

# AUTUMN *Adventures*

The magnificent sights of fall in Connecticut make it the perfect time to indulge in a little wanderlust. Whether you're primed for a day trip or a weekend (or longer) getaway, embrace the spirit of exploration and build your journey around one of these four foliage-forward destinations right in our own backyard.

**BY BEKAH WRIGHT**

*Heublein Tower at  
Talcott Mountain  
State Park in  
Simsbury.*

**O**range, amber, fiery red, purple, bronze ... Connecticut's trees are awash in a magnificent array of colors this time of year. As the season is fleeting, total immersion is in order. With this in mind, here are four locations as magical as the foliage you'll find there.

Soak in the spectacular panoramas of these charming destinations, then make a day, or a weekend, out of it by exploring nearby attractions, including places to eat, shop, play and stay. What each site guarantees: fall's fireworks popping in all their glory.

ROMAN KHOMLYAK/GETTY IMAGES



One of our state's most spectacular structures, Gillette Castle is even more magical amid the colors of autumn.



MIDDLESEX COUNTY

# GILLETTE CASTLE STATE PARK

EAST HADDAM

Taking to the Connecticut River via the Chester-Hadlyme Ferry, aka *Selden III*, is a beloved way of enjoying fall foliage. The vessel, which turns 75 in 2024, runs April 1 through Nov. 30, providing ample opportunities to hop aboard and check out the kaleidoscope of colors reflecting off the water.

There's something else, too. Up on a clifftop, a castle lures with the promise of even more spectacular views. This is Gillette Castle, former home to actor William Gillette of *Sherlock Holmes* fame.

After five years of construction, Gillette completed the castle, named the Seventh Sister estate, in 1919. Renovations continued through 1926. Though tours inside the castle concluded for the season in September, make a mental note for a return after it reopens on May 27, as seeing Gillette's unique designs (the castle doors are remarkable works of art and engineering) gives excellent insight into the Hartford native's imagination.

The state purchased the 122-acre property in 1943 and opened it to the public as Gillette Castle State Park the following year. The drive to the park is lush with trees. Near the park entrance are many spots for lingering, including a lily pond.

Drawing closer to the castle, it's possible to spy remnants of Gillette's 3-mile-long, narrow-gauge railroad. Nearby, the railroad's "Grand Central Station" is still a gathering place. The railroad's route has lent itself to some excellent walking trails, along with some paths Gillette created that feature wooden trestles and stone-arch bridges. Two hikes to consider include a 2.2-mile easy loop leading to a river cove just right for skipping stones. There's also a .6-mile quick jaunt during which one encounters a rock wall with a tunnel.

Stroll to the cliff's edge to take in the fall's magnificence reflected on the Connecticut River below. Cutting its way across the gold and russets along the water—the Chester-Hadlyme Ferry.

67 River Road, East Haddam, 860-526-2336, [portal.ct.gov](http://portal.ct.gov)





### Brushmill by the Waterfall



### Where to eat

**Brushmill by the Waterfall:** Even the parking lot of this restaurant is picturesque. Trees sprinkle a colorful path of leaves en route to a bridge. Cross the bridge, and the presence of the waterfall will soon make itself known. As wonderful as it is to bask in the outdoor ambiance, there are fall vibes indoors, as well. Homage is paid to the venue's past with décor relaying the story of its history as a brushmill. Warming hands and hearts is a stone fireplace. In the kitchen, chef Joseph Roberto and chef de cuisine Adam Boyd are creating dishes with local farm ingredients. An autumnal entrée to order: the oven-roasted half-chicken with corn miso, guajillo sauce, jalapeño escabeche and queso-stuffed corno di toro peppers. 129 W. Main St., Chester, 860-526-9898, thebrushmill.com

**Higher Grounds:** This East Haddam coffee shop is fun, funky and has art displays and live music. Plus, the coffee, pastries and soups hit the spot. 32 Main St., East Haddam, 860-615-6112, facebook.com/HigherGroundsat32Main

**Whistle Stop Café:** A young lass named Maddie cooks up family breakfast and lunch specialties that have earned fans since the café's 1934 opening. Craving a vegan breakfast burrito? You're in luck. Also try a Happy Drink made with black cherry seltzer and a splash of cranberry black cherry juice. 32 Main St., Deep River, 860-526-4122, whistlestopcafe1.wixsite.com/whistlestop

**Two Wrasslin' Cats Coffee House & Café:** Standing out from nature's red, orange and yellow leaves are the bright blues and green of this

charming café that lets its stance on peace and inclusivity be known right off the bat. The breakfast and lunch menus are a tip of the hat to the resident cats (give them a "meow" while there). One item to consider: the grilled chicken Et Tu Bruno wrap. 374 Town St., East Haddam, 860-891-8446, twowrasslincats.com

