

# SARATOGA SOJOURN

By Christine Hinz

Eager for a relaxing break from city life without the hassle of car traffic or airport security, I head to Saratoga Springs on Amtrak. Saratoga is a year-round getaway, rich in history, health and... horses! I arrive before noon, ready to take in as much as I can in less than 48 hours.

**Horse Racing.** I'm a novice track-goer, but I immediately get caught up in the excitement. The grandeur of the Saratoga Race Course transports me to an earlier time. The oldest organized sporting venue in the country, the impressive Queen Anne-style grandstand and 1 1/8-mile track awe me.



Race fans are eager to offer me betting tips. One gentleman spews a stream of statistics while another bets on his favorite horse names. I focus on the fourth race (my lucky number) and use my birthday in a variety of bets. My biggest wager is \$4.00 on a long-shot, but Lady Luck doesn't shine on me.

**Polo.** That evening, I head to the polo fields. I don't know much about polo either, but the announcers tell the



Downtown Saratoga Springs

crowd what to look for. Horses and riders sprint up and down the field, whacking a ball with their long mallets. At halftime, I join other spectators to "stomp the divot" (tamp down the grass) on the field.

**Track Tour.** The next morning, I head back to the Saratoga Race Course using Saratoga's bike-share program, for breakfast and a tour of the track. I take



a tram to the "back stretch" (far side of the track). Trainers "pony their horses" (teach them to feel comfortable on the track), while "hot walkers" cool down the thoroughbreds after their workouts. The tour culminates with an up-close view of horses entering the starting gate.

Afterward, I head across the street to the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, home to an extensive collection of the sport's art, artifacts and memorabilia. I leave with a stronger understanding of this centuries-old sport.

**Downtown Saratoga.** Saratoga Springs' historic downtown is the big surprise. I'm impressed by the selection of shops, galleries and restaurants. I

TOP: SARATOGA SPRINGS CHAMBER; FAR LEFT: CHRISTINE HINZ; MIDDLE: DAVID CONNELLY