



The Countryside of Philadelphia: A Guide to Road Tripping through Brandywine Valley and Valley Forge

Description

Ever tuned into one of those Netflix dramas like *Gilmore Girls*, *Virgin River*, *Chesapeake Shores*, or *Sweet Magnolias*? They define comfort viewing with a soothing formula that resonates worldwide. Their success lies in the portrayal of small, picturesque North American towns where everyone knows each other, and every character feels like a familiar friend. Whether it's the quaint streets lined with cozy shops, the serene landscapes that exude peace, or the warm-hearted interactions among neighbours, they create the perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, offering a glimpse into a world where life's problems can be solved with a cup of coffee at the local diner or a leisurely stroll through the town square. So, if you're in the mood for some feel-good entertainment that will warm your heart and lift your spirits, then a visit to the [Countryside of Philadelphia](#) with its **rolling hills, sprawling gardens, and spectacular attractions** will transport you right into the setting of these beloved shows.

A road trip through [Brandywine Valley](#) offers a glimpse into the early 20th-century extravagance of American aristocracy. Although the drive along Route 52, Brandywine Valley's Scenic Byway, from the stunning **Longwood Gardens** to **Kennett Square** (the mushroom capital of the world) and on to the historic town of **West Chester** may seem brief, it takes a few days to truly savour the experience.

DAY 1

BEGIN AT VALLEY FORGE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



Valley Forge National Memorial Arch. Photo © Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board/2019 Dylan Eddinger.

Valley Forge National Historical Park offers a poignant journey into American history. Located just northwest of Philadelphia, this park commemorates the pivotal winter encampment of **General George Washington's Continental Army** during the Revolutionary War. The park's expansive grounds provide opportunities for **hiking, picnicking, and biking**, with trails that wind through woodlands and fields. Make sure you visit **The United States National Memorial Arch** situated at the intersection of Outerline Drive and Gulph Road. Designed by Paul Philippe Cret, the arch draws inspiration from the **Arch of Titus in Rome** which also influenced the design of several other monuments, including the **Arc de Triomphe in Paris** and **Stanford White's Arch in Washington Square Park, New York**.

Where to Eat: Located in the Visitor Center, **The Encampment Store** offers a variety of snacks and refreshments. For a historical dining experience, head to **Black Powder Tavern**, just a seven-minute drive from the Visitor Center. Believed to have been the site for George Washington's covert meetings, this tavern remains a popular gathering place more than 200 years after the encampment, serving up great food and fine spirits.

[Valley Forge National Historical Park](#) is conveniently accessible from several major highways, making it easy to reach from all directions.



Brandywine Battlefield. Photo © Leigh Vogel, Summer/Spring 2018

If you're arriving from Philadelphia or Southern New Jersey:

Take the Schuylkill Expressway (I-76) to the King of Prussia/Norristown exit (#329). From there, the park is 8 kilometers north along Gulph Road.

Visitors from Baltimore and Washington, D.C.:

Take I-95 North toward Wilmington, Delaware. North of the city, take the Concord Pike/West Chester Exit (#8) for US-202 North. The park is approximately 48 kilometers north, just off US-202 along PA-23.

Those coming from New York City and Boston:

Drive north on I-95 towards Wilmington, Delaware. North of the city, take Exit 8 for Concord Pike/West Chester, which leads to US-202 north. The park is approximately 48 kilometers north, just off US-202 along PA-23.

LONGWOOD GARDENS



Main Fountain Garden at Longwood Gardens. Photo © countrysidephil.com

Longwood Gardens is located on US Route 1, about 5 kilometers northeast of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

From the National Memorial Arch, take **US-202 South**, then continue onto **PA-926**. In under 45 minutes, you'll arrive at Longwood Gardens. Spanning over 1,100 acres, [Longwood Gardens](#) is the living legacy of **Pierre S. du Pont** – an architectural marvel showcasing horticultural spectacle. The **Main Conservatory spans 4.5 acres under glass, housing over 5000 types of plants**, including an orchid room, an exhibition hall, acacia passage and an orangery. As part of the **Longwood Reimagined** project, an extraordinary new garden experience will premiere in the fall of 2024, with the **32,000 square-foot West Conservatory** as its main attraction. This expansive glass house, spanning the size of a football field and surrounded by water, will resemble a magnificent crystal sculpture. Inside, new additions will include 18-foot-tall cypress trees, enhancing the beauty and grandeur of the space.



