

Amish Country: Lancaster, Pennsylvania

by Michelle Clark, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Our family recently completed a road trip through the northeastern U.S. While making our trip plans, the Amish area of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania was a high priority destination. However, besides locating Lancaster on a map, our knowledge of this area was very limited! Friends and family had given varied advice - some said Intercourse was the home of the Amish country, others said to visit Bird-in-Hand. So with the spirit of exploration (and going against my usual obsessive planning nature) we arrived in Lancaster County with no set touring plans.

Our first order of business was to find a place to stay! This was not a problem as the lodging options are plentiful in Lancaster County, ranging from chain motels/hotels to bed and breakfasts to working farms. We opted to stay at a new Hawthorn Suites directly on Lincoln Highway. There are two main roadways that will take you to most of the Amish related attractions and shopping in Lancaster County, U.S. 30 (Lincoln Highway), and Highway 340, also known as Old Philadelphia Pike.

U.S. 30 travels just north of downtown Lancaster. Continue eastward on Lincoln Highway to visit the towns of Ronks, Soudersburg and Paradise. There is plenty of shopping, dining, and lodging to explore along this main route.

We found a gem of a restaurant, Miller's Smorgasbord, on Lincoln Highway between Ronks and Soudersburg. I can't think of a better word to describe this marvelous buffet than "smorgasbord," as there was such a large variety of dishes to choose from. We also got our first taste of the wonderfully rich shoo-fly pie, one of the more famous dishes of the area. Some locals claim that this sweet dessert got its name because the large amount of molasses and sugar used in this pie would attract flies; therefore once the pie was set out to cool one would have to "shoo" the flies away. If you're hankering for a sample of shoo-fly pie, stop by Dutch Haven on Lincoln Highway in Ronks, where they give out free samples. You can't miss it, just look for the large windmill on top of the building. They sell a wide variety of souvenirs as well.

My quest was to find an authentic Amish-crafted item to take home as a souvenir. I was surprised to find that many of the stores in this area sold more typical mass-produced items than authentic hand-made treasures.

So my advice is to check labels. If an item is Amish made, it will be noted. The Quilt Shop at Miller's is located next door to Miller's Smorgasbord and was one of my favorite stores for browsing. The quilts are handmade and are truly exquisite! Gloves are required in this store if you want to touch any merchandise. Sadly I was only able to browse as some of the quilts sold for well over \$1,000!

To visit some of the other communities in Lancaster County such as Bird-in-Hand and Intercourse, take Highway 340 East, also known as Old Philadelphia Pike. Bird-in-Hand is a quaint town with an interesting name and even more interesting origin. One legend behind the name goes back to the time when Old Philadelphia Pike was being surveyed. Two surveyors debated on whether to stay the night at an inn located in present Bird-in-Hand or to stay in Lancaster. One of the surveyors replied that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and that inn was then known as "Bird-in-Hand Inn." The inn still operates today as Bird-in-Hand Village Inn and Suites on Old Philadelphia Pike.

Intercourse is located just 3 miles east of Bird-in-Hand on Highway 340, at the intersection of Highway 772. We found a variety of shops located directly on Old Philadelphia Pike offering such items as Amish furniture, country decor, baskets, and typical souvenirs. One of our favorite stores was Hoffman House, which had some of the more unique items for sale, including handmade jewelry boxes, turkey and deer calls, walking sticks, and baskets. Almost all of the items in this store were handmade, and many were Amish-made. I purchased a pie safe (a square basket used to transport pies) that came from an Amish family, and was delighted to learn that the 7-year old son of the family had made it himself! The store operator was very friendly and gave us tips and directions on some of the lesser known attractions to visit in the area. Two doors down from Hoffman House is Dutch Baskets, which also sells Amish-made baskets but with a twist; you can create your own gift baskets filled with a variety of items to take home.

To see authentic Amish farms up close, you should turn off these main roadways and explore some of the side roads; just be sure and take a map along with you! The Lancaster County official map has excellent detail - you can pick one up at most businesses in the area. The Amish are busy throughout the day on their farms, all of which are meticulously kept and vividly green. I took several photographs of the beautiful farmlands but was respectful to the Amish' wishes that they not be photographed themselves. Some of the Amish households have items for sale; those that do will have a sign at their mailbox.

One of the more unique stops we found off the beaten path, and definitely the tastiest, was Lapp Valley Farm. Located on Mentzer Road

in New Holland, Lapp Valley Farm makes milk, ice cream, and other dairy products on site from milk produced by their Jersey cows. Jersey cows produce richer milk with a higher percentage of butterfat and more calcium than other breeds of milk cows. The result is a deliciously rich ice cream made in their own creamery. I also purchased a pound of butter made on site as well. I am hoping that the Lapps figured out a way to leave out the calories! We noticed several local residents purchasing milk at the Lapp's drive-through window. The creamery is located on a working farm, which is an attraction itself. Children enjoy looking at the farm animals located in the barn next door to the creamery.

The drive throughout the Amish farmlands is a pleasant one, best experienced at a slower pace. Roll down those windows for a breath of country air! Roadside stands and gift shops that cater to tourists can be found, as well as businesses where the Amish shop for food and dry goods. We noticed area churches and one-room Amish schoolhouses dotted along the countryside. And be prepared to share the road with horse-drawn buggies, the Amish method of transportation.

As you can guess, we only scratched the surface of all that Lancaster County has to offer on our first visit. A return trip is definitely in the works for the future!

If you're considering a trip to the Lancaster County area, here are some web sites you might want to check out:

[The Pennsylvania Dutch Country Welcome Center](#)

[Lancaster County, PA](#)

[Lancaster Country Information Center](#)

[Amish Country News](#)

About The Author: Michelle Clark is a self-professed thrill ride junkie and the mother of three teens who share in her obsession. Her goal is to experience as many theme parks as possible and stay in every Disney resort before she dies!

Article last updated: 7/31/2008

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