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[Home](#) > [Travel](#) > [National](#)

The Valley Forge area is a prime site for recreational activities



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Birds aren't the only creatures you'll see flying through the treetops in Spring Mount, Pa.

Just west of downtown Philadelphia, this small town in Montgomery County is home to Spring Mountain Adventures, which offers treetop canopy tours. The county is one of only a handful of places in the U.S. that offer this type of activity.

The tours consist of a series of zip lines, rope bridges and challenges such as rappelling from a platform. These excursions are not for the faint of heart; they keep you high off the ground with nothing but a harness, steel rings that fasten the ropes and cables.

The tranquil natural beauty of the Valley Forge area and Montgomery County make them a prime site for all types of recreational activities, everything from biking and horseback riding to fishing and golfing.

Sarah Eichorn moved to the Valley Forge/Montgomery County area after she started cycling and kayaking. She lives along the Schuylkill River Trail, a 22-mile trail that runs from Valley Forge down to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

"Valley Forge is very pastoral," she said. "It has lots of rolling hills, streams and wonderful places to walk and bike. You can bring your own bike or you can rent one. It's a great way to spend a day."

The 3,500 acres in Valley Forge National Historical Park, known to most as the site of George Washington's winter encampment of 1777-78, include 6 miles of paved trails. Just north of Valley Forge is the 19-mile Perkiomen Trail and the 3,400-acre Green Lane Park, which has several large bodies of water as well as a number of creeks and streams where fly fishing is encouraged. Wintertime activities include ice skating, cross-country skiing, sledding and ice fishing.

Golf is yet another prevalent activity in Montgomery County with nearly 70 public and private courses, including the Blue Bell Country Club adjacent to the Normandy Farm Hotel and Conference Center. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Normandy Farm Hotel first started as a gentleman's estate. The Manor House, built 200 years ago, is the oldest building on the property. The hotel's restaurant is headed by celebrity chef Jim Coleman, host of the radio show "A Chef's Table" on National Public Radio.

Montgomery County also houses the largest retail shopping mall on the East Coast, King of Prussia Mall, which has nearly 400 stores and restaurants. If you go, be prepared for a hike.

Chester County, which sits west of Philadelphia, is only a short drive away and includes attractions such as the home-shopping institution QVC and Chaddsford Winery, the largest winery in Pennsylvania.

Located near the town of West Chester, QVC offers guided walking tours at its broadcast facility seven days a week. The tour ends with a stop in the studio store where you can pick up many of the items you see on the show. Tour tickets are \$7.50 per adult.

Janet Bauer lives in Chester County not far from West Chester. Two of her favorite stops are The Lincoln Room, a tea and sandwich shop housed in a circa-1833 building, and Carlino's Market, a bustling family market with everything from sandwiches and homemade specialties to desserts.

"The Lincoln Room is warm and cozy," Bauer said. "It has a great atmosphere. Carlino's is just a fun spot to wander through. It has great cheeses and prepared foods."

Other unique shopping options include A Taste of Olive, where you can sample a variety of olive oils and balsamic vinegars, and Eclat Chocolate, filled with creations by the store's master chocolatier, Christopher Curtin.

"Eclat is a great spot," Bauer said. "During the holidays I get chocolate turkeys. I give them as gifts."

All of the culinary experiences in Chester County are featured in the Brandywine Valley Culinary Camp, a three-day, two-night camp that includes meetings with chefs, restaurateurs and the wine makers at Chaddsford Winery. The camp will be held July 16-18 this year.

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