Illuminated Fountain Performances. Photo © J. Fusco for VISIT PHILADELPHIA®

Beyond the stunning floral displays, Pierre du Pont created fountains that still leap and sway with an evening light and music show. The [illuminated fountains](#) dance to music ranging from classical to country to movie themes, drawing visitors from all over.

Where to Eat: Located in Longwood Gardens, [1906](#), with its farm-to-table seasonal menu featuring botanical and floral garnishes, assures an unparalleled fine dining experience. You could also opt for alfresco dining in their **Beer Garden** or visit **The Café** for a selection of ready-to-eat sandwiches & salads, hot entrée selections and freshly prepared desserts. Access to the restaurant and café requires a ticket to the gardens.



Beer Garden at Longwood Gardens. Photo © countrysidephl.com

DAY TWO

WINTERTHUR

Travel along **U.S. Route. 52/Kennett Pike**, to arrive at Winterthur— a country estate so big that it has its own post office address. It takes a full day to take in the wonders of this **982-acre family residence that Henry du Pont** turned into a museum. **Comprising over 90,000 pieces**, this vast collection of American decorative arts stands as the largest of its kind, boasting exquisite furniture, captivating portraits, and delicate porcelain, tin, and silverware objects. Henry Francis du Pont's love for colorful fabrics and textiles is evident in the furnishing textiles used throughout Winterthur's rooms. Some of these textiles are notable for their historic fabrics, including outstanding English, French, and Indian printed cottons, as well as French silks.



Enchanted Garden at Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library. Photo © Ritika Basu for Travel and Food Network

As part of America's Garden Capital, [Winterthur](#) also features over 35 stunning gardens within a 30-mile radius. Those traveling with kids must explore the **Enchanted Garden**, sprawling across 3 acres and featuring play areas, a treehouse, a faerie cottage, and more to keep the little ones entertained.

Where to Eat: The Visitor Center Café at Winterthur offers a selection of grab-and-go sandwiches, wraps, and salads, along with snacks, desserts, tea, coffee, and assorted bottled beverages.

KENNETT SQUARE

Just five kilometers from Longwood Gardens lies the picturesque borough of [Kennett Square](#). During the Revolutionary War, thousands of British troops camped in the area ahead of the ill-fated Battle of Brandywine in September 1777, an event now commemorated as **Kennett Occupation Day**. Later, the area played a significant role in the Underground Railroad, aided by its proximity to Delaware and Maryland. By the late 1800s, Kennett Square began its journey to becoming a mushroom powerhouse. Today, the neighboring **farms produce over 500 million pounds of mushrooms annually**, around 60% of the country's total production.



Historic Kennett Square, PA in the Fall. Photo © Leigh Vogel

This walkable town features a boutique-studded Main Street, unique restaurants ranging from cozy breakfast spots to gourmet dining, and charming bed and breakfast lodging, perfect for making a weekend of it.

Souvenir Shopping

Unless you're a purist who trudges into the woods to gather your own mushrooms, a stop at **The Mushroom Cap** gift shop lets you shop for a diverse range of fresh picked Kennett Square mushrooms and every mushroom snack or pantry item you can imagine including a variety of mushroom teas and mushroom themed souvenirs. Visit **Mrs. Robinson's Tea Shop** to explore a selection of over 150 teas from around the world and adorable tea-themed souvenirs. Next door, at Mrs. Robinson's Sweets and Treats, indulge in trending gummy shapes and flavors, alongside top-selling classics in sour, sweet, tart, and mint varieties, available in chewy, hard candy, and powdered forms.



