



5 perfect days in the Hudson Valley

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The Hudson Valley is many different things to many different people. This is not surprising. It does, after all, occupy a rather sizeable chunk of real estate, stretching 150 miles north of the city to that magical place they call Albany. To truly get a handle on the region, you need to do a ton of exploring.

In some places it is a diamond in the rough; in others — where man hasn't gotten his grubby paws on nature — it is drop-dead gorgeous. In the long run, nearly all of it is worth a visit.

Understanding that not everyone has a ton of time to wander around looking for the good stuff, here are five great Hudson Valley days that highlight very different (and rather special) corners of one of the country's most intriguing places. This is not an inclusive list, by any means. It is a list of very good things, all time-tested, in some cases, over and over again. Please enjoy.

#1 AS GOOD AS IT GETS Located not far from the increasingly Hampton-ish village of Rhinebeck, **Bard College** is not only one of the nerdiest little liberal arts institutions in existence, it is also a showcase of appealing architecture spanning more than 100 years, clustered along the northern end of one of the Hudson Valley's most scenic back roads. Weekends, the best reason to be here is a show at the Frank Gehry-designed **Fisher Performing Arts Center**, a mini-Disney Hall in the middle of a quiet field. The stage is lit all through October; expect performances by the American Ballet Theater and American Symphony Orchestra (both call Fisher home base, college president Leon Botstein conducts the Orchestra), as well as Conservatory Sundays, concerts by the faculty and staff of the music school. Tickets start at \$20 and \$25, depending on the event (bard.edu). Before or after the show, hike the 1.5 miles of trail at **Poet's Walk Park**, just down River Road from the college campus. These pastoral estate lands are maintained by Scenic Hudson, a major force for preservation and

park building in the valley; trails lead you through fields, forest and ultimately down to the Hudson River for excellent views of the Catskill Mountains (scenichudson.org). Hungry? Even if you're not, make a stop at the **Montgomery Place Orchards** farm stand, over on Route 9G. This isn't just another farm stand; these orchards, on and around the grounds of River Road's historic Montgomery Place mansion, are part of the revival of many antique apple varieties that had been all but lost to the history books. Simply: These aren't apples as usual. The stand is one of the best in the valley for its carefully curated mix of local products, including vegetables from other nearby farms. Don't forget to grab a mason jar of the house hard cider, produced just around the corner (mporchards.com). For dinner, head around the corner to Tivoli, a sleepy village where Bard students and old-school locals and boldfacers like Jann Wenner and Natalie Merchant mix and mingle. **Panzur**, a terrific Spanish joint, isn't the best-known restaurant in town, but it ought to be. Saturdays, they do dinners, Sundays, stop in for cocktails and charcuterie and other nibbles. Either day, be social and sit at the bar; the staff is great (panzur.com).

#2 WINE + CHEESE + THE TACONIC Could the Hudson Valley ever end up giving Northern California a run for its money in the wine and food production department? Not really. But what the valley might lack in weather and output, it definitely makes up for in atmosphere. We're truly not far off from parts of the region morphing into the likes of California's Sonoma County — cute in some places, refreshingly workaday in others, but always pleasant and scenic and full of people who are escaping big cities nearby both as residents and visitors. Not that there's no good wine or cheese, because there is. For best results, stay east of the river — start at **Millbrook Winery**, where the grounds and onsite café are half the fun (millbrookwine.com). Next, head over to **Sprout Creek Farm**, out on the east side of Poughkeepsie. This not-for-profit organization with years of experience specializes in raw cheeses of all ages and types; their aged, nutty Ouray is becoming a staple at parties and getting some nice national attention, too (sproutcreekfarm.org). Next, head up the parkway to Columbia County, where it's all about the **Hudson-Chatham Winery**, which even the biggest snobs will admit shows real promise (hudson-chathamwinery.com). Nearby, pop by the mothership of the no-introduction-needed **Old Chatham Shepherding Company**; visitors are welcome to come say thanks to the sheep for those awesome cheeses that are available in nearly every good grocery store in the city these days. A small stand on property is a good place to stock up (blacksheepcheese.com). Don't fill up on cheese, though — before you head home, you need to stop in for a civilized dinner at **The Red Devon**, tucked away in the wonderful little village of Bangall. Chef Sara Lukasiewicz has gotten great notices for her Valley-influenced menu (reddevonrestaurant.com).