### Two Wrasslin' Cats



FRANK DINARDI (BRUSHMILL) • BEKAH WRIGHT (TWO WRASSLIN' CATS)

**Machimoodus State Park:** The Salmon River deserves some admiration, too, and Machimoodus is a great park for taking in its glory. A trio of ponds shouldn't be overlooked, either. The 300-acre park has two recommended trails; one even lends itself to horseback riding. While taking in the colorful foliage, one might just spy an eagle or two in this popular birding area. 128 Leesville Road, Moodus, 860-526-2336, portal.ct.gov

**Devil's Hopyard State Park:** Visit the 860-acre park's official website, and these words will spur a hike, "Chapman Falls drops more than sixty feet over a series of steps in a Scotland Schist stone formation." Who can resist a trek to a waterfall? Especially one where pothole formations were once believed to be the work of a cranky devil. 366 Hopyard Road, East Haddam, 860-526-2336, portal.ct.gov

more foliage spots...



### Pandemonium

### Shopping

**Pandemonium:** Referring to Pandemonium as merely a thrift shop feels erroneous. After all, the massive, well-stocked shop has a charitable mission to help exotic animals. A favorite haunt here is Ella's. Grab coffee and a snack from this small café to enjoy in the adjoining brick-walled library. One of the resident cats (they're all named after rock stars) might just join you in this endeavor. Live music might also be underway. Explore the building, where everything from ephemera to vintage clothing awaits. 500 Main St., Deep River, 860-767-2889, pandemoniumrainforestproject.org

**Acoustic Music:** Lovers of acoustic instruments will find it easy to get lost amongst this collection of guitars, bass guitars, mandolins, banjos and ukuleles. There are even some museum items that aren't for sale. 4 Maple St., Chester, 203-458-8353, acousticmusic.org

**Amber & Lowell:** Fashion is at the forefront of this boutique that carries men's and women's clothing, along with jeans, specialty beauty items and candles. Just right for fall is the Gravenstein Apple & Clove handcrafted bar soap from Three Sisters Apothecary. 1 N. Main St., Chester, 480-335-4171, amberandlowell.com

**Atmosphere:** Glass artist Rob Wallace has garnered fans in Connecticut with his work that has been found

in Lyme's Arch One Glass, as well as The Space in Chester. He's just opened his own spot, where his freeform glasswork is available. He's also offering classes. Wallace is also showcasing artisans he collaborates with, including an animal driftwood artist, metal sculptor, oil painter and stone specialist. 51 Main St., Chester, 860-575-5033, myfireglobe.com

### Culture

**Goodspeed Musicals:** If you time it right, you can catch a show after leaving the castle property of William Gillette, one of Connecticut's great thespians of yesteryear. In fact, you'll pass right by the majestic Goodspeed Opera House just over the swing bridge as you make your way to and from the castle. In store at the Goodspeed is *The 12* through Oct. 29. Currently playing a short distance away at the Goodspeed's sister theater in Chester, The Terris, is *Private Jones*, which runs through Nov. 5. Goodspeed Musicals, 860-873-8668, goodspeed.org; Goodspeed Opera House, 6 Main St., East Haddam; The Terris Theatre, 33 N. Main St., Chester

### Overnights

**Getaway Machimoodus Cabins:** When exploring accommodation options, someplace in the woods seems in keeping with a fall-foliage outing. This one fits the bill. Located in Moodus, this 86-acre campground features 45 cabins

### Goodspeed Opera House



that take full advantage of the wooded views. There's a small dog park for off-leash time. A one-mile nature path meanders through the property. Promised: leaves aplenty! 298 East Haddam Moodus Road, Moodus, tinyurl.com/getawaymachimoodus

**Riverwind Inn Bed & Breakfast:** Drive up to this 1854-built, Federal-style inn, and a sigh escapes. All the trappings for a getaway are present, especially in outdoor seating areas that call for canoodling. Seven rooms are available for booking. A highlight is the daily breakfast. 209 Main St., Deep River, 860-526-2014, riverwindinn.com

### Getaway Machimoodus Cabins





# SLEEPING GIANT STATE PARK

**HAMDEN**

*The view from the top of Sleeping Giant extends for miles and includes the New Haven skyline and even the Sound on clear days.*



*The slumbering Giant, dressed in fall's colors.*

**I**t's easy to see why, in his wanderings, a giant might decide this would be a peaceful place for a nap. Hit upon certain locations in Hamden to spy this two-mile mountaintop sprawl resembling a slumbering behemoth. Better yet, head for Sleeping Giant State Park to explore acres and acres alight in leaves of red, orange and yellow.

