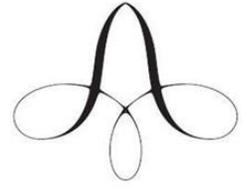




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## Top 9 Things to Do in Saratoga Springs

Upstate New York is not short on picturesque small towns. The northern portion of the state is full of compact camera-ready villages, from Aurora in the Finger Lakes to Woodstock in the Catskills. Picture-perfect Saratoga Springs -- about halfway between Albany and Lake George -- is an upstate destination whose storybook star shines especially bright. The area's famous mineral springs have been luring wellness-seekers for centuries (earning it the nickname Spa City) and the Saratoga Race Course has attracted horse-racing enthusiasts since the Civil War. Even if your vacation doesn't align with track season, Saratoga Springs has plenty to do, see, eat, sip, and snap up as a keepsake. Here are some of our favorite things to do in Saratoga Springs.

### 1. Admire the architecture.



Drop into any town in upstate New York and you'll likely see a streetscape of brick sidewalks, porticoed homes, and an old-timey train depot. Saratoga Springs throws countless (and stunning) examples of classic architecture into the mix: it seems like every lot holds a stately red-brick commercial building or a Queen Anne mansion with towers and Tiffany glass details. Saratoga Springs is a great walking town, so you can easily see many of its architectural knockouts by foot. Be sure to walk past the Hiram Charles Todd House, a grand Greek Revival home built in 1837, and the town's 1910 Classic Revival post office (don't miss the lobby). Both buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places.

## 2. Walk one of America's great main streets.



Running through the heart of historic downtown, Broadway is Saratoga Springs' main thoroughfare and a parade of more splendid architecture. Broadway is bound on both sides with boutiques, bookstores, restaurants, bars, art galleries, Victorian homes, and hotels, including the 1870s Saratoga Arms and **The Adelphi Hotel**. The latter is a landmark hotel built in 1877 and reopening this year after extensive renovations. Stop by local favorites like Putnam Market for sandwiches and wine, and One Caroline for live bluegrass and jazz jams. And just off the main drag is Hattie's, a Saratoga Springs institution famous for its fried chicken, gumbo, and barbecued ribs. ←

## 3. Take the waters at Saratoga Spa State Park.



A National Historic Landmark, Saratoga Spa State Park consists of 2,400 acres of peaceful wooded countryside and European-style facilities that were built in the 1930s during the New Deal. Lovely nature trails lead to streams, picnic groves, and park attractions, like the Roosevelt Baths & Spa, Victoria Pool and Peerless Pool Complex, The Gideon Putnam hotel, Saratoga Automobile Museum (a one-time water bottling plant), and the Saratoga Performing Arts Center.

The cold mineral water that bubbles up from the earth was revered by the Iroquois, and by the mid-1800s, Saratoga Springs was known as the "Queen of the Spas" to the elite vacationers who came here to sip and soak in the water. Bring your water bottle, as there are a dozen mineral springs around the park still in use today, including the saline-rich Charlie Spring near the Performing Arts Center, and State Seal, a spring behind the museum that gushes fresh, non-effervescent water.

#### 4. Relive the golden age at the race track.



Saratoga Race Course opened its gates in 1863, making it one of the oldest race tracks in the country. It's also one of the most illustrious -- it proved a glam enough backdrop for James Bond in the novel "Diamonds Are Forever." For seven weeks of the year, the race track's grandstand, box seats, and suites flood with spectators who come to see the thoroughbreds charging toward the finish line. Opening day for the summer season is July 21.

#### 5. Get spooked.



This wouldn't be an upstate town if it didn't have a creepy local legend or two lurking in its yesteryear. Investigate the town's paranormal side on a spine-tingling ghost tour through downtown and Congress Park's historic Canfield Casino, where reports of the unexplainable range from cold patches and floating household items to chimes and the whiff of a lit cigar (courtesy of a ghost by the name of Old Smoke). Committed specter-seekers could book a room in the Batcheller Mansion Inn, a nine-room hotel in a cream-and-burgundy Victorian mansion that's so elaborate and unusual that its designers patented its architectural plans after it was built in 1873. The Victorian mansion sat abandoned for years.

