

The New York Times

36 Hours in The Berkshires

BY LAUREN MATISON — PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY CENICOLA — OCTOBER 10, 2024



Visiting the Berkshires, the sprawling Massachusetts region of deeply connected communities, feels like being let in on a secret. Of course, this slice of rural paradise is hardly off the radar. Already home to Tanglewood, the renowned music destination and summer stage of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the progressive area became a kind of promised land during the pandemic, when city dwellers relocated to start second acts like a mission-

driven brewery and an artist-run gallery. Longtime locals are adding to the momentum with new, unconventional farm-to-table restaurants, further signaling a 21st-century heyday for the Berkshires. October, peak leaf-peeping season, is the ideal time for a road trip that includes towns from the south to the north, where one of America's largest contemporary art museums, MASS MoCA, is celebrating its 25th year.

Recommendations

KEY STOPS

- **The Mount**, a national historic landmark in Lenox and the summertime retreat of the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edith Wharton, sits on a 50-acre public park with a vast network of accessible trails and three Wharton-designed gardens.
- **The Barn**, in South Egremont, beckons to music lovers with wide-ranging live acts, a fun local crowd and strong drinks like Ruby's Revenge, with Greylock Gin from Berkshire Mountain Distillers.
- **Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art**, better known as MASS MoCA and celebrating its 25th anniversary, looms large in the Berkshires as a beacon of artistic expression. It has 300,000 square feet of gallery space, year-round performances, and a new Mexican restaurant, Casita.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

- A **self-guided audio tour of the town of Great Barrington** takes you off the beaten path, from the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center to the historic Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church to the serene Housatonic River Walk.
- **Kennedy Park** is a 500-acre hardwood forest in Lenox with 15 miles of well-maintained hiking and biking trails and a beautiful lookout over Mount Greylock.
- **Cascades Trail** is a roughly two-mile, crowd-free hike outside downtown North Adams with a stunning 45-foot waterfall.

RESTAURANTS & BARS

- **Marjoram + Roux** is a cozy veggie-friendly cafe in Great Barrington with soups, panini, frittatas, delicious maple lattes and a pop-up dinner menu on Fridays with the roving restaurant After Hours.
- **No Comply Foods** is a Great Barrington restaurant with skateboarding décor and a daily changing menu that includes a few staples like chickpeas with sunny-side-up eggs, basil pesto and whipped feta.
- **Pizzeria Boema** serves Neapolitan-style pies (including vegan options) baked in a 900-degree wood-fired oven in a century-old barn in Lenox.
- **Hot Plate Brewing Co.**, in Pittsfield, is an L.G.B.T.Q.-friendly community hub and the only Latina-owned brewery in Massachusetts.
- **Bluebird & Co.**, perched next to Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort, has an après-ski vibe, a riverside backyard with twinkling lights, and eclectic, flavor-packed dishes inspired by the seasons.
- **Tourists**, a sublime riff on the classic roadside motel in North Adams, lures a local crowd with creative cocktails, board games and a cozy lounge designed for fall evenings by the fire.

GALLERIES & SHOPPING

- **Bon Dimanche** in Great Barrington has a delightful mix of hand-printed clothes, vintage jewelry, morel-shaped candles, Berkshire-themed posters and stylish home décor with a French modern flair.
- **Railroad St. Collective** in Great Barrington sells handcrafted pieces by regional artisans like Aaron Meshon, who makes whimsical illustrations, and Hettle, who produces block-printed, organic plant-dyed goods, and you may even see the artists working at the shop.
- **West Stockbridge** is a small town with big attractions like TurnPark Art Space, an open-air museum in a former quarry, and Shaker Mill Books, a used-book store in a historic gristmill, which is laden with literary gems.
- **Greylock Works** is a former cotton mill that's been spun into a small business and arts haven. Scope out Douglas Gilbert Art and Berkshire Cider Project and shop for vintage fashion and homewares at Your Neighbor Studio or for artistic bits and bobs at 328North Studio (the same owner runs State Food + Drink, a cafe in the complex).

