

CONNECTICUT BONUS: GREENWICH, STAMFORD, RIDGEFIELD AND NEW CANAAN

WESTCHESTER family™

July 2009

FREE

POOL
Safety Tips

Fabulous
Family
Daycations

Local Calendar
of Events



89 **Fantastic Places**
TO EAT, SHOP AND GO

contents

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FEATURES

21 Family Favorites

We asked our readers to tell us about their Family Favorites and we were delighted to hear what they had to say. From ice cream shops to family fitness centers, the word is out on what's hot in our area. Looking for a pair of shoes to fit your hard-to-fit child or a cute clothing boutique? You'll find the answer to these questions and a lot more right here.

32 Daycations: Go Big or Go Home!

Staying close to home this summer? Why not consider a daycation to one of the region's superlative sites. We recently sent a savvy parent and her family to find fun sites claiming to be the "biggest," "largest" or "tallest" in the state, country and even the world! Find out where your family can go to have a super-duper time.

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NEXT MONTH

How Westchester's Babies are Born:

Read this in-depth look at the county's birthing trends and what they mean for the health and welfare of both mother and child.

Campout In Your Backyard – Great gear to get your family outdoors for fun without going too far from home.

Local Calendar – Looking for something to do? See our daily calendar of events for fun family activities!

Look for it starting July 27!



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COVER PHOTO: BIGSTOCKPHOTO

Go Big -or- Go Home!

Daycations to
the Region's
Superlative Sites

By Traci L. Suppa

"Staycations" don't work for my family. I would much rather get in the car for a quick trip than try to fabricate the experience in my backyard. We recently set out on a series of regional "daycations," targeting sites claiming to be the "biggest," "largest" or "tallest" in the state, country and even the world. Our search was fruitful, fun and full of great photo opportunities.

Upper Hudson Valley

A sunny day was forecast, so we headed up to Greene County to hike to **Kaaterskill Falls**, the tallest two-tiered waterfall in New York State. The trailhead is located on Rte. 23A, west of Palenville. You have to park a short distance west and walk alongside the busy road, but you're rewarded with great views from the start, which kept our kids' excitement levels high the entire time.

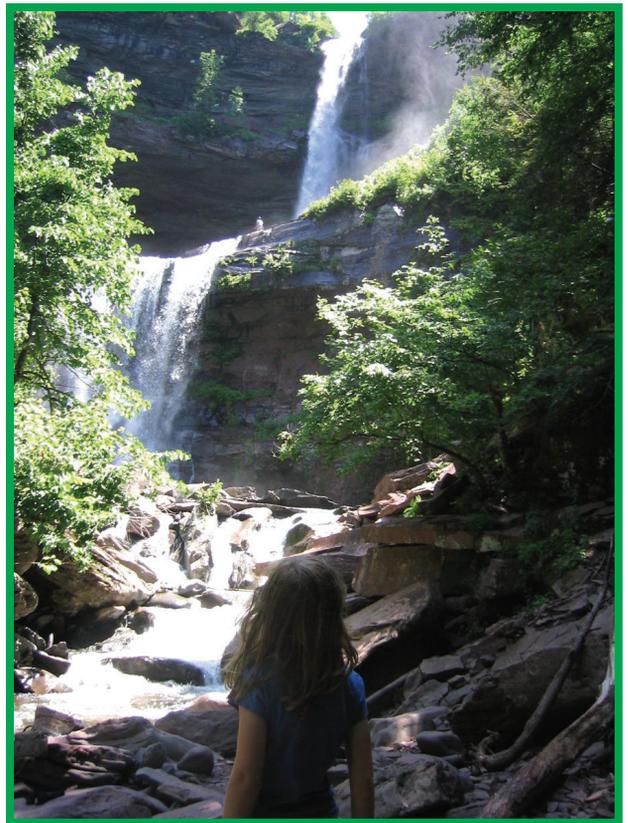
This is an easy hike for people who actually hike once in a while. That's not me, so I took my time in the slow lane. The distance is about a half-mile, but it's a steep climb.

We saw several other preschoolers clambering up the trail, but toddlers were carried in backpacks. The trail runs alongside Kaaterskill Creek, so you can stop and enjoy the sight and sound of rushing water at any point.

You can't actually access the top of the falls, but in under 30 minutes you do reach an end point where you can wade into chilly, shallow pools. The spellbinding view upward begins at the 85-foot lower tier, topped by the 175-foot upper tier.

