amish house and schoolroom, then take the Farmlands Tour and a buggy ride. After you visit one of these attractions, you should have dinner – "Pennsylvania Dutch style" – at a restaurant like Good N' Plenty. You'll sit at a table for 10, and be served heaping platters of fried chicken, roast beef, ham, noodles, mashed potatoes, and the local specialty, Shoo-Fly Pie, all family-style.

SMALL CITY CHARM

A good home base to explore this region is the small, historic city of Lancaster. We enjoyed the convenient location of the Lancaster Marriott at Penn Square, which put us in the middle of the walkable shopping and dining district. Across the street, the Central Market is located in a beautiful red brick building with more than 60 food and craft stalls. Established in 1730, it's America's longest-running public farmers' market. My daughter treasured her score from the candy counter – a 10-cent candy lipstick – while I filled my bag with Amish cinnamon bread.

For older kids who love to shop, there's an array of independent stores downtown, particularly the 300 block of North Queen Street, with retro finds, cool gifts and trendy fashions. Ten minutes away, there are more than 80 stores in the Rockvale Outlets, and more than 100 retailers in the Tanger Outlets.

Traci L. Suppa is a frequent contributor to Westchester Family, and blogs about her family's travels at GoBIGorGoHomeBlog.com.

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Visitor's information

Amish Village

199 Hartman Bridge Road
Ronks, Pa.
717-687-8511
theamishvillage.net

Dutch Wonderland

2249 Lincoln Highway East
Lancaster, Pa.
866-386-2839
dutchwonderland.com

Lancaster Central Market

23 North Market St.
Lancaster, Pa.
717-735-6890
centralmarketlanaster.com

Lancaster Science Factory

454 New Holland Ave., # 300
Lancaster, Pa.
717-509-6363
lancastersciencefactory.org

Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum

2451 Kissel Hill Road
Lancaster, Pa.
717-569-0401
landisvalleymuseum.org

Strasburg Rail Road

301 Gap Road
Ronks, Pa.
866-725-9666
strasburgrailroad.com

Turkey Hill Experience

301 Linden St.
Columbia, Pa.
844-847-4884
turkeyhilllexperience.com