



Year-round Excitement in Victorian Bellefonte

It's impossible to visit Bellefonte without being charmed by the town's impressive two centuries of architecture. More than 300 buildings in the National Register of Historic Places remain frozen in time to remind the future of its past. Among them are many lovingly restored homes that welcome overnight guests to bed and breakfast hospitality, where innkeepers offer expert suggestions on what not to miss during visits.

Major events attract folks from miles around, beginning in April when thousands upon thousands of daffodils burst forth in a blaze of yellow trumpets as if to announce the opening of trout season in the area's sparkling mountain streams.

Each May the town celebrates its 18-million-gallon source of pure water with a Big Spring Festival, a family event showcasing children's activities, rides on the Bellefonte Historical Railroad, music at the Gazebo and restocking of the stream with hundreds of trout.

Families also love the Children's Fair in June with its pony rides, face painting, games, stories and crafts for the kids and the adults they bring along.

Warm weather offers the perfect opportunity for window-shopping along shaded downtown streets or for an adventuresome crack at kayaking or canoeing on Spring Creek, where brisk waters attract Olympic paddlers to Bellefonte's waterfront district.

Sailboats and motorboats dot the lake at nearby Bald Eagle State Park, while families enjoy its sandy beach and swimming area. Cyclists are attracted too. They can take their pick of leisurely valley routes or challenging mountain adventures.

Classic and antique cars converge for Father's Day weekend's Bellefonte Cruise & Car Show. From its sock hop to stereo competition to cruisin' the town to see and be seen, this event keeps the downtown buzzing. Later in the month, a quieter group gathers for the Bellefonte Garden Club's tour of beautiful gardens in bloom.

Flight scenes in *The Thomas Crowne Affair* were filmed at nearby Ridge Soaring Gliderport where you can experience a breathtaking view of the valley and mountains. Ideal air currents make it possible for anyone to experience this sport.

On summer Sundays, music lovers carry picnics and lawn chairs to Talleyrand Park for concerts at the Gazebo, ranging from Dixieland to classic rock. Then in August the park hosts a tournament of vintage croquet.

Summer also brings more than 100 artists and craftspeople downtown to display and sell their creations at the Bellefonte Arts & Crafts Fair. Against the backdrop of historic architecture, thousands of residents and visitors shop for crafts, feast on festival yummys and relax to the sounds of live entertainment.

Lamplighter tours in October feature costumed guides who conduct walking tours of historic Bellefonte, sharing a ghost story or two along the way. The Bellefonte Historical Railroad takes autumn riders on special excursions to view fall foliage in nearby valleys. In December, Bellefonte's Victorian Christmas celebrates 19th Century holiday traditions. This three-day celebration of yesteryear attracts visitors from near and far for its carriage rides, craft show, children's tea party and candlelight homes tours.

During winter months, enough snow blankets the area (an average annual 45 inches) to allow for such winter pleasures as cross-country skiing and tobogganing at Bald Eagle State Park, or downhill skiing at Tussey Mountain Resort. Temperatures range in the 30s throughout the winter, meaning it's not too cold for walking to museums or the National Register Historic District. And it may be brisk enough to savor a cup of hot chocolate by the fireside at a cozy bed and breakfast.

All year around, visitors enjoy Bellefonte's many special restaurants. The dining is gourmet at the historic Gamble Mill, which received the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence in 2003-05, and whose gallery displays the works of local artists. Casual Asian cuisine distinguishes the Bellefonte Wok. Classic submarine sandwiches are the fare at Bonfatto's downtown, while a more elaborate Italian menu is featured at its suburban location. Also offering fine Italian dining along with nouveau- cuisine is La Bella Trattoria, where after-dinner entertainment can include a first-run film upstairs at the restored Garman Opera House. The specialties at Schnitzel's are German and may be served either inside the restored Bush House restaurant or outdoors on the terrace overlooking Spring Creek's burbling stream.

For do-it-yourselfers, homegrown and homemade foods are offered at the Farmers' Market downtown on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

In addition to exploring Bellefonte, visitors can use the town as headquarters to expand their excursions into surrounding areas. Penn State's University Park campus is next door in State College, offering theater, music, museums and legendary football tailgating. Just over the mountain are Penns Valley and Brush Valley, where you can share the road with horse-drawn Amish buggies as you drive by the old-fashioned farms of these "Plain People." A drive through these valleys is one of the most scenic in any season. The county is home to two public caves that offer underground tours, one of them by boat. Centre County also boasts six state parks for swimming, boating, hiking and fishing.

Whatever the season, Bellefonte is a fascinating place for getting away from it all.