

Hershey, Pennsylvania: The Great American Chocolate Town

by Melissa Calamera, PassPorter Guest Contributor

"Hershey chocolate, Hershey chocolate, it's a Hershey chocolate world. Wherever you go, no matter how far, you'll always see a Hershey bar. Hershey chocolate, real milk chocolate.

Hershey, the great American chocolate bar." If I were to make a soundtrack of my travel experiences, this song would be the first track. Growing up in New York City as the child of travel lovers, my family and I were always searching for the perfect family-friendly theme park. We did not need to search long or far, though. On our very first family vacation, when I was only three years old and my brother was a year and a half, we drove three hours south and enjoyed all of the fun activities and unique adventures available in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Since our first trip in 1990, my family and I have visited the "**Sweetest Place on Earth**" four times. Once as a toddler, once was with extended family, one was as a grade-school aged child, and once as a teenager. I had an amazing time on all four of my vacations, proving that Hershey truly is a place for all age groups and party sizes. I can honestly say that Hershey feels like a second home, and with an endless array of things to do, from theme parks to petting zoos to chocolate spas, I could continue visiting the "The Great American Chocolate Town" for many, many years to come.

The first thing to do when it comes to planning a Hershey, Pennsylvania vacation is to pick a place to stay. The obvious choice here would be the **Hotel Hershey**. Looking more like a mansion than a hotel, the Hotel Hershey sits atop majestic mountains and amongst regal fountains. Class and sophistication are the name of the game here, with luxury and top-notch customer service being the top priorities. Lavish would be the best way to describe the hotel's decor, with golden Italian sculptures and refined paintings lining the walls. The Hotel Hershey is actually the only hotel in the central Pennsylvania area to win the AAA Four Diamond award. Don't expect any stuffiness, though. You'll find more kids whose hands are covered in chocolate here than in any other hotel in the world! Rates vary by season, with Value Season rates (running from January 1 -- April 14) starting at \$259 a night and Summer Season rates (running from May 26 -- September 3) starting at \$379 a night. More information can be found at <http://www.hersheyhotel.com>.

If you're looking for something slightly less expensive, the **Hershey**

Lodge is a great alternative. Located only three blocks away from Hershey Park, the Hershey Lodge is a chocolate lover's paradise. With chocolate themed decor, artwork, and color palettes, the feeling of the lodge is definitely snug and sweet. Comfort reigns supreme here, with the entire lodge having a very down-to-earth and cozy feel. Warm lighting, an inviting lobby, and a cheerful staff add to the ambiance of the lodge, truly making you feel as if you are right at home. There are four restaurants located in the lodge, as well as two lounges, an indoor and outdoor pool, tennis courts, and an on-site miniature golf course. The Hershey Lodge is also Pennsylvania's largest convention resort, and has been repeatedly certified by J.D. Power and Associates as, "An Outstanding Guest Experience." Rates at the Hershey Lodge also vary by season, with Value Season rates (running from January 1 -- April 14) starting at \$169 a night and Summer Season Rates (running from May 26 -- September 3) starting at \$259 a night. More information can be found at <http://www.hersheylobby.com>.

Once your accommodations are set, it's time to hit the parks! The first part of any Hershey vacation should surely be a visit to **Hershey Chocolate World**, a fun attraction located right next door to Hershey Park. An array of Hershey characters will greet you as you at the entrance, as well as the sweet, lingering smell of fresh chocolate. There are several attractions located at Hershey Chocolate World, with the most popular of them being the Hershey Chocolate Tour. It is a free ride during which your group sits in a large candy kiss-shaped car and is taken around a replica of the Hershey Chocolate Factory. Riders get to see how Hershey chocolate is made, from the sweetening process to the packaging and marketing routine. Don't miss the free samples at the end!

Right next to the Hershey Chocolate Tour is the **Hershey's Really Big 3D Show**, an interactive 3D experience in which guests learn the history of The Hershey Company before watching a Broadway-style production starring Hershey bars, candy kisses, and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Unexpected surprises and hilarity ensue in this uproarious and witty musical review. Tickets are \$5.95 for adults (ages 13 -- 61), \$4.95 for children (ages 3 -- 12), and \$5.45 for seniors (ages 62+). Also located in Hershey Chocolate World is the Factory Tour Experience, a chance for children to make their own Hershey chocolate, and Trolley Works, a breathtaking train ride through the gorgeous mountains of Hershey, Pennsylvania.

After learning a little bit more about Hershey chocolate it is time to experience the main event, Hershey Park! Known as the "cleanest and greenest" park in the world there is something for everyone here, ensuring that the entire family will have a truly exceptional time. Thrill

seekers will love the **Storm Runner**, a premier roller coaster in which guests shoot out of the loading platform at 70-miles per hour in only 2 seconds flat. It is a rush like no other! Water lovers will enjoy the unique Roller Soaker, a ride that is part roller coaster and part water ride. Riders dip, turn, and race along a suspended track while guests on the ground shoot giant water guns at them. But don't worry, riders can get their revenge by dumping up to four gallons of water on unsuspecting guests below!

Children are not forgotten at Hershey Park, with a variety of classic and unique attractions geared towards the younger set. **Kids will enjoy the carousel, railroad train ride, and bumper cars.** Another great favorite for children is the Turnpike, a driving attraction for kids who still have quite a while to wait before getting their actual drivers license! There are two tracks here, the Sunoco Classic Cars and the Sunoco Speedway, allowing mini-drivers to maneuver both a classic 1900's period buggy and a race car. If you're looking for attractions the entire family could enjoy, Hershey Park features the Kissing Tower, offering panoramic views of the entire Hershey area, and Hershey Park's very own monorail.

Hershey, Pennsylvania is truly a unique town. With candy kiss-shaped light posts and the sweet smell of chocolate always lingering in the air, you will never forget where you are. Besides Hershey Chocolate World and Hershey Park, Hershey is also the home of **Zoo America** (a large wildlife park), the Hershey Bears hockey team, the Giant Center sports and concerts arena, four PGA certified golf courses, and the Hershey Spa (the perfect place to get a chocolate body wrap or take a white chocolate bath). More information on the various attractions can be found at <http://www.hersheypa.com>. The possibilities here are truly endless, ensuring that your trip will leave you truly believing that Hershey, Pennsylvania really is the "Sweetest Place on Earth!"

About The Author: Melissa Calamera is a freshman in college whose true passion is travel. She is currently planning her fourth trip to Walt Disney World for this coming summer, and cannot wait to again experience all "The World" has to offer.

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