Mushroom Cap and Museum. Photo © Christa Neu

WHERE TO EAT

Kennett Square boasts a diverse range of [dining options](#) to cater to the taste and preferences of every visitor. One of the most popular restaurants on East State Street is **La Verona**. With its house-made pastas and hand-stretched pizzas, brothers Jack and Sam Mavraj expertly bring to life the traditional rustic **cuisine of Northern Italy**. Next to La Verona, **Portabellos of Kennett Square** is another hotspot known for its artisan, handcrafted American and international cuisine. While they specialize in a variety of dishes featuring the humble mushroom, their **pizzas, pastas, steaks**, and seafood are equally enticing. For a unique dining experience, head to **Talula's Table**. During the day, it operates as a gourmet market while in the evening, it transforms into an exclusive dining destination, renowned for its intimate and exceptional dinner experiences. Another local favorite is **Sweet Amelia's**, celebrated for its vegetarian dishes and a monthly changing menu. The locally popular **Grain Craft Bar + Kitchen** with its lively bar scene and rooftop views is perfect for sundowners.

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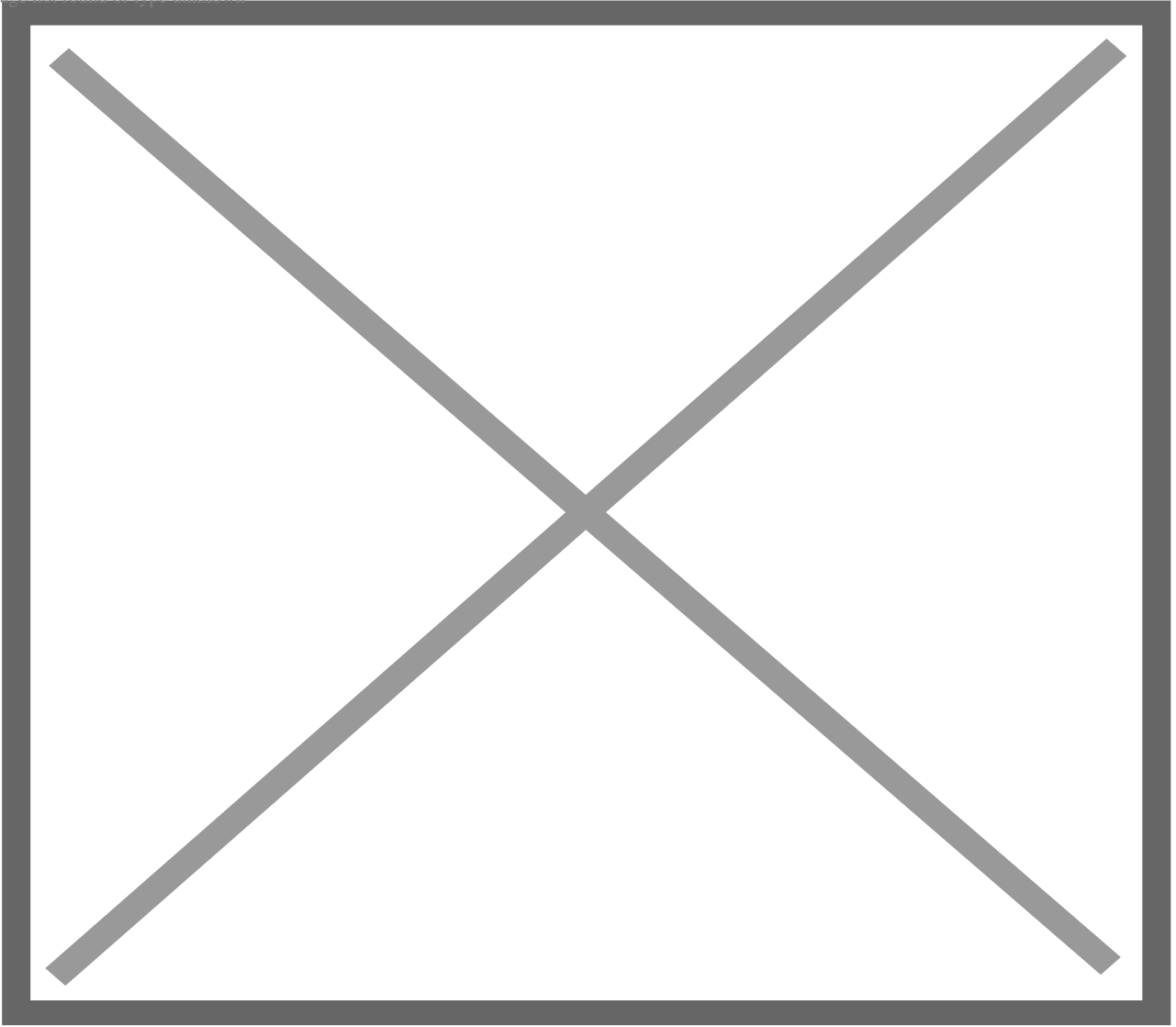


