

# Itinerary

## Tis' the Season

*From Thanksgiving through the New Year, Greater Wilmington, Delaware Sines with the Spirit of the Holidays*

By: Pam George

To get into the holiday spirit, all you need to do is visit the Greater Wilmington area, where cultural attractions, performing arts venues and shopping meccas pull out all the stops each season. A weekend tour of the Brandywine Valley's most iconic sites is a good way to soak in the local traditions. (Note that some venues require reservations and timed tickets) Depending on your schedule and ticket availability, here are some must-do activities, along with a few dining and shopping venues that are located close to each one.

### See a Show

Now joined under one umbrella, **The Grand Opera House** and **The Playhouse** in the **Hotel du Pont** are known for impressive architecture and nationally and internationally known performers. These longstanding venues offer a roster of seasonally themed shows, including "The Nutcracker" ballet performances, musicians who pay homage to the holidays and family-friendly musicals.

**Dining:** A meal, particularly Sunday brunch, in the Hotel du Pont's **Green Room** is a ritual for many local families around the holidays. You might not recognize the movers and shakers around you, but you'll be dining in a room that's hosted actress Rosalind Russell and Julia Child. Pocket a few macaroons to nibble on later. The hotel is known for them.



If you're going to The Grand and want a casual bite with a brew, consider **Chelsea Tavern**, which by the holidays might have a new neighbor, **Stitch House Brewery**—both are locally owned. Or, walk a few blocks to one of the many restaurants on lower Market Street, including **La Fia** and **Cocina Lolo**, owned by Bryan and Andrea Sikora. A few blocks up from The Playhouse, you have your pick. **Tonic** is best known for steaks, while **Washington Street Ale House** is the place for burgers at the bar. For sushi, try **Mikimotos Asian Grill**, and if you love wine, you'll love **Domaine Hudson**, where James Beard-nominated Dwain Kalup rules over the kitchen.

**Shopping:** Market Street includes several landmark shops, including **A.R. Morris Jewelers**. A quick ride from Market Street, Trolley Square is home to independent boutiques. (If you want a quick bite in Trolley, check out the original **El Diablo**, a burrito-centric quick-casual restaurant, or **Opa! Opa!** for a gyro to go.)

## Light up your season at Longwood Gardens

One of the season's most eye-popping spectacles, **A Longwood Christmas** showcases the horticultural gem's floral displays, which once a year include winterberry, winter-flowering begonias, tulips, amaryllis, narcissus, cyclamen, snapdragons and, of course, thousands of scarlet poinsettias. Guests often gasp when they enter the Music Room, which traditionally suits a theme, such as a country gentleman's retreat.



Wander inside the 4.5-acre conservatory, where the theme continues. However, the wonder extends beyond the towering glass walls. There are more 500,000 outdoor lights. In addition, entertainment includes choral, harp and bell concerts, as well as sing-a-longs beside the famous pipe organ.

**Dining:** Many people elect to dine on site in the full-service **1906** restaurant or the casual cafeteria. If you prefer to eat before or after your visit, try the new **Hearth Kitchen**, which specializes in handcrafted pizza and homemade pasta dishes. It's also owned by the Sikoras, who've experienced success in downtown Wilmington. For craft beer, go next door to **Two Stones Pub**'s Kennett Square location. You could also head into Kennett where **Grain Craft Bar + Kitchen** recently opened its second location. (The first is in Newark, Delaware.)

**Shopping:** Longwood has a well-stocked gift shop, and Kennett Square is a small town with independent boutiques. From Kennett, the stores in Hockessin are easily reachable. One favorite, **Everything but the Kitchen Sink**, carries the perfect items for the cook on your list, while another, **Wild Birds Unlimited**, sells gifts for bird enthusiasts.

## Go back in time at Hagley Museum and Library

The birthplace of the DuPont Co., **Hagley** is acclaimed for its demonstration of 19th-century life, and the holidays offer an ideal time to peer into the past. The du Ponts' first family home, Eleutherian Mills, built in 1803, is decorated for the season. Five generations have left their mark on the Georgian-style house, which contains furniture from the Empire, Federal and Victorian periods. The home's last du Pont resident, Louise du Pont Crowninshield, leaned toward Colonial Revival style. The holiday theme changes each year, but it often pays tribute to the family's French roots and its early days in America.



**Dining:** Since Hagley is on the edge of Wilmington, you have a wealth of options, including **Krazy Kats** in the **Inn at Montchanin Village**, located in a former blacksmith's shop. One of area residents' favorite artisanal pizza restaurants, **Pizza by Elizabeths**, is nearby, as is **Columbus Inn**, a locals' favorite for six decades. The clubby bar is perfect for happy hour. Another popular eatery, **Eclipse Bistro**, has maintained its preferred status since 1996.

