

# Itinerary

## Color Your Passion

*Autumn in Wilmington turns any hobby into a vibrant experience*

By: Pam George

With its rolling hills, plentiful parkland and historic sites, the Greater Wilmington area appeals to leaf-peepers who want to combine the beauty of autumn with a hobby or interest. For proof, take a peek at these suggestions, which you can mix and match to suit your schedule.

### For the History Buff

The First State's rich past is on prominent display in **Historic New Castle**. The Dutch and the British fought over the port town, and the older architecture bears the early settlers' imprints. Consider visiting the **Dutch House Museum**, the **Reed House & Gardens** and the **Amstel House**.

Take a walk around the town to view the scarlet and gold trees that line cobblestone streets. The **Courthouse Museum** is part of the **First State National Historical Park**, a collection of seven sites throughout Delaware. Find out more at the visitor center inside **The Arsenal** at 30 Market Street in New Castle. **Battery Park**, which overlooks the river, will provide some Instagram-worthy photo opps.

From New Castle, it's a short ride to Delaware City and Pea Patch Island, the home of **Fort Delaware**, a former prison for Confederate soldiers. The imposing granite structure contains artifacts from its time as prison, and the living history brings a poignancy to the plight of the soldiers on both sides. Pea Patch Island has walking trails and an observation platform for a panoramic glimpse of the autumn trees with the Delaware River as a backdrop. Fort Delaware operates under limited hours during September and October. Please check their schedule before visiting.



Fort Delaware

### Historic New Castle

**Tip:** Walk along The Strand and The Green to get a real sense of the historic district. Get your photo taken with the statue of William Penn, who landed here in 1682.

**Foodie Find:** Order lunch, dinner or just a pint at **Jessop's Tavern**, located in a circa-1674 building. Locals are also fond of the recently opened **Café New Castle**, where they can catch up with neighbors over coffee in the morning and a glass of wine in the afternoon.

### Courthouse Museum



### Delaware City

**Tip:** If you like goose bumps, time your visit to coincide with the **Pea Patch Paranormal Adventure**, a three-hour evening investigation on weekends in October led by the Diamond State Ghost Investigators and park staff. Participants must be 13 or older.

**Foodie Find:** This part of Delaware is known for its crabs, and the crab dishes at **Crabby Dick's** in Delaware City run the gamut, from Maryland crab soup to crab cake sandwiches to crab-stuffed rockfish.

Back north, just outside the city of Wilmington, is **Hagley Museum & Library**, the original headquarters of the DuPont Co. and the location of the family's first home. The property has exhibits, a living history program and tours, which detail what life was like living and working on a gunpowder-manufacturing site in the 19th century. It also has bragging rights to one of the most stunning landscapes in the area. Take time to see the family's first home, which was built in 1802, and the Osage orange tree that was already 100 years old at the start of the 19th century.

Hagley is situated alongside the Brandywine and populated by mature trees with branches that spread out over the water. The kaleidoscope of burnt orange, green, red and golds makes it a preferred setting for professional and amateur photographers.



Hagley Museum

### For the Train Devotees

The **Wilmington & Western Railroad** spans many interests, whether you admire old train cars and engines, nature or history. The railroad was chartered in 1867 to move goods between the mills along Red Clay Creek and the Port of Wilmington. Today, Historic Red Clay Valley Inc. owns 10.2 miles of the old line. There are a variety of excursions, including the Autumn Leaf Special. The one-and-a-half-hour trip stops in Mt. Cuba's secluded picnic grove. (Pack your lunch or purchase it ahead of time). A two-and-a-half-hour trip goes into Hockessin, where you can stretch your legs. Both trips take passengers through brilliantly colored woods that flank the creek.



Wilmington & Western Railroad

### Hagley Museum

**Tip:** Upscale boutiques are part of the Greenville life. There are three shopping centers within close proximity of each other.

**Foodie Find:** Dela-brity chef Dan Butler runs the charming **Belin House Organic Café**, which is located on Workers Hill. The menu includes crab cakes, eggplant parmesan and personal pizzas. Speaking of pizza, **Pizza by Elizabeths**—where pizzas are named for famous Elizabeths—is in nearby Greenville. For casual fare and burgers that take two hands to hold, there's **2 Fat Guys American Grill**, located in the same shopping center as Pizza by Elizabeths. For quick to-go, pop into **Janssen's Market**, home to **J's Café**. This is no ordinary gourmet grocery store. It's an institution. Back in the day, butlers and maids came in limousines to pick up goods for their du Pont bosses.

### Wilmington & Western Railroad

**Tip:** Groups can rent the parlor car or the station for events or private trips. You can also book a hayride on a freight flatcar that's been converted to a novel carrier.