There are more than 30 trails in the park. Popular among them is the Sleeping Giant Tower Trail. This easy-to-moderate, 3.1-mile, out-and-back hike leads to a four-story stone tower built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. From this 739-foot summit on Mount Carmel, it's possible to observe colorful foliage sprawling for miles. Is that New Haven in the distance? Long Island Sound? Yes, and yes.

For a moderately challenging hike, try the 1½-mile Nature Trail, a good option for families with its tidbits about the park's flora and fauna. A more difficult path is the three-quarter-mile Red Circle, which follows a gorgeous gorge with cascades and pools.

The most challenging hike — but also the most rewarding — is the 5.1-mile Blue Trail. At 5.1 miles, it traces the Giant from head to toe, offering sweeping vistas along the way. Expect some rock scrambles that might find pups asking to be carried.

200 Mt. Carmel Ave., Hamden,  
203-287-5658, [portal.ct.gov](http://portal.ct.gov)

COURTESY OF THE CONNECTICUT OFFICE OF TOURISM • PETER GHERLONE/SLEEPING GIANT PARK ASSOCIATION (INSET)



## Where to eat

**Ristorante Luce:** Luce's prix fixe menus (lunch \$24, dinner \$38) are an excellent deal. Expect appetizers like mussels and arancini, the Luce garden salad, and entrées ranging from gnocchi Bolognese to salmon puttanesca. I would be remiss if I didn't alert that there are tiles in the stalls of the women's restroom showcasing the face of a young Robert DeNiro. What better way to say 'Benvenuto!' 2987 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-407-8000, ristoranteluce.net

**Glenwood Drive-In:** One of Connecticut's venerable hot dog stands, Glenwood has been serving filling frankfurters, made-to-order burgers, hot-buttered lobster rolls and more roadfood favorites for nearly 70 years. The dogs come on toasted buns, and are available with loads of toppings (try the hot relish if you like a bit of kick). With booths inside and picnic tables outside, plus an attached ice cream shop, Kelly's Cone Connection, it hits the spot for a family meal. 2538 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-281-0604, glenwooddrivein.com

**Cantean Coffee & Tea:** An excellent way to kick off the day is with coffee, tea and fresh pastry from Norwalk's Wave Hills Breads, served by Cantean owner Sarah Borden. There's big love waiting for the furry set, too (order the Pup Cup). Not an early riser? Specialty sandwiches, soup and pizza are offered for lunch. 1660 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-745-3681, canteancoffeeandtea.com



**Ristorante Luce**

**MiKro Depot:** Lunch, dinner and beer are on tap at MiKro. Sipping a Slumbering Behemoth Maple Bourbon IPA on the outdoor patio beside the woods makes for fall foliage memories. Yes, there's panzanella, a white bean and quinoa burger, and pesto cavatelli, but after a trek through the woods, one word on the menu will stand out: Poutine. 0 Depot Ave., Hamden, 203-553-7676, mikrodepot.com

**Wentworth Homemade Ice Cream:** Get a scoop or three of your favorite flavors inside this charming yellow house and head to the grounds, where a gazebo and porch swings urge you to stay a while in the shadow of the Giant. 3697 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-281-7429, wentworthhomemadeicecream.com



**Wentworth Homemade Ice Cream**



**MiKro Depot**

BEKAH WRIGHT (LUCE, MIKRO) • COURTESY OF WENTWORTH ICE CREAM

**West Rock Ridge State Park:** Word is it's possible to see 200 square miles along this park's 23 trails to locations such as West Rock Ridge (400-foot elevation) and High Rock's South Summit (700-foot elevation). Be on the lookout for Lake Wintergreen, historic ruins, the Heroes Tunnel and Judges Cave. Feel like cycling or kayaking? The park is set up for those activities, too. 1134 Wintergreen Ave., New Haven, 860-424-3200, portal.ct.gov

**Wharton Brook State Park:** If looking for a more laidback outing that lends itself to a picnic under the trees, this 96-acre park just across Route 15 in North Haven, with its sandy knolls and woodlands, is the ticket. Five of those acres is the idyllic Allen Brook Pond that feeds into Wharton Brook. Established in 1918, some consider Wharton Brook State Park a precursor to state highway rest areas. 675 US-5, North Haven, 203-287-5658, portal.ct.gov