#3 BEYOND THE GATES Hyde Park, as a realtor would say, does not show well. Back in the old days, when Franklin Delano and Eleanor (ask not who) used to live here, down the street from the Vanderbilt clan; back when the Culinary Institute of America first set up shop on its very nice spot up above the river — things were nicer then. Back then, people had class. Then came along a bunch of shortsighted fools, who decided to suburbanize the joint, turning a quiet river village with a serious pedigree into a crappy exurb. Don't let the terrorists win, though: Hyde Park's ugly is only skin-deep. Get behind the town's many gates and you'll see. The impressive **Roosevelt lands** are where you start. This isn't just an old house tour; there are more than 10 miles of beautiful trail that link the riverfront property up to Val-Kill; it's all under the supervision of the National Park Service, meaning it always looks absolutely gorgeous. There's a pleasing diversity of terrain, too — the riverfront cove, marshlands, hills, fields, creeks, deep forest — you could get lost in here for more than a day (nps.gov/hofr). For an impressive bit of contrast, next make a stop at the **Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site**. Where the Roosevelt trails are all about wandering and enjoying nature, everything here seems rather rigid. Still, the river views from the bluff-top mansion (and further down the bluff, on the north side of the property) are epic. Skip the house tour, unless you want to be reminded of the fact that money can't buy people taste (nps.gov/vama). If you are lucky enough to be up here on a weekday — and you really should make that happen — make like a future celeb chef and dine at the **Apple Pie Café**, the most casual — and one of the best — restaurant on the pristine Culinary Institute of America property, also located along the river; the buzz is fantastic and the food is one of the best lunches in the valley. Unlike at the other restaurants on property, nobody will notice or care if you look like you just wandered in from a day of hiking (ciachef.edu).

#4 UP IN THE SKY Located atop the iconic Shawangunk Ridge, just west of the busy college town of New Paltz, **Mohonk** is easily one of the state's greatest places. If you've just crawled out from under a rock: Mohonk is a carefully maintained private preserve, surrounding a historic mountain house hotel with grounds of its own that show like some sort of manicured Magic Kingdom for outdoor enthusiasts. Explore the trails, do the rock scrambles, climb up the Skytop Tower and hang around beautiful Mohonk Lake; for best results, book breakfast or lunch at the hotel in advance — the cost (starting at \$35 for breakfast) isn't insignificant, but considering you pay \$25 on weekends to access the resort grounds, it starts making more sense. (Before or after your meal, you've got free rein of the property.) On a budget? Hit one of the **Mohonk Preserve** lots — access is \$12 per person — and hike the couple of miles (give or take, depending on which lot you use, all of them lead you on to beautiful trails, details at mohonkpreserve.org) up to the Mountain House. And while those without meal

reservations really shouldn't be sneaking around the hotel, and if they do go inside, they certainly should not be making their way to the very pleasant tavern tucked away on the ground floor for a civilized cocktail, well-behaved rule-breakers will likely have no trouble at all. Or so we've heard, from people who are not us who have done such terrible things (mohonk.com).

#5 THE SLEEPER AWAKES If it had a train station, you would have been there by now, but if it had a train station, **Kingston** would also probably not look like it does today, which is to say, much like it has looked for a very long time. This modestly sized and very old mid-Hudson Valley city has been passed by in many ways; it's been out of fashion so long that its retro appeal is now working for it instead of against it. Absolutely stunning stone and Victorian homes line blocks that are starting to catch on with a more cosmopolitan crowd. Your first — and some might say only — stop should be the **Stockade District**, which has roots going back to the 1660s. Here, the handsome **Old Dutch Church** — built from the local bluestone — makes a nice backdrop for the city's pleasant Saturday farmers market; nosh your way through and chat up the locals. What next? You're in Kingston, a town that's never far from nature — hardly surprising, when you consider the city limits on the western side border the vast wilds of **Catskill Park**. Today though, it's all about the Hudson Valley end of things; head out the back side of town, over the **Rondout River** and down Union Center Road, which runs through the **Marlboro Mountains**, a low-profile but very scenic area that contains the **Shaupeneak Ridge Preserve**. Here, approximately 800 feet above the Hudson River, 6 miles of trails on 700 acres offer everything from big valley views to a pleasant loop around **Louisa Pond**, which looks even nicer than usual in the fall, with everything around it turning color (scenichudson.org). Just a few minutes' drive and you're back in town; here, the **Stockade Tavern** — located across from the old **Senate House**, briefly the seat of state government during a little kerfuffle we now know as the Revolutionary War — is a particularly good cocktail bar; its existence and success is a testament to just how quickly the area is changing, as moribund neighborhoods and nearby villages soak up an increasing number of city refugees who like nature and quiet but also appear to enjoy heading out once in awhile for smart beverages in a hipster-chic setting (stockadetavern.com). Speaking of things you would not expect to find in a town of this size, around the corner on North Front Street you will find **Boitson's**, an urbane little hangout run by a Blue Ribbon refugee and not a little bit similar to the West Village original. Expect oysters, fried chicken, good vegetarian options, conviviality, coziness. You should make a reservation on weekends (boitsons.com).

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