For natural beauty, this scene is hard to beat. It's a sun-dappled panorama of dense green foliage, punctuated by foaming white water falling over craggy grey stones. Take note: during hot summers or drought, the falls can slow significantly. But this day was a memorable treat for all of us.

Less than 45 minutes from the falls is the **World's Largest Kaleidoscope** in Mt. Tremper. It's inside a tall black silo located within the Emerson Country Store. The store itself is a minefield of breakable but beautiful kaleido-



Kaaterskill Falls is the tallest two-tiered waterfall in New York State.

scopes available for sale. We were quickly escorted to the interior of the silo, and offered the choice of lying on the floor to see the show, or leaning on tilted back boards.

The 10-minute show – colorful, musical and somewhat psychedelic – is reflected off three 37-foot tall mirrors. The high-quality sound system was too much for our 22-month-old daughter, Emilia, who made it halfway through before demanding an escape. A selection of three shows rotates, depending on the season.



Enter the tall black silo to see the world's largest kaleidoscope.

Further South

I knew that the largest Buddha statue in the Western hemisphere was located in Putnam County, but I had no idea just how big it was until we took the short drive up to the tranquil **Chuang Yen Monastery** in Carmel.

The monastery is run by monks belonging to the Buddhist Association of the United States (BAUS), and the grounds are open to the public April through December. The collection of Asian-style buildings seems out of place in this New York suburb, but lovely nonetheless. We followed the stone path lined with statues of Buddha's disciples up to the Great Buddha Hall.

At 37-feet tall, the "Great Buddha Vairocana" sits serenely in lotus pose, commanding the quiet respect of the 10,000 small Buddha statues encircling him. The light, spacious hall in which he sits was built around him, and was all but empty when I visited with my son, Leo. At 8 years old, I knew he would behave properly; I chose not to bring Emilia on this outing.



Chuang Yen Monastery in Carmel is home to the largest Buddha statue in the Western Hemisphere.

Looking all around at the murals, altars, and up at Buddha himself, Leo stared in calm reverence. Later he told me he felt all his worries float away in that space. I'm not sure how much an 8-year-old has to worry about, but I'm glad Buddha was able to help.

We availed ourselves of the free literature in the back of the room, leaving a small donation. Leo was thrilled with his colorful Chinese book-

marks, and even took a small book about Buddhism so he could learn more about it.

After your visit here, you can head west into the riverside village of Cold Spring for lunch or dinner. You may be tempted by the antiques and gift shops but chances are your kids won't. Take them to Whistling Willies' American Grill for American comfort food, the Silver Spoon Restaurant for their popular "Big Daddy Burger," or to the Cold Spring Depot if you'd like to eat outdoors and watch trains speed by.

Westchester

Another overlooked local treasure, the **New Croton Dam** in Cortlandt, was purported to be the second-largest hand-hewn stone structure in the world after the Giza Pyramid when it was completed in 1906. Built over a span of 13 years by mainly Italian immigrants, it was heralded as the most important structure of its kind because it supplied drinking water to New York City.

Close to 290 feet high and 220 feet wide along the top, it's a marvel, especially when you consider the physical labor demanded by moving such large stones into place. The artistry wasn't lost on me, either. There are keystone arches lining the top, purely decorative, and moldings to add visual interest. My kids didn't much care about the structure; they marveled at the water rushing over the beehive-shaped spillway. We first walked along the top of the dam, peering over and through the railing at the reservoir on one side, and the spillway on the other.



See water rush over the beehive-shaped spillway at New Croton Dam in Cortlandt.

If heights bother you, limit your visit to Croton Gorge Park, which sits at the base of the dam. From this vantage point, you can enjoy the breezy mist from the spillway's waterfall. We discovered a rainbow within it. The breeze makes conditions ideal for kite-flying, although we spotted a few which had met their demise, tangled in the trees.

Picnic tables and shady spots are plentiful, and there's a fun little playground with four slides and a mini-climbing



See huge mammals at Mystic Aquarium water shows.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MYSTIC AQUARIUM & INSTITUTE FOR EXPLORATION

wall. For hikers, there's direct trail access to New York State's Old Croton Aqueduct Trail.

We lunched at the Croton Colonial Restaurant, a local diner serving our favorite comfort foods; silver dollar pancakes, western omelets and tuna melts.