WHERE TO STAY

- **The Guest House at Field Farm**, set on 320 acres in Williamstown, features a sculpture garden, four miles of hiking trails and six rooms — some with private decks and views of Mount Greylock— with midcentury modern furnishings. Rooms start at \$269.
- **The Trail in Adams** was opened in 2023 by Yina Moore, who recently restored the neighboring Adams Theater, vacant since the 1960s. It is on the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and offers contactless check-in, made-to-order breakfast and nine modern rooms with works by local artists. Rooms start at around \$175.
- **The Red Lion Inn** is an 82-room gem in Stockbridge that dates back to 1773 and has an attached live-music pub, the Lion's Den. This fall, the inn opened Norman Rockwell-inspired accommodations in a newly transformed historic firehouse that the artist captured in his 1971 painting "The New American LaFrance Is Here (Firehouse)." The Norman Rockwell Museum is a short drive from the inn. Rooms start at \$110.
- For **short-term rentals**, look in the towns of Great Barrington, Lenox and Williamstown (the latter is home to a vast collection of European and American masterpieces at the Clark Art Institute), which have walkable areas with cultural attractions, shopping, historic sites and outdoor activities. For a quieter side of the Berkshires, charming West Stockbridge is full of culture, good food and scenic trails.

GETTING AROUND

- While many individual towns are walkable, traveling around the region requires a **car**. **Ride-hailing apps** like Uber provide some coverage throughout the county, and HappyCAR operates round-the-clock, on-demand shuttle service seven days a week (call or text to make a reservation). To discover the towns and trails on two wheels, rent a bike at Berkshire Bike & Board (e-bikes, \$85 a day) in Great Barrington and Pittsfield, or Berkshire Outfitters (bicycles from \$35 for three hours), near the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, which extends roughly 14 car-free miles between Pittsfield and Adams.
- **The Berkshire Flyer**, an Amtrak train, offers service between New York City and Pittsfield, but operates only between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekend.

Itinerary



RAILROAD STREET IN GREAT BARRINGTON



MASON LIBRARY



NO COMPLY FOODS

FRIDAY

3 p.m. Grab a coffee and pop into shops

Start your Berkshires weekend in the town of Great Barrington, in the region's south. Railroad Street, named for a 19th-century former depot, is a charming microcosm of the Berkshires' renaissance. Pick up a maple latte (\$5.25) at Marjoram + Roux, then peruse Railroad St. Collective, which spotlights works by regional artisans, including Cheryl Pagano's plant-based textiles and Aaron Meshon's whimsical illustrations. Pop into Bon Dimanche, a new boutique with screen-printed apparel and affordable décor (fellow small businesses raised funds to save the store after it fell victim to a cyberscam this year). In the alley, don't miss two giant murals honoring the N.A.A.C.P. co-founder and Great Barrington native W.E.B. Du Bois, painted by the Railroad Street Youth Project.

4:30 p.m. Take a self-guided historic walking tour

Beyond Great Barrington's trendy shops and rainbow crosswalks are remnants of a rich and complex history. Follow a free self-guided audio tour that begins at the Mason Library, which features a free exhibit on local civil rights activists. Crisscrossing downtown, the full tour may take around an hour. One notable stop is the Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church, where Du Bois attended services; it is set to be restored as the Du Bois Freedom Center by 2027. For more on Great Barrington history, the new Max documentary "Breaking New Ground" follows the Broadway performer and entrepreneur Robert Hartwell on his journey to restore the 1822 Russell House, which he purchased on Juneteenth 2020.

6 p.m. Dine at a new spot by a local legend

When Julie and Stephen Browning opened No Comply Foods, their brick-and-mortar restaurant, in April, there was a collective cheer in town: no more waiting until the Saturday pop-up at the Great Barrington Farmers Market for a golden milk latte (\$6) or loaded Japanese sweet potato drizzled with olive oil, tahini and house-made chile crisp (\$14). The light-filled space with funky art, flower-topped tables and corner booths offers a daily changing menu (the sweet potato is a constant) that champions local farms and inventive, veggie-heavy food. (Stephen was formerly the executive chef at the nearby farm-to-table institution Prairie Whale.) The restaurant is counter-service only, a leaner business model that its owners say allows them to pay its smaller staff better wages. (There is also a no-tipping policy.)