**Blue Dodo**

## Shopping

**Blue Dodo:** This unique home décor shop has treasures that speak to shoppers' personalities. It's as if owner Betsy DeMarco knew you'd need a classic white vase adorned with a pair of lips for your peonies. Make sure to peruse the outdoor sculpture offerings. Hiring DeMarco to create commissioned art or for her interior design services is also possible. 3547 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-535-0902, thebluedodo.com

**Bon Appetit:** If heading to Sleeping Giant for a hike, plan a stop in this Mount Carmel shop for gourmet picnic fare. To choose from: fresh-baked bread, decadent cheeses and chocolates from exotic locations. 2979 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-248-0648, bonappetitahamden.com

## Culture

**Best Video & Cultural Center:** Not only are there rooms and rooms of VHS and DVD selections, Best Video is also a space for cultural stimulation. Grab some joe, wine or beer from the Coffee Bar. Then catch a film, listen to an author reading on topics like ecology, theology and climate change, or groove to everything from punk rock to jug bands. 1842 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-287-9286, bestvideo.com

**Eli Whitney Museum and Workshop:** The museum is located where, in 1798, American inventor Eli Whitney constructed the U.S.'s first factory. And though there are permanent exhibits and three visiting exhibitions each year, the property speaks more to Whitney's ingenuity and serves as an experimental learning workshop. Walk-ins are welcome. Catch the Water Learning Lab before it closes for the season at the end of October. 915 Whitney Ave., Hamden, 203-777-1833, eliwhitney.org



**Best Video & Cultural Center**

## Overnight

**Wally's Log Cabin:** Where better to take advantage of the fall colors than from a log cabin on Sleeping Giant Mountain. Taking advantage of this view are two handcrafted decks, a patio and a firepit. The 1973-built cabin was lovingly restored by Walter Gardella in 2020. Indoor coziness comes via two fireplaces and nooks for settling in with a good book. The four-bedroom home accommodates up to seven. Need additional space? There's a new studio barn apartment above the property's event space. Mt. Carmel Avenue, Hamden, 203-722-4685, margardella11.wixsite.com/wallyslogcabin

## MAKE IT A CITY STAY

**Urban settings have ample fall foliage to admire, a perfect excuse for an overnight in neighboring New Haven. There's much to experience here, including culture, art, activities and dining. Foodies may want to spend an entire weekend just to partake in New Haven's pizza scene.**



**Hotel Marcel:** Fresh on the New Haven scene is the net-zero Hotel Marcel, named after its designer Marcel Breuer. Located in the former Pirelli Building, this Brutalist-style hotel is a looker and deserves admiration for its style and eco-friendly mission. The "levitating" structure has much to offer, including accommodations decked out in mid-century designs, curated art installations from local and emerging artists, and its restaurant BLDG, which serves New American cuisine. I'll have a Sustainabowl, please. 500 Sargent Drive, New Haven, 203-780-7800, hotelmarcel.com

**The Study at Yale:** This bespoke hotel graces guests with direct access to Yale University's museums, theaters, libraries and cultural centers. There's even the Aisling Gallery on-site, where works from student artists are on display. The Living Room is suited for some time in repose. There's no resisting the bookshelves stocked with selections from Strand Book Store. Grab something from the cafe here, or settle in for farm and coastal cuisine over breakfast, lunch and dinner at Heirloom. As for accommodations, they promise views. 1157 Chapel St., New Haven, 203-503-3900, thestudyatyale.com

more  
foliage  
spots...



# TALCOTT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

SIMSBURY

Whether from the ground below or the top of Talcott Mountain, the foliage views are something to behold.

**T**outed as having one of the best views of New England ablaze in fall colors, 557-acre Talcott Mountain State Park

has two trails — Yellow and Loop — ideal for hiking among the trees and happening upon cliff views. Oh, and both lead to the famous Heublein Tower atop the nearly 1,000-foot summit.

The steepness of the 2.8-mile Yellow Trail denotes forthcoming high-elevation views. Expect some rock climbing on this moderately challenging trek. Keep an eye out for owls sojourning in the trees.

Upon reaching the 1914-built tower, head inside to ascend 165 feet and gain more impressive views. Revel in Hartford and Farmington River Valley skylines from this landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There's a bit of romance attached to the tower's history. While hiking on Talcott Mountain, Gilbert Heublein, of A1 Steak Sauce and Smirnoff vodka fame, promised his fiancé he'd build a castle for her on the site. The five-story tower became the couple's summer home.

Plan up to three hours for the moderately challenging 5.2-mile Loop Trail. For prime comfort, prepare to fend off possible insects and ensure rugged footwear that can stand up to some water. Most of all, pause to soak in the fall panoramas.