Photo © Talula's Table

Indulge your sweet cravings at **La Michoacana Homemade Ice Cream**, offering 36 delectable flavors every day. Enjoy tempting options like rice pudding, avocado, sweet corn, and even an earthy **mushroom ice cream**. Alternatively, visit **Wanderlust Doughnuts**, where the irresistible Brown Butter Biscoff reigns as a crowd favorite. For the adventurous, there are even doughnuts featuring bacon.

For a delightful dinner experience, we recommend **The Gables at Chadds Ford**, just a 15-minute drive from Kennett Square. Set in a charming converted 1800s dairy barn, the restaurant offers an upbeat and comfortable ambiance along with a creative, well-executed seasonal menu. Their dishes feature a contemporary twist on **traditional American cuisine, enriched with French influences.**

DAY 3

WEST CHESTER

West Chester, a historic town in Chester County, is renowned for its charming streets, vibrant community, and rich cultural scene. Its downtown area blends historic architecture with boutique shops, art galleries, and a diverse array of restaurants and cafes. The town's friendly atmosphere and picturesque setting make it an ideal destination for a leisurely day trip.



West Chester Downtown. Photo © countrysidephl.com

As the county seat of Chester County, [West Chester](#) boasts a rich political history. Notably, the first biography of Abraham Lincoln, which played a crucial role in his election to the presidency, was published in 1860 in **The Lincoln Building** on West Market Street. A stroll through the town's historic district reveals beautifully preserved 18th and 19th-century architecture. **The Chester County Historical Society** is a must-visit. Their fascinating rotating exhibits of artifacts, manuscripts, photographs, and works of art beautifully depict life in the region from the 1600s to the present day.

WHERE TO EAT: With **over 65 [restaurants](#)**, eateries, bars, and cafes, Downtown West Chester extends a dining option for every taste and budget.

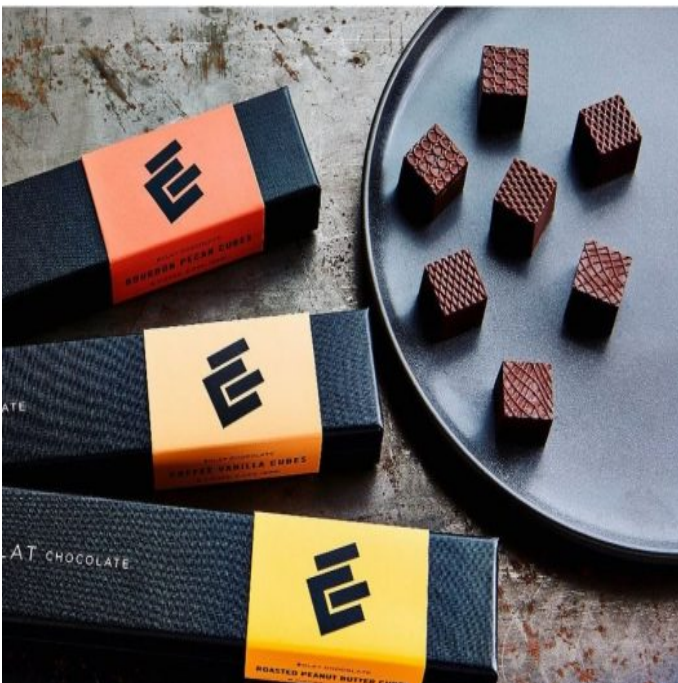
Start your day with a caffeine fix at the European-style **Gryphon Cafe**, an independent coffee roaster. Their menu includes an interesting range of breakfast items, snacks, vegan and gluten-free options, and a variety of healthy lunch selections, such as their famous homemade hummus sandwich. Pair your coffee with a sweet treat from the family-owned **Yori's Church Street Bakery**, known for its custom cakes, pastries, cookies, donuts, and traditional holiday delights. For lunch, head to **Mercato Ristorante** for a taste of Southern Italy. Choose from a selection of their signature Neapolitan pizzas baked in a brick oven, as well as artisan pastas and seafood prepared from authentic recipes.