7:30 p.m. Rock out in a barn

Music lovers have been flocking to the Berkshires for decades to hear the greats, including Louis Armstrong, Janis Joplin, Bob Marley and James Taylor (who just celebrated 50 years of performing at Tanglewood). The Barn, a short drive from Great Barrington in the town of South Egremont, keeps the beat going year-round in a space with a wabi-sabi feel and a big, glowing peace sign. The co-owner Jenny Rubin programs acts that pack a full house, be it a Grateful Dead cover band, a New Orleans-style blues outfit or the celebrated local jazz singer Wanda Houston (tickets around \$20). Take your post-concert high a few minutes down the road to the newly opened Hys Fried for fried chicken and a biscuit (\$14) and dancing to vinyl records on the red-and-black checkerboard floor.



THE MOUNT, THE SUMMERTIME RETREAT OF THE PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR EDITH WHARTON, SITS ON A 50-ACRE PUBLIC PARK.

SATURDAY

9 a.m. Start slow, then wander artsy backwoods and book stacks

At No. Six Depot, a cafe in an 1834 train station in the town of West Stockbridge, sip a cappuccino (\$4.50) on the porch overlooking Lenox Mountain and the peaceful flow of cyclists and plein air artists. Up the street is the 16-acre TurnPark Art Space (adult entry \$14, free under 12), a former marble quarry turned lush art park. Meander on and off the trails, spying contemporary pieces amid a vast grassy field — like the Austria-based Vadim Kosmatschof's towering mirror sculpture, reflecting the autumnal blaze. West Stockbridge's crown jewel is Shaker Mill Books, which had to expand into the historic gristmill next door to house its eclectic collection of more than 30,000 used, out-of-print, new and rare books, many offered at a bargain price.

11:30 a.m. Tour Edith Wharton's hilltop haven

In 1902, Edith Wharton, the first woman to receive a Pulitzer Prize, moved into the Mount, a 17,000-square-foot neo-Classical mansion that she designed and had built against a rocky knoll in the town of Lenox. On a one-hour guided tour (included in entry; \$20 for adults, under 18 free), learn about her writing habits (in bed) and how she defied Gilded Age expectations of women, traveled abroad annually and published 40 books in the 40 years between 1897 and 1937, including "The Age of Innocence" and "The House of Mirth." Until Oct. 20, the Sculpture at the Mount exhibition showcases 27 art pieces throughout the gardens and hiking trails, and you can have your spine tingled year-round with evening ghost tours (\$30) that Wharton, who feared phantoms yet wrote about them, would most likely skip.

1 p.m. Savor pizza in a barn

In a region bubbling over with talented pizzaiolos, one of the hottest pizza scenes is in Lenox. Molly Lyon-Joseph opened Pizzeria Boema, a wood-fired Neapolitan-style pizza joint in the midst of the pandemic — and while running its sister restaurant Frankie's next door. Take a seat in the cozy art-filled space or century-old barn to try the popular buffalo-mozzarella margherita (\$21) or one of many vegan options: One comes with wild mushrooms, arugula and plant-based mozzarella on a thin cauliflower crust (\$20). Fall pies include the Bianca (\$20) with butternut squash, Gorgonzola, walnuts and kale, and the Bresaola (\$22) with dried figs and stracciatella. After lunch, check out the backyard cornhole (you can always come back for s'mores by the fire pit in the evenings).

2:30 p.m. Explore a beloved park

In Lenox, all roads lead to Kennedy Park. Just north of the town center, the 500-acre hardwood forest has vernal pools (temporary ponds that are vital wildlife habitats), colorful canopies of oak, ash and beech trees, and more than 15 well-groomed miles of hiking and biking trails — including old carriage paths traveled by Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt while staying at the prominent Aspinwall Hotel (which burned down in 1931). Get a free trail map at Arcadian Shop on the eastern edge. Then, for a relaxing under-three-miles-round-trip jaunt, follow the Woolsey Trail to the lookout gazebo, with views of Mount Greylock. From there, take the Coakley Trail south to the Kennedy Park Belvedere overlook, via the Picnic side trail, to admire the mountain vistas and Housatonic River Valley.

5 p.m. Sip a pint with a purpose

Hot Plate Brewing Co. an inclusive and community-driven seven-barrel brewhouse and taproom that opened in 2023, is hopping with people gathered for live music and great beer (from \$3 for five ounces, \$7 for a pint). Try the Capable of Anything, a chamomile blonde ale, or the Kardia, a habanero chocolate stout inspired by the co-owner Sarah Real's Mexican heritage. This fall and winter, proceeds from sales of Kardia will be donated to the Pittsfield Area Council of Congregations, to help provide heat for low-income households.