You can make a longer day of it by heading the three miles southwest down Rte. 129 into Croton, and tour Van Cortlandt Manor, a Revolutionary-period Historic Hudson Valley site. Tours of the manor house and gardens, led by a costumed guide, include hands-on activities, like spinning wool and weaving. Special events at the site, including River Day in August and the Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze in October, are worth planning a day around.

Connecticut

Mammals don't get much bigger than whales. And although beluga whales are on the diminutive end of the whale scale, the **Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration** in Mystic, Conn. contains the largest outdoor beluga whale exhibit in the northeast, among the top eight in the country. With 750,000 gallons of water, large enough to accommodate 13 belugas, Mystic is the only aquarium in New England lucky enough to have these adorable melon-

headed creatures.

Five times a day you can watch the trainers feed the belugas, and hear what they – both the trainers and the whales – have to say. Belugas, also known as white whales, “speak” in staccato high-pitched squeaks and whistles. Everyone, young and old, watched and smiled as each whale was called by name, popped up to accept their treats, and playfully bantered with their feeders.

The Aquarium also provides habitat to North America's largest collection of Northern fur seals, as well as being one of only four facilities to house Steller sea lions. But it was the colorful, oversized indoor tanks, which captivated our children for the majority of our three-hour visit. Emilia called out “fish!” at every creature she saw, from coral to sharks. She was captivated, being able to peer into the eye-level tanks.

Leo, a more jaded aquarium patron, preferred the Institute for Exploration, an on-campus oceanic research facility directed by Robert Ballard, famous for discovering the remains of the *Titanic* in 1985. Several multimedia exhibits showcasing the findings of his deep-sea expeditions captured Leo's interest, in particular the “Alvin” deep submergence vessel into which he was allowed to climb.

We chose to stay overnight on this trip and enjoyed a cozy room at the Hilton hotel directly across the street from the Aquarium. The next day, we headed out early to get a table at Kitchen Little for gingerbread waffles and lobster benedict. We spent a few hours at Mystic Seaport, which includes a small children's museum and planetarium, and had lunch at Mystic Pizza, the restaurant made famous by the 1988 movie of the same name starring Julia Roberts.

On the drive home, we stopped for a quick, no-frills but delectable dinner at the Norwalk location of **Stew Leonard's, the World's Largest Dairy Store**. During the warmer months (May through mid-September), you can eat outside at their “hoedown.” Purchase burgers, grilled chicken, hot dogs, steak sandwiches, and even lobster, and saddle up to a picnic table. Don't forget the wipes. ♦

Traci L. Suppa can't wait for her next road trip, riding shotgun in the family minivan, playing “I Spy” with her two kids. www.wordscapesny.com.

RESOURCES

Chuang Yen Monastery

2020 Rte. 301, Carmel, N.Y.
845-225-1819
www.baus.org/baus/about_us/intro_cym.html

Cold Spring Depot Restaurant

1 Depot Square, Cold Spring, N.Y.
845-265-5000
www.coldspringdepot.com

Croton Colonial Restaurant

221 S. Riverside Ave.,
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.
271-4991

Croton Dam / Croton Gorge Park

Rte. 129, Cortlandt, N.Y.
827-9568
www.westchestergov.com/parks/parkslocations02/CrotonGorgePark.htm

Kaaterskill Falls

Rte. 23A between Palenville and Haines Falls
NYS Department of Environmental
Conservation
518-589-5058; www.dec.ny.gov/

Kitchen Little

81½ Greenmanville Ave.
Mystic, Conn.
860-536-2122

Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration

55 Coogan Blvd., Mystic, Conn.
860-572-5955
www.mysticaquarium.org

Mystic Hilton Hotel

20 Coogan Blvd., Mystic, Conn.
860-572-0731
www.hiltonmystic.com

Mystic Pizza

56 W. Main St., Mystic, Conn.
860-536-3700
www.mysticpizza.com

Mystic Seaport

75 Greenmanville Ave., Mystic, Conn.
888-973-2767
www.mysticseaport.org

Silver Spoon Restaurant

124 Main St., Cold Spring, N.Y.
845-265-2525

Stew Leonard's

100 Westport Ave.
Norwalk, Conn.
203-847-7214
www.stewleonards.com

Van Cortlandt Manor

525 S. Riverside Ave.
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.
271-8981
www.hudsonvalley.org

Whistling Willies' American Grill

184 Main St., Cold Spring, N.Y.
845-265-2012

The World's Largest Kaleidoscope

5340 Rte. 28, Mt. Tremper, N.Y.
845-688-5800
www.kaleidostore.com