**Foodie Find:** If you're packing a lunch, pick up sandwiches at **Maiale Deli & Salumeria** on Lancaster Avenue in Wilmington, which is celebrated for its cured meats and sausages. Nothing is ordinary. The BLT, for instance, has house-made bacon lettuce, tomato chutney and basil mayo—all on grilled Texas toast.



## For the Art Aficionado

Surrounded by some of the city's most beautiful homes, **Rockford Park** features plenty of open spaces, where people fly kites, play Frisbee or relax with their pets. But there are also wooded spaces that will make you feel like you're far from a city. Trails wind throughout the park, which has hills for walkers who want a challenge, and they're particularly stunning in fall. Save your breath for a climb up the 100-year-old **Rockford Tower**, an iconic landmark that's been a muse for generations of artists and photographers.

The park is within walking distance of the **Delaware Art Museum**. Originally founded to pay tribute to local illustrator Howard Pyle, the museum has a valuable collection of artists from what's known as "the Brandywine School." Thanks to the family of Samuel Bancroft, a Wilmington mill owner, the museum also has one of the largest collections of Pre-Raphaelite art. But there is also a good representation of American artists from the 19th and 20th centuries. Stand in the sculpture garden and you can enjoy the colorful trees that embrace the property.



Heading toward Pennsylvania on Route 52 (which is the Brandywine Scenic Byway), you'll find **Winterthur Museum Garden and Library**. The former home of Henry Francis du Pont, the mansion-turned-museum is packed with early American decorative arts, from paintings to furniture to china to architecture, all made before 1860. It was not unusual for du Pont to rebuild whole facades of buildings in a space.

You could spend hours wandering the property, whose 1,000 acres includes hills, meadows, streams and woodlands. Du Pont was a fan of natural settings, but he had a keen eye for color and composition, and the placement of the trees and the shrubbery was carefully considered.

## Delaware Art Museum

**Tip:** Take a walk around **Trolley Square**, one of the city's hippest neighborhoods. Stop in **Brew Ha Ha!** for coffee roasted on site. Varieties are often named for area landmarks and bags have custom designs.

**Foodie Find:** For coffee or lunch, drive—or walk—to tiny **De La Coeur** for a crepe (savory or sweet), tarte, salad or sandwich. (Don't forget the café au lait.) Or, scoot into the heart of **Trolley Square** for oysters on the half shell or a lobster roll at the **Trolley Square Oyster House**. Fancy some pho or a banh mi? **Southeast Asian Kitchen**, a few blocks up from the oyster house on Delaware Avenue, is a hidden gem. Likewise, **Scalessa's "My Way" Old School Italian Kitchen** is the community's favored place for casual Italian. Owner Don Scalessa cooks the pasta to order.



## Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library

**Tip:** If you have kids, take them to the **Enchanted Garden** located on Winterthur's grounds or the neighboring **Delaware Museum of Natural History**.

**Foodie Find:** When between Wilmington and the Pennsylvania state line, you must stop in **Buckley's Tavern** for a burger, a pint or comforting food, such as the chicken pot pie. You can sit in the dining room, but many prefer to belly up to the bar in the casual pub area. The tavern's claim to fame is its welcoming vibe, as personified by the luxury cars that park next to the pickups.

A few miles over the Pennsylvania state line, the **Brandywine River Museum of Art**, located in an old mill on the banks of the Brandywine River, is on land owned by the Brandywine Conservancy that's gorgeous all year long but particularly in autumn.

The museum features the work of three Wyeth artists (N.C., Andrew and Jamie) and other family members. The building's design features floor-to-ceiling windows between galleries, so you can take a seat and savor the picturesque view.



Brandywine River Museum of Art

### For the Green Thumbs:

It goes without saying that the Brandywine River Museum and Winterthur will please gardeners and nature-lovers. But there are several other celebrated spots that will delight a gardener.

**Longwood Gardens** is so close to Winterthur that you can do them both in one day. Indeed, you might need the entire day. The botanical garden has 1,077 acres of gardens, woodlands and meadows, all of which are full of seasonal color. The arrangements in the conservatory also undergo seasonal changes. The undulating meadow, which gives walkers a good workout, is guaranteed to please peepers. Watch for the bunnies that dart across the paths.



Longwood Gardens

### Brandywine River Museum of Art

**Tip:** **Kennett Square** is just up Route 1. It's a charming small town that's walkable. For area flavor, stop in **Kennett Brewing Company** for an IPA.

**Foodie Find:** The recently revamped **Millstone Café** has a wall of windows that overlook the woods. Chef MacGregor Mann, who's dedicated to locally sourced ingredients, created the menu. Many items were grown in Pennsylvania or made by area artisans.

