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Path of Petals

See beautiful quilt gardens and more along Indiana's Heritage Trail

BY KIT BERNARDI

The sun's warmth awakens the farmland from slumber, gently folding back the weighty blanket of mist. Morning birdsong accompanies the staccato clip-clop of horse-drawn buggies on rural country roads in northern Indiana.

Norman Lehman rose before the

sun to water the whirl of cobalt blue, gold and deep purple created by 3,000 plants growing in the garden outside his Amish shop, Dutch Country Market, near the town of Middlebury.

With stakes and string, he outlined the garden's intricate pattern with help from his family. Lehman's gardening tips: "Never put your plants to bed wet because it's an invitation to night-flying

insects and fungus. Weeds will stay down once the flowers grow together creating a beautiful, flowering blanket."

Visitors drive cross-country to stand on elevated viewing platforms like the one overlooking Lehman's garden illustrating the Dutch Mill pattern, a design sewn into American quilts for centuries. It's one of many meticulously designed gardens honoring Amish >



Nappanee



Middlebury



Elkhart

quilt-making traditions in Elkhart and LaGrange counties, about 115 miles east of Chicago.

From May 30 through Sept. 15, thousands arrive on tour buses and drive country roads threading through farmsteads and woodlands to view the quilt gardens, 16 giant beds with flowers and plants arranged in such a way to create what look like intricate quilt patterns. More than 1 million blooms in plots measuring from 800 to 3,400 square feet are tended by 200 volunteers who invest 2,000 hours to maintain them.

Quilt gardens are composed of all kinds of bedding plants — begonias,

impatiens, zinnias, petunias, marigolds, sweet potato vines, dusty miller, dichondra, curly parsley and coleus of all colors and leaf shapes. Patterns span centuries of quilt design dating to the late 1800s. The works of art have names, and some are nods to the region's history and environs, like Box Car, Sweet Apples, Cornflower and Canoe Crossing.

Planning quilt gardens is a yearlong process overseen by a committee of skilled volunteers. Project manager Sonya Nash of the Elkhart County



For more information on the quilt gardens and communities along the Heritage Trail, visit visitelkhartcounty.com.

Convention and Visitors Bureau has directed the quilt gardens since its beginnings 15 years ago. A native of Nappanee, Ind., and certified master gardener, Nash says, "Quilt gardens express in beautiful plants the region's rich history, artisan heritage and our friendly communities' stories."

You can view all the quilt gardens on the scenic 90-mile Heritage Trail driving tour connecting the cities and towns of Elkhart, Bristol, Middlebury, Shippshewana, Goshen, Nappanee and Wakarusa. >

It's possible to see all of them during a full day. But, take a cue from the Amish buggies: Slow your pace and take time to sample the region's farm-to-table dining, shops, craftsman workshops, breweries, boating and biking. Here are some highlights along the route:

ELKHART

Elkhart, the largest city in the region, is centered around the Elkhart and St. Joseph rivers.

Tour the 1848 home of city founder Havilah Beardsley. See the 1910 Ruthmere Museum, the Beaux Arts mansion of Albert Beardsley, site of a quilt garden. Nearby at Wellfield Gardens, view the showy, contemporary quilt-patterned Peace Flower garden. Wellfield's *Origami in the Garden* exhibition runs through October.

The Midwest Museum of American Art's collection includes Norman Rockwell illustrations. The 1924 Lerner Theatre, a former vaudeville palace, anchors Main Street. Dine at wine-centric restaurant The Vine, or at Artisan, a fine-dining restaurant with a contemporary craft cocktail bar.

Visit Elkhart's Recreational Vehicle/Manufactured Housing Hall of Fame, a testament to the town's status as the No. 1 manufacturer of trailers.

BRISTOL

Rivers and railroads shaped Elkhart County's history, as told at the Elkhart County Historical Museum in the tiny town of Bristol. Its quilt garden's name is Box Car, after an 1897 pattern. Today, outfitters lead canoe and kayaking trips on the St. Joseph River. While there, enjoy a community theater production at the 1897 Opera House and taste a variety of vino at Fruit Hills Winery & Orchard.

MIDDLEBURY

On this town's Amish farmsteads, horses graze in white-fenced pastures and clotheslines of laundry flap in the breeze. Hand-painted road signs advertise fresh foods for sale at farms and shops.

The largest quilt garden of 7,000 plants grows at Das Dutchman Essenhaus in a garden named Old Windmill. The family-style restaurant serves generous fried chicken platters and 30 varieties of pie. The complex also includes the Essenhaus Inn &

TIPS

Enjoy your visit to Amish communities:



► Businesses are closed on Sundays (Quilt Gardens are open).



► Many home-based businesses do not take credit or debit cards.



► Amish farmsteads are private residences. If roadside signs advertise goods, stop by during normal business hours.



► Be respectful of Amish people not wanting to have their pictures taken.