## 6. Drift through Yaddo Gardens.



A writers' colony located on a turn-of-the-last-century country estate, Yaddo looks like it could be the set of a dreamy Sofia Coppola film. The estate is helmed by a castle-like stone Queen Anne Revival mansion with 55 rooms (past tenants include Sylvia Plath and Truman Capote). The artists' residence is closed to the public, but Yaddo's whimsical gardens are free and open year round for tours, either self-guided or led by a garden guide. Even if you opt for a docent tour, the free spirit of the place might move you to then get lost among the fountains, terraces, marble statues, rose-covered pergolas, paths lined with geraniums in large clay pots, and Japanese-inspired rock garden. After experiencing this kind of peace, the activity of downtown Saratoga Springs might seem like downright chaos.

## 7. Shop like a local, from a local.



While the race track is only open seven weeks out of the year, the Saratoga Farmers' Market operates twice a week, all year long. From May to October, covered pavilions in downtown's High Rock Park host the incredible Mohawk Valley bounty, and in the winter, things move inside the Lincoln Baths building in Saratoga Spa State Park.

Locally grown Swiss chard, shiitake mushrooms, and garlic scapes may not travel well or make for good on-the-spot snacking, but sour cream coffee cake and cider donuts do. Actually, before you fill

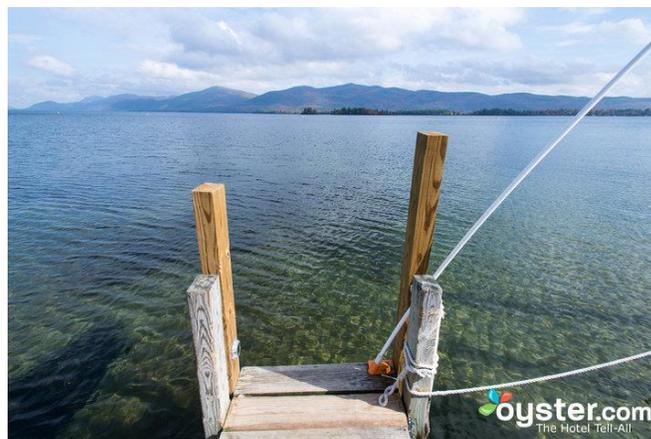
up on baked goods, wander around and source picnic supplies from the market -- baguettes from Mrs. London's Bakery, artisanal cheese from Homestead Artisans and Argyle Cheese Farmer, and cured meats from Dancing Ewe Farm -- for a DIY lunch in the park. Local cider, wine, rye, whiskey, and even moonshine make great take-home gifts.

### 8. Go apple picking.



If you miss the Farmers' Market (and its cider donuts), fret not. This is upstate New York, so there are orchards, roadside stands, greenhouses, country stores, and bakeries all around and open for business every day. Apple orchards are especially magical to visit in the fall, when they're bursting with gourds and autumnal-colored mums arranged on hay bales, live fiddlers, wagon rides, corn mazes, and pumpkin patches. September through early November is prime pick-your-own-apples season, when varieties like Fuji, Braeburn, and Granny Smith are ready for plucking. This time of year, orchards dole out barrels of fresh-pressed cider and tray after tray of warm, sugar-and-cinnamon-coated cider donuts (Saratoga Apple, about a 15-minute drive out of town, offers both year round).

### 9. Take a day trip to Lake George.



A 30-minute drive to the north, the mountainous area of Lake George is a popular summer travel destination whose star power is on par with Saratoga Springs' -- the resort town and its surrounding

region have been drawing travelers for centuries. (If it's good enough for Georgia O'Keeffe, it's good enough for us.) The freshwater lake is a slam dunk for water-sports enthusiasts, including boaters, swimmers, rafters, or parasailers. All around Lake George is Adirondack Park -- the largest publicly protected area in the continental U.S. -- with plenty of lakes, mountains, and hiking trails. Consider the Sleeping Beauty Mountain trail, which loops past ponds and offers beautiful clear views of Lake George from its summit.