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THINGS TO DO

New Hope and Lambertville offer rustic charm along the Delaware River

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For years, artists and writers have drawn inspiration from the picturesque Delaware River and the charming towns that hug its shores in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Two of the most scenic and popular towns, New Hope and Lambertville, are just a 90-minute ride away from Manhattan. And once you get there, you'll see why it's worth the battle to get through the Holland Tunnel.

Filled with antiques galleries and funky craft shops, these two towns offer a welcome respite from the daily grind of city life.

Lambertville, located in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, was founded in 1705 and still retains its historic roots with Victorian homes and Federal-style town houses. Visitors come for the antiques, restaurants and cafes as well as the river views.

It's a pleasant stroll across the bridge to New Hope, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The town has a lively scene with music clubs, outdoor bars and restaurants and a landscape filled with stone houses.

It's such a desirable area to live in that some residents even make the 70-mile commute to New York City.

Here are some highlights for a trip to New Hope and Lambertville:

THE MAIN STRIPS

Take a leisurely walk through Lambertville, where the main streets are dotted with antiques shops. The downtown area is compact, with Bridge Street the main thoroughfare. The People's Store Antiques Center (28 N. Union St., 609-397-9808, peoplesstore.net) also features everything from antique furniture, silver, porcelain and paintings to jewelry, vintage clothing and books.

New Hope's Main Street is lined with vibrant shops and restaurants. Pace yourself because there is a lot to see. Gem Zone (127 S. Main St., 215-862-7000, gemzone.us) sells unique bracelets, necklaces and earrings in topaz, turquoise, opal, and other colorful stones. Heart of the Home (28 S. Main St., 215-862-1880, heartofthehome.com) has a little bit of everything: pottery, home décor, handmade candles and other gifts. Farley's Book Shop (44 S. Main St., 215-862-2452, farleysbookshop.com) is a must-see for book lovers of all ages. The comfortable, friendly shop is stacked with books and has knowledgeable staffers. Wandering through the rooms is an adventure.

GO CANALSIDE

Explore the canals that line both sides of the Delaware River. During the industrial revolution, the canals were vital transportation routes. Barges of goods were pulled by mules or steam tugboats. Now there are recreational trails popular for walking, jogging and biking. Go a little north on the river and you will see people tubing — happily floating on inflatable rings — downstream. (More at delawarerivertowns.com.)

ANTIQUÉ GOODS IN LAMBERTVILLE

Hunt for treasure at the Golden Nugget Antique Market (open Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays; 1850 River Rd., 609-397-0811, gnflea.com) located two miles south on Route 29. This 50-year-old institution features indoor and outdoor dealers with a wide array of merchandise — vintage toys and lots of kitsch along with furniture, jewelry and anything that can fit on top of a wooden table.

OLD-TIMEY TRAIN IN NEW HOPE

The New Hope & Ivyland Railroad features antique coach cars behind a 1925 Baldwin Steam Locomotive. Riders can take a 45-minute trip through bucolic Bucks County. There are several special excursions including a Murder Mystery Dinner, Sunday Brunch and Family Dinner (prices vary; 32 W. Bridge St., New Hope, 215-862-2332, newhoperailroad.com).

GOOD TO KNOW

Getting there: It's about 70 miles from midtown Manhattan to New Hope and Lambertville. Trans-Bridge Lines (transbridgelines.com) runs buses daily from Port Authority. If you don't have a car, it might be worth renting one so you can travel to sites outside the downtown areas. But there is enough within walking distance to keep you busy.

Where to stay in Lambertville: The Lambertville Station Restaurant and Inn (11 Bridge St., 609-397-4400, lambertvillestation.com) sits on the banks of the Delaware River and is the largest hotel in the area. It's a popular site for weddings and events as well as weekend travelers, so you usually need to book in advance. Another option is the Lambertville House (32 Bridge St., 609-397-0200, lambertvillehouse.com). Built in 1812 and listed on the National Register of Historic Place, it offers the amenities of a boutique hotel. Many of the rooms have gas fireplaces.

Where to stay in New Hope: Lodging in New Hope is found primarily in small inns and bed and breakfasts. The Mansion Inn (9 S. Main St., 267-740-7153, themansioninnnewhope.com) is an 1865 manor home boasting Baroque Victorian architecture. Its Royal T's restaurant has a full lunch and dinner menu as well as brunch offerings like blueberry lemon pistachio pancakes. For a B&B, there's 1870 Wedgewood Inn (111 W. Bridge St., 215-862-2570, wedgwoodinn.com), a bright blue Victorian a few blocks from Main Street. Some of the rooms have Jacuzzis and fireplaces. Along with homemade breakfast, guests have access to a pantry, fruits and homemade treats around the clock.