

Escape to Southern Ulster County

By Andrew Frey



Ulster County is the perfect getaway from New York City, just 90 miles north and a 1.5-hour Amtrak train ride. This 250,000-acre rural playground has opportunities to bike and hike across the Walkway Over the Hudson or along the county's 350 miles of trails, rock climb at Shawangunk Ridge, sample farm-to-table restaurants and shop at small-town boutiques. I wanted to experience it all.

Exploring New Paltz. A hidden gem, New Paltz sits at the base of the Mohonk Preserve and Shawangunk Mountains. Strolling down Main Street, I perused the colorful array of unique mom-and-pop shops. One store, Cocoon, sold an eclectic mix of artisanal soaps, jewelry and kitchenware. Another, Heady Teddy's, was a treasure chest of 1960s and 1970s apparel. Street art decorated the outer walls of many local businesses, including an iconic peace symbol towering above Church Street.

I headed to the Walkkill River and Water Street Market. The quirky statues at the street's entrance intrigued me. Picnic and chess tables were sprinkled throughout the area. At Rhino Records, I thumbed through their sizable collection of classic vinyl. Then, at the Antique Center, a massive red barn filled with everything vintage, I lost myself browsing the boundless collection of memorabilia.

Huguenot Street. A walk through this 10-acre National Historic Landmark District transported me back in time. After a tour and watching the reenactments, I understood

what the lives of the founders of New Paltz were like during the 1700's.

Each of the old stone houses was a museum unique to the family that had inhabited it. My favorite was the lavish Deyo House, with its Victorian-era furniture, gold accents and a functioning player piano.

Lake Minnewaska State Park. Looking for a hike, I drove to picturesque Lake Minnewaska State Park. A haven for swimming, paddling, hiking, biking and climbing, my short hike took me to the top of one of the park's immense cliffs for a view of its mountaintop lake.

Determined to go for a bike ride, too, I rented a bike, then pedaled the new River-to-Ridge Trail, a six-mile loop to the Shawangunk Ridge.

The Rail Trail was just as scenic. Riding along the Walkill River, I headed south surrounded by acres of farmland. Along the way, I spotted grazing cattle just as the sun dropped behind the Mohonk Skytop Tower. It was the perfect finale to an adventurous day. ○

To read more about Andrew Frey's visit to Southern Ulster County, including more hot spots, go to NewYorkByRail.com/Escape-to-Southern-Ulster-County.

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