6:30 p.m. Follow the local flock to dinner

A ski jump's distance from Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort in the town of Hancock, Bluebird & Co. is the latest restaurant from Nancy Thomas and Bo Peabody (of the wildly popular Mezze Bistro & Bar in nearby Williamstown). Opened in July 2023 with a local, seasonal ethos, the restaurant leans in to an après-ski vibe with cozy booths, wood-paneled walls, vintage black-and-white portraits of people from the Berkshires, a bar area with sports playing quietly on the two TVs and a groovy playlist peppered with the likes of Brenton Wood and Creedence Clearwater Revival. Bluebird's regulars come back for the double-patty Okie burger with fried onions (\$17) and the braised chickpeas with green harissa, labneh, mint and parsley (\$12).



NO. SIX DEPOT



BLUEBIRD & CO.



STATE FOOD + DRINK



THE HOOSIC RIVER AND THE ASHUWILLTICOOK RAIL TRAIL IN ADAMS.

8:30 p.m. Play games by the fire

Along the Mohawk Trail — one of the country’s first scenic byways, originally used by Native Americans as a trade and travel route — is the Tourists hotel, remodeled from the 1960s Redwood Motel. Its wood-beamed lounge looks as if it was designed for autumn getaways and midcentury-modern enthusiasts. Post up next to staycationing locals and order a Sumac Spritz (\$15), made with blanc vermouth, prosecco and sumac, picked from the property’s 80-acre forest. Ask for one of a dozen board games at the bar, then sink into a leather couch by the fire. If the Sing for Your Slumber live-music series has the night off, you can count on a soundtrack of 1960s country-blues and psychedelic folk troubadours. The only reason to move will be for s’mores (\$7 per kit) around the fire pit outside.

SUNDAY

8:30 a.m. Be the early bird who gets the works

In the town of North Adams, explore Greylock Works, a 240,000-square-foot former cotton mill, now home to shops, artists’ studios, a distillery, a cafe and, more recently, loft condos. Before they sell out, order a pistachio sweet roll or a feta-and-hot-honey croissant (around \$6 each) at the newly opened State Food + Drink. Then shop for potted plants, abstract paintings and Vietnamese condiments at the 328North Studio (owned by State’s chef Tu Le), before heading next door to Your Neighbor Studio, a used-clothing and furniture shop. Its owners live part time in Brooklyn, so the space runs on an honor system when it’s unstaffed, although fellow shopkeepers look in (simply Venmo them for the Picasso print or Issey Miyake leather jacket you might find there). Douglas Gilbert, another New York transplant, offers drawing classes in his studio, which is lined with his crosshatch artwork.

10:30 a.m. Hike to a hidden waterfall

Like Herman Melville, who wrote “Moby-Dick” in the whale-shaped shadow of Mount Greylock, countless others have discovered the region’s wellspring of creativity by taking a hike. Just outside downtown North Adams, the Cascades Trail (one of around 250 hiking trails in the Berkshires, according to the new outdoor resource BerkshiresOutside.org) is a roughly two-mile out-and-back trip that would have vanished if not for a community petition in 1938 that saved the area from deforestation. Infused with the scent of pine and wet rocks, the path meanders along Notch Brook and up verdant woods tinged with gold leaves. Stepping over roots and muddy patches, you’ll climb a short bend and suddenly see a deep gorge and a 45-foot waterfall. Even on a spectacular fall day, you will most likely have the glen all to yourself.

12 p.m. Celebrate a museum’s major milestone

How do you represent 25 years of a museum’s journey? MASS MoCA, which opened in a complex of abandoned mill buildings in downtown North Adams in 1999, has grown into one of North America’s largest contemporary art museums. The anniversary exhibition “MASS MOCA by the NUMB3R5” (through May 2025) presents a dazzling display of data, including 8,640 gallons of paint used in exhibitions, the 5,750 pencils Sol LeWitt used for 105 large-scale drawings, and 2.5 million attendance stickers issued. Also don’t miss Gunnar Schonbeck’s interactive “No Experience Required” music room; Amy Podmore’s blinking “Audience,” in which motorized eyeballs hold your gaze; Louise Bourgeois’s “Untitled” marble sculpture, a U.S. debut; and a James Turrell retrospective that includes a 40-by-40-foot freestanding Skyspace, the largest of the artist’s series of immersive light chambers around the world, built beside the Hoosic River.