Conference Center.

At Krider World's Fair Garden, walk through an exact replica of the garden local Krider Nurseries displayed at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. Postage Stamp, another flourishing quilt garden, is within view of the twisting Pumpkinvine Nature Trail, a former railroad line. The 13-mile-long paved path connects Goshen, Middlebury and Shippshewana.

SHIPSHEWANA

Visit the Menno-Hof, home to one of Shippshewana's more popular quilt gardens. With a reservation, guests can tour the facility that helps tell the story of the Amish, Mennonites and Hutterites.

The family-owned Shippshewana Trading Place Auction & Flea Market, across the street from the Menno-Hof, holds a flea market every Tuesday and Wednesday (May through September). The Midwest's largest outdoor flea market has more than 700 vendors. Wednesday mornings bring the antique auction. Perched on ladders, the many auctioneers' loud, monotone drones sound like a giant beehive inside the hall packed with furniture, architectural remnants, paintings, vintage housewares and toys.

Orley Miller of Orley's Tours offers visitors a look at "the Amish groove of life today." Follow his lead to see how buggies are hand-built; talk with an Amish school teacher in a one-room schoolhouse; tour a furniture manufacturer and visit a clockmaker.

GOSHEN

Next up on the Heritage Trail: Goshen. A section of the route overlaps the Shippshewana Barn Quilt Trail, mapping out dozens of farmsteads' barns decorated with giant quilt-patterned murals.

Like quilt gardens, murals paint a picture of the region's history. A North Star mural adorns Meadow Brook Farm's restored, registered Indiana landmark barn built by Amish craftsmen in 1860. Kori Cripe and her husband, Tory, are third-generation owners of the farmstead, which hosts tours of its barns, granary, smokehouse and farmhouse. Kori Cripe's mom, Linda Garber, runs Meadow Brook's storytelling hours, sewing workshops and flower garden talks.

"We chose the North Star quilt pattern for our barn's mural because it helps tell >



Middlebury

Dutch Country
Market Garden

Shipshewana

the story of what was going on in this region during the Civil War period,” says Cripe, in reference to the celestial body that helped lead runaway slaves north toward free states.

The Elkhart River runs through Goshen, which has a quilt garden at its Greek Revival-style courthouse. Main Street’s restored, late-19th-century buildings look like a period film’s movie set. The spirited college town holds the RiverRun International Film Festival

May 6-16. Goshen Brewing Company’s leafy patio overlooks the river.

Interior designer Ann Graber Miller and husband Keith, a Goshen College professor of religion, co-own Found, which features a finely curated collection of midcentury-modern and international furniture, art and artifacts. “Some might find it surprising that our small town in the upper Midwest is very international, progressive and artsy,” Graber Miller says.

NAPPANEE & WAKARUSA

About 16 miles southwest of Goshen, Nappanee has two quilt gardens — one at the Nappanee Center, a community history museum, the other at The Barnes at Nappanee, a restaurant-theater complex. Finish up your Quilt Gardens tour in Wakarusa, where American flags wave from front porches and locals lovingly tend to the Windmill Star garden. ■

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS



Kit Bernardi is an award-winning travel writer and photographer. Her work has appeared in *Reveal*, *South China Morning Post* and other publications. She shares with readers her love of cooking and road tripping in stories on the quilt gardens of northern Indiana's Amish Country (**page 96**) and distinct foods of rugged Extremadura, Spain (**page 140**). "My favorite stories are about people whose cultural traditions and personal histories are deeply rooted in the land that sustains them."



Transporting readers to Sonoma County, Calif., and the natural wonders of the Caribbean was second nature for travel writer **Lisa Davis**. "Biking Sonoma County (**page 124**) is a great way to explore the area's vineyard-lined terrain," she says. "Hiking to the Caribbean's spectacular and thundering waterfalls (**page 142**) is one of my favorite things to do when island hopping." Davis also spoke with Barbara Bradley Baekgaard (**page 94**), creator of the Vera Bradley brand.



Erin Gifford has written about family travel, road trips and outdoor recreation for such outlets as *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Parents* and *Family Circle*. A Northern Virginia-based freelance writer, she was thrilled to explore the natural wonders tucked away deep in the southwest corner of her home state (**page 76**). An avid hiker and a new backpacker, she's eager to take her outdoor adventures to the next level this summer with a paddle-in camping trip to a private island (**page 34**).



Washington, D.C.-based travel writer **Kathryn Streeter** is lucky to be living in the heart of the nation's capital and able to regularly walk, run and cycle around the National Mall. She treasures each of D.C.'s "secret" gardens (**page 60**) and is delighted to share them with those who don't have a local friend to show them around. Philadelphia is right up the road, and Streeter is pumped to share the city through actress Lauren Ambrose's insider tips (**page 54**). "I can't wait for my next road trip to Philly!" says Streeter.



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