For Latin flair, **Agave** is close by. This is a BYO, so pick up some wine or beer first if you want a libation with your lunch or dinner. You're in the heart of mushroom country, so don't be surprised to see roasted mushrooms on the sides menu with refried beans, salsa and corn on the cob. Across the street are **Brandywine Prime Seafood & Chops** and the low-key **Hank's Place**. Both were favorite haunts for Andrew Wyeth.

### Longwood Gardens

**Tip:** Longwood recently unveiled its revamped fountain area, where you'll feel like you're in Europe. There are 1,700 fountain jets, and the illuminated nighttime shows with accompanying musical themes are worth staying till closing time (Check the schedule in advance, as timed entry tickets are often required). To reach Longwood Gardens from Wilmington, you'll likely take Route 52, also known as the Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway. It passes museums, historic estates and lush fall foliage.

**Foodie Find:** You can dine in the full-service restaurant, **1906**, or in the cafeteria-style section. Al fresco dining is an option in either area, depending on the weather. Both offer a signature cream of mushroom soup. The restaurant, however, boasts a prettier presentation, complete with crispy shallots.



**Mt. Cuba Center** is the place to go for those who are fans of plants native to the East Coast, as well as the formal gardens near the mansion. Tours will give you a solid background on the gardens' evolution from farmland to botanical garden. There are sunset hayrides on select dates.



Mt. Cuba Center

### For the Outdoor Enthusiast

If you like to bike, hike, walk or horseback ride, you're in luck. The region has multiple parks that can accommodate one or more interests, and all are breathtaking in fall.

Created in 1886 as part of a nationwide beautification movement, the 178-acre **Brandywine Park** is located within the city of Wilmington. It contains a one-mile stretch along the Brandywine River for walkers, joggers and bicyclists. The hardcore athletes appreciate Monkey Hill, a steep cobblestoned road that runs through the **Brandywine Zoo**.



Brandywine Park

### Mt. Cuba Center

**Tip:** **Hockessin** is also home to the **Ashland Nature Center**. Owned by the **Delaware Nature Society**, it offers trails across 130 acres of woods, meadow and marsh—perfect peeping territory.

**Foodie Find:** Mt. Cuba is near Hockessin, where the **House of William & Merry**, located in an old farmhouse, offers up lunch and dinners with creative twists. Chef Bill Hoffman's favorite ingredient is foie gras, so expect to find it somewhere on the menu. The **Back Burner** is a traditional favorite in the area. Fans can't get enough of the pumpkin-mushroom soup.



Brandywine Zoo

### Brandywine Park

**Tip:** The park is dotted with architectural elements worth noting, including impressive bridges for cars and trains. **Josephine Garden** contains a large fountain erected in memory of Josephine Tatnall Smith. It's flanked by two double rows of Japanese cherry trees.

**Foodie Find:** The park is near **Trolley Square** on one end and Wilmington's business district on another. You'll find a restaurant row on Washington Street, which includes **Domaine Hudson**, known for its wines and inventive menu, **Mikimotos Asian Grill** and the **Washington Street Ale House**.

**Delaware State Parks** include **Bellevue State Park**, which is located on the former estate of William du Pont, who was keen on riding, tennis, gardens and woodland settings. There's a fitness track surrounded by trees for walking and viewing, as well as a catch-and-release fishing pond.



The 933-acre **Brandywine Creek State Park**, a former du Pont dairy farm, includes a stand of 190-year-old tulip poplar trees and 14 miles of trails. The many hills and rocks make this area popular among mountain-bikers.

## Bellevue State Park

**Tip:** While at Bellevue, drive or walk over to **Cauffiel House**, another former estate, which offers scenic views of the rivers under shady trees.

**Foodie Find:** Find: Nearby **Claymont Steak Shop** gives you the chance to eat like senators and vice presidents—it's one of Joe Biden's favorite eateries.



## Brandywine Creek State Park

**Tip:** Route 202, a shopping mecca, includes large retailers and the **Concord Mall**, so you can indulge in some tax-free shopping.

**Foodie Find:** The park is so broad that your choices will depend on where you start and finish your trip. If you're near Route 202, find out why **Grotto Pizza**—which migrated north from the Delaware beaches—is such a local favorite. Hint: it's all about the swirl. Or, visit a Delaware institution, the **Charcoal Pit**, for a burger cooked over the flames and topped with a zesty relish.

About the author: Pam George is a food and travel writer who's written six books on Delaware history, dining, and Delaware-based businesses. In addition, her work has appeared in Forbes, Fortune and US Airways Magazine. A University of Delaware graduate, she lives with her husband and two dogs in North Wilmington and Lewes.