Downtown West Chester PA. Mercato Restaurant on Market Street. Photo © countrysidephl.com

Souvenir Shopping

Be sure to stop by at **A Taste of Olive** for the freshest **selection of extra virgin olive oils** and gourmet goods from artisans around the world. They also offer a wide variety of traditional and flavored premium **balsamic vinegars** imported from the finest artisans. The shop's walls are lined with large, stainless-steel drums known as "fustis," which preserve and dispense a great variety of unique oil and vinegar flavors. Choose from exquisite extra virgin **olive oils, featuring popular flavors like blood orange, bacon, garlic,** and capers. Don't miss their unique **balsamic vinegars, with delightful flavors ranging from bourbon maple to dark chocolate** and cranberry pear.



Clockwise from left to right: A taste of Olive; Kilwin's; and Eclat Chocolates

Éclat Chocolate, established in 2005 by chocolate maker **Christopher Curtin**, is definitely one of the best chocolate brands in America. Curtin's journey took him around the world to refine his craft, drawing inspiration and techniques from chocolate-making traditions in Belgium, Switzerland, Japan, France, and Germany, as well as local inspirations. Éclat's **signature Mondiants** offer a modern twist on the classic mendiante, featuring a delicate filling wrapped in a thin layer of sustainably sourced chocolate. The shop also offers exquisite gift sets, including **bourbon pecan cubes** and hand-painted chocolate hearts in **flavors like rose tea, blueberry lavender, and smoked cinnamon orange**.

Since 1947, **Kilwin's** has been crafting high-quality confections using traditional techniques. With over 75 products made by hand in the store, Kilwin's offers a delightful array of clusters, bark, turtles, truffles, and more. Don't miss their signature **homemade ice cream and gourmet ice cream cakes**—they're simply irresistible!



