

PENTA

Great Escapes: A Rejuvenating Retreat in the Berkshires, Then and Now

By Andrea Park Aug. 12, 2022 4:05 pm ET



Tanglewood Music Festival in the summer features performances by artists like James Taylor, John Williams, and Yo-Yo Ma.

Edith Wharton and her peers flocked to the Berkshires during the Gilded Age for a respite from New York City, and the Western Massachusetts region has been a restorative destination for the well-heeled ever since. Skiing and snow-capped pine trees, spring blossoms, cool summer air, and breathtaking fall foliage make the Berkshires an attractive place to visit year-round, while wellness centers, museums, and performance arts venues offer plenty to do indoors.

Although the Berkshires have been a popular travel destination for more than a century, trendy New Yorkers continue to vacation in the New England cultural hub. The newest Miraval resort opened in Lenox—where Wharton’s home was—in 2020, bringing a new all-inclusive wellness resort to the Berkshires, with mountain views and activities like meditation, yoga, equine experiences, and pottery. Meanwhile, the thriving food scene in the Berkshires has attracted talented chefs who prefer more space and a quieter lifestyle.

STAY



The Miraval Berkshires sits on 380 acres of land in Lenox.
James Baigrie

The Miraval Berkshires sits on 380 acres of land in Lenox, including the Gilded Age mansion, the Wyndhurst Manor and Club. Guests can find focus in a meditation class in the Vibrational Soul Chamber; get active with guided hikes and yoga classes; or completely unwind in the tranquil 29,000-square-foot spa with an indoor/outdoor pool. The digital device-free resort also offers unique experiences like a Self-leadership for Effective Communication class with horses (guests learn to earn the horses' trust through equine communication techniques); hatchet throwing; and a "warrior challenge" through outdoor courses that are elevated at 35-50 feet into the trees. The Miraval is all-inclusive, providing healthy spa meals at Harvest Moon Restaurant and snacks, coffee, and smoothies in between.

Granville House, a new bed and breakfast in Great Barrington, opened in 2020. Union Square Hospitality Group alums and married couple Terry and Terri Coughlin dreamed of owning a bed & breakfast, and fell in love with Great Barrington after honeymooning there in 2000. The five-room inn, originally built in 1825, is named after the house that George and Mary Bailey restore in *It's a Wonderful Life*. The Coughlins' younger daughter Grace has special needs, and the couple makes it a priority to reinvest a portion of proceeds to support the special needs community in the Berkshires.



The pool at the Miraval.
Miraval Berkshires

EAT & DRINK

Prairie Whale owner Mark Firth helped pioneer the Williamsburg dining scene with Diner and Marlow & Sons in the aughts. The restaurateur left New York for a quieter life in the Berkshires, and opened Prairie Whale in a former antiques shop and bookstore in Great Barrington in 2012. Prairie Whale (a 19th-century term for pigs) serves seasonal menus that include dishes like pig head rillettes and whole grilled porgy with fried potatoes and pea shoots.

Bjorn Somlo, three-time semi-finalist for the James Beard Foundation's Best Chef: Northeast, has taken Lenox favorite Nudel through several iterations, and the latest, called Nudel Bar. Comfort & Craft, is focused on comfort food. Expect a mix of traditional and cosmopolitan riffs on comfort food, like chili cheese fries and masa fried skate.

Haven Cafe and Bakery in Lenox is a charming standby for pastries, sandwiches, and lattes. The popular brunch spot offers croissant french toast on its menu alongside banh mi and grilled polenta.

Mooncloud in Great Barrington has an extensive and inventive cocktail menu that includes drinks with housemade cordials, like Davy Jones' Locker 2.0, which is made of Swedish punsch, lime, pineapple, angostura, ginger, and cinnamon cordials. The bar also offers bites like cured meats, cheeses, and tinned fish. Mooncloud also has several mocktails for those who prefer to skip booze for the night.

Cozy tapas bar Brava in Lenox is the perfect place to grab late-night small plates, pizza, or even poutine. Brava has an extensive wine and beer menu that is constantly changing.



Chef Bjorn Somlo's Nudel Bar.
Good Bites & Glass Pints

EXPLORE

More than a century old, Edith Wharton's estate, The Mount, is still exquisite. Learn about Wharton's role in designing her home and explore the library that still holds her collection of books, and bask in the beauty of the gardens, including a particularly stunning walled garden that feels like a secret.

When people hear "Tanglewood," they often think only of Tanglewood Music Festival in the summer, during which visitors can sit on the lawn and enjoy performances by artists like James Taylor, John Williams, and Yo-Yo Ma; this year's lineup includes all of the above (and a celebration for Williams' 90th birthday) plus Ringo Starr and Bonnie Raitt. But Boston Symphony Orchestra musicians, who call Tanglewood home during the summer, perform at Tanglewood's Linde Center for Learning year-round.

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center in Great Barrington hosts a range of events, from concerts with Graham Nash to a conversation about design with Debbie Millman and Roxane Gay.

For adventure seekers, Great Barrington is an Appalachian Trail Community. Day hikers can take a 10-mile trail from Jug End to Bear Mountain. For a less challenging hike, Monument Mountain Reservation is also in the area with several trails and scenic views.

Women-owned dispensary Rebelle's founders are from New York, and its website invites fellow New Yorkers to come join them at one of the city's closest recreational dispensaries—just under a three-hour drive to Great Barrington. Rebelle's parent company, Community Growth Partners, aims to empower local communities through efforts like creating internship and career opportunities with its nonprofit partners, recruiting its workforce from neighboring communities with vulnerable populations, and maintaining an expungement fund that works to overturn low-level cannabis convictions in Massachusetts.

Get ready for a hit of funk as you walk into Rubiner's Cheesemongers & Grocers. Browse a wide range of imported and domestic cheeses, as well as other gourmet goodies like goat milk caramels, stroopwafels, and aged balsamic.

There are many small galleries in both Lenox and Great Barrington, but Bernay Fine Art is especially elegant, with exhibitions that include paintings, sculptures, photography, ceramics and works on paper. Keep an eye out for stunning still-lives from local artist Janet Rickus.

The author was a guest of the Miraval Berkshires.