**Shopping:** Hagley is within walking distance of four Greenville shopping centers that cater to discerning customers. Ask the staff at **Janssen's Market** to create a custom goodies basket for the foodie in your life. Brighten a friend or relative's holiday with the lipsticks and cosmetics from **Houpette**. Personalize a gift at **Pink Turtle**, where monogrammed items are the store's signature items. (Look at the Savannah-Strong line of merchandise, named for co-owner Carey Pauley's, whose daughter died of cancer at 10. Partial proceeds go to efforts to fight pediatric cancer.)

## See how the du Ponts lived at Winterthur Museum

Known for its collection of 85,000 American antiques, **Winterthur** is among Delaware's premier destinations. During **Yuletide at Winterthur**, select rooms in Henry Francis du Pont's former home are repositories for past and present traditions, which are detailed by docents during guided tours. Many are decorated to demonstrate how the family celebrated the holidays. Look for a colossal tree in seemingly every room on the tour—one more beautiful than the next. Keep watch for the dried flower tree, a tradition since 1985.

**Dining:** There is a small café near the house and a larger cafeteria in the welcome center. Winterthur is not far from the **Centreville Café** for lattes and other coffee drinks, breakfast items, sandwiches and salads. It's also near **Buckley's Tavern**, which is a fixture for locals.

Chef Tom Hannum cut his teeth at the Hotel du Pont, but Buckley's is far from fussy. The menu mines comfort food for inspiration. The chicken pot pie and burger are big hits.

**Shopping:** Visit one or both gift shops at Winterthur. Then take the back roads—which dip and wind through the rolling landscape—to Route 202, locally known as Concord Pike. There are plenty of well-known stores between the state line and I-95, as well as the **Concord Mall**.

## Experience a Chadds Ford Christmas

The **Brandywine River Museum of Art** in Chadds Ford is part of the Brandywine Conservancy, which has been instrumental in permanently protecting more than 40,000 acres of land. The relationship is celebrated during the holidays, when the museum displays trees decorated with ornaments made from natural materials, including pine cones, teasel and milkweed pods. The ornaments are also available for sale.

Children and adults will have difficulty leaving the toy train exhibit. Shiny silver and gold trains chug around the track, creating a delightful cacophony. The sleek engines streak past miniature neon signs and, one year, a tiny drive-in theater complete with real movies and teeny speaker boxes for car windows.

The museum, meanwhile, is a repository for work by three generations of Wyeth artists, so make time to explore the galleries

**Dining:** There's a lovely café on site with a view of the Brandywine River. Nearby is the locals' haunt, **Hank's Place**, and **Brandywine Prime Seafood & Chops @ Chadds Ford Inn**. (Both were stops for Andrew Wyeth.) In between, you'll find **Antica**, an Italian BYO, and **Agave**, a Mexican BYO.

**Shopping:** The museum has a gift shop with prints, books and jewelry. It's not far from the **Shoppes at Brinton Lake** (Anthropologie, Pottery Barn, J. Crew). For totally tax-free shopping, head back into Delaware.



## Explore the Historic Houses of Odessa

Located just south of Wilmington, **Odessa** was once a bustling port town, which was originally named Cantwell's Bridge. But with the railroad's arrival, it fell on hard times. Philanthropist H. Rodney Sharp in 1938 purchased the circa-1774 Corbit House and then moved the circa-1700 Collins-Sharp House to Odessa. He also owned Corbit-Sharp House and The Brick Hotel — which opened in 1823 as Cantwell's Bridge Hotel. Sharp or his family gave all the buildings to Winterthur, which received the Wilson-Warner House in 1969 from the David Wilson Mansion Inc. Today, the collection is independently operated Historic Odessa Foundation. In all, the foundation has six structures.

Since 1987, the staff and volunteers have organized **Christmas in Odessa**, which has a different theme each year. The roster of activities during the holidays often includes cooking demonstrations, a children's tea and candlelight tours.

**Dining:** **Cantwell's Tavern**, located on the historic houses campus, is owned by the same hospitality group that operates the **Deer Park Tavern** in Newark. The charming dining rooms in Cantwell's retain a Colonial flair, but the menu has a modern slant. Selections include wood-fired flatbreads and pizzas, sandwiches and entrees. For local flavor, get a crab cake sandwich or entrée.

In nearby Middletown, **1861** is a gastro pub with grilled pizzas and eclectic burgers, including the smoked turkey burger with goat cheese, pork belly and grape chutney, as well as the traditional version. **Metro Pub & Grill** is also celebrated for its burgers.

**Shopping:** On the way to Odessa, you could take a detour to **Christiana Mall** and its surrounding shopping centers, which is a paradise for diehard holiday shoppers. The mall draws over 20-million visitors each year.

The Historic Houses of Odessa complex is minutes from Middletown, which has a Main Street-esque downtown—there really is a Main Street—as well as shopping centers. For kids, visit **First & Little**, a clothing boutique. Don't forget to pick up a seasonally flavored cupcake at **Half Baked Patisserie**.

About the author: Pam George is a food and travel writer who's written six books on Delaware history, dining, and Delaware-based businesses. In addition, her work has appeared in *Forbes*, *Fortune* and *US Airways Magazine*. A University of Delaware graduate, she lives with her husband and two dogs in North Wilmington and Lewes.