Baldwin's Book Barn. Photo © Ritika Basu for Travel and Food Network

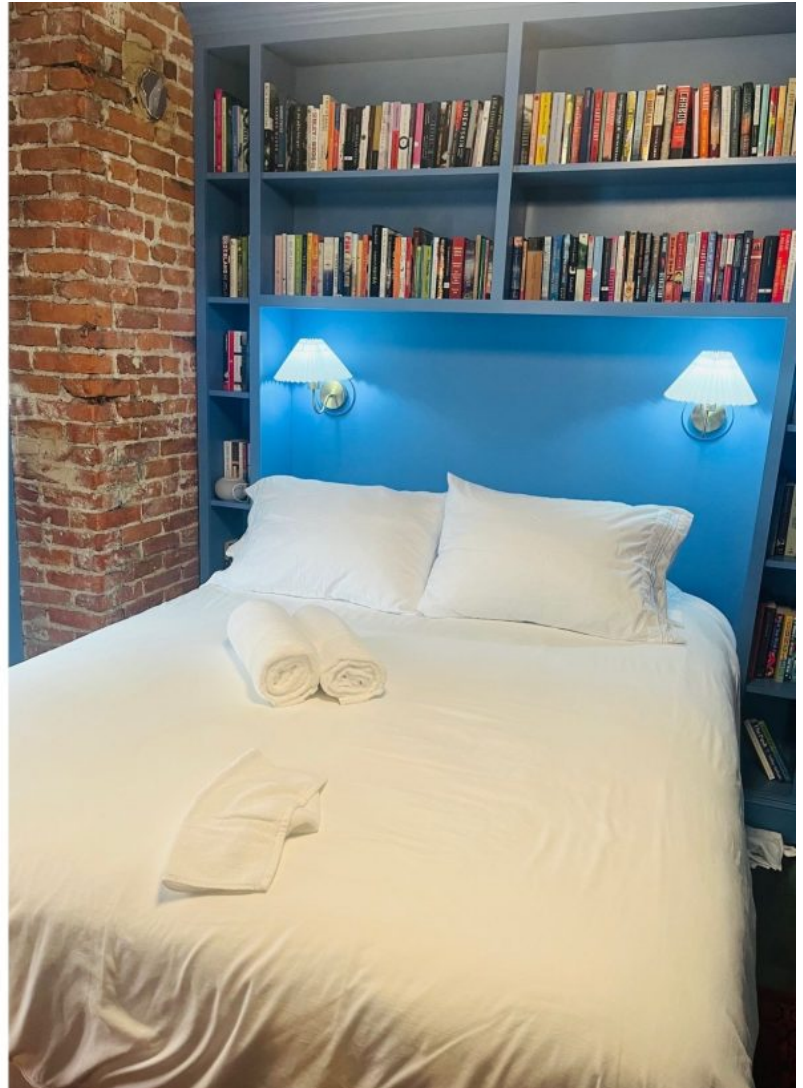
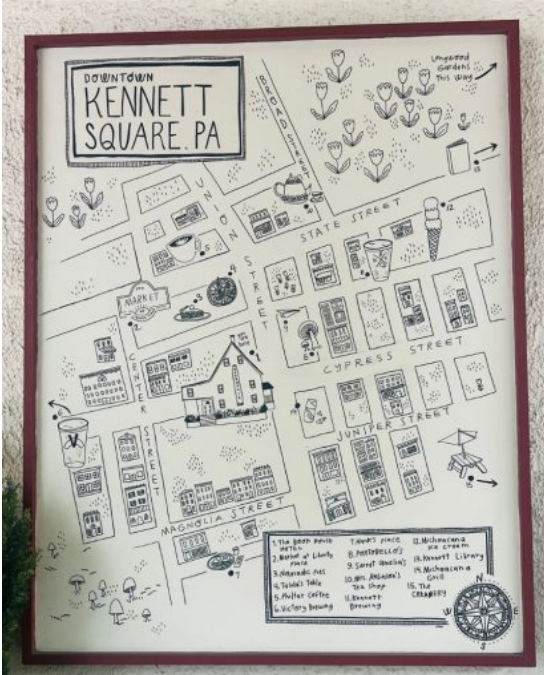
Before leaving Chester County, don't miss a pitstop at **Baldwin's Book Barn**. This unique bookstore specializes in used and rare books and is housed in a historic five-story dairy barn built in 1822 just outside West Chester, Pennsylvania. The bookstore, with its cozy nooks, stone walls, inviting atmosphere, wood-burning stove, and shelves brimming with over **300,000 books, maps, and prints**—some even dating back to the 1800s—feels like a journey back in time to a different century.

WHERE TO STAY

In Brandywine Valley, visitors have a range of accommodation options that blend comfort with charm. Some hotels offer packages that include tickets to Longwood Gardens.

A 10-minute drive from Longwood Gardens, **Fairfield by Marriott in Kennett Square** offers a special Longwood Gardens package that includes two adult general admission tickets and a complimentary breakfast.

Nestled in the heart of downtown **Kennett Square** – close to excellent dining and shopping options, **The Bookhouse Hotel** is a fascinating 4-room boutique hotel located in a former bookstore. With over 5,000 books, it is a haven for book lovers and anyone seeking a cozy place to unwind. Guests can also purchase Longwood Gardens tickets at a discounted rate.



The Bookhouse Hotel. Photo © Ritika Basu for Travel and Food Network

Opened in 1930 as the Warner Theater, the **Hotel Warner** in **West Chester** seamlessly blends historic charm with modern comforts. Located just steps away from eclectic shops, restaurants, sidewalk cafes, and museums, the Hotel Warner is also conveniently close to the Brandywine River, Valley Forge, Philadelphia, and Lancaster.

Hotel Indigo by IHG is coming soon to **West Chester**. This six-floor boutique hotel will offer everything you need, including meeting rooms, a fitness center, restaurants, bakeries, and wine tasting rooms all within the blocks of the hotel. The hotel is now accepting reservations for arrivals on or after March 4, 2025.

Stretching through southern Chester County and northern Delaware, Brandywine Valley near Philadelphia is a year-round destination perfect for both day trips and multi-day visits, with its wide array of museums, outdoor activities, gardens, and restaurants.

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