While in the park, make a mental note to return for the annual Hike to the Mic event in late August. Waiting at the tower will be live bands and food vendors.

1 Summit Ridge Drive, Simsbury,  
860-242-1158, [portal.ct.gov](http://portal.ct.gov)



SHUTTERSTOCK • COURTESY OF THE CONNECTICUT OFFICE OF TOURISM (INSET)



## Where to eat

**Millwright's:** From the dining room it's possible to gaze at waterfalls framed by fall foliage. Rustic wood ceilings bring with them a feeling of communing with nature. With a fall breeze in the air, go for the chicken and dumplings with gnocchi, roasted chicken and root vegetables. Stay a little longer with a pop-in at the tavern for some hard cider. 77 West St., Simsbury, 860-651-5500, millwrightsrestaurant.com

**Plan b:** Adjoining the grounds of Simsbury Historical Society is this longtime destination for burgers, beer and bourbon. Set in a former railroad depot, this charming brick building is on the National Register of Historic Places. A crock of pickles welcomes guests. Highly recommended—the Pretzel, a burger couched in a pretzel bun that's ideal alongside a Founders Breakfast Stout. 4 Railroad St., Simsbury, 860-658-4477, burgersbeerbourbon.com/simsbury

**Popover Bistro & Bakery:** Apple pie waffle. If this special is featured on the menu, order it. The namesake popovers are delicious, too, but in the fall, apple anything might be mandatory. There are many drool-worthy options, including the popover with eggs, Swiss, cheddar and goat cheeses. This Simsbury café is open for breakfast and lunch,

making repeat visits easy. 928 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury 860-413-2392, popoversimsbury.com

**Lost Acres Orchard:** Like the idea of breakfast or lunch on a farm? Try the quiche or loaded oatmeal with farmhouse granola at this North Granby orchard. Pop into the farm store for made-from-scratch pies, homemade breads and jams, cookies... can't wait to dig in? Grab a rocker on the porch and stay a while. If apple-picking is underway, inspiration to join in the fun will rub off. 130 Lost Acres Road, North Granby, 860-653-6600, sites.google.com/view/lost-acres-orchard

**Clark Farms at Bushy Hill Orchard:** The following words alone should have cars directing themselves to this Granby-based property: Clark Farms French toast made with apple cider doughnuts and maple whipped cream. 'Nuff said. Stop in the Bushy Hill Cidery for sweet cider made from 20 different apple varieties and test out their four hard ciders. 29 Bushy Hill Road, Granby, 860-653-4022, clarkfarmsct.com

**Soma Grille:** Paella, Parmesan-crusted cod, short ribs... the menu here is as tantalizing as the views. They also host a sumptuous Sunday buffet that could become a family tradition. 731 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, 860-217-0937, somagrille.com



Plan b

## Shopping

**AvaGrace:** At a loss when looking for a gift? This boutique within Simsbury Town Shops has something for everyone, from fussy babies to fussier great-grandparents. The compass charm with moving hands I discovered there got me out of a jam. They gift wrap, too! 926 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, 860-658-4400, avagracegifts.com

**Gozzo Antiques & Restorations:** Arrive at the barn that's home to Gozzo, and you just know there are treasures inside. This Simsbury-based business restores, buys and sells antiques. 22 Bushy Hill Road, Simsbury, 860-408-9783, gozzos.com

**Farms Village Antiques & Collectibles:** Located in a historic post office building, this store screams quaint. Multiple vendors' antiques, pottery, garden items and gifts

BEKAH WRIGHT



AvaGrace

are on display inside. 250 Farms Village Road, West Simsbury, 860-651-9599, facebook.com/FarmsVillage

**Tulmeadow Farm:** Across the street from Farms Village is this 1768-established farm. Where folks are lined up, that's the ice cream window. The farm store has fresh produce and specialty foods, along with pottery, puzzles, toys and other gifts. 255 Farms Village Road, West Simsbury, 860-658-1430, tulmeadowfarmstore.com

**Sew Inspired Quilt Shop & Studio:** Temps are falling, so it might be time to take up that quilting project. Located in Fiddler's Green, Sew Inspired has everything a quilter could desire, from books to frames, fabrics and kits. 8 Wilcox St., Simsbury, 860-651-8885, sewinspiredquilts.com

## Overnights

**Simsbury 1820 House:** Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this bed and breakfast was built

in 1820 by Revolutionary War hero Noah Phelps. The country B&B's style harks back to its origins with period furniture and accents—and yes, that includes four-poster-canopied beds topped with goose-down featherbeds. Spotted upon arrival are ideal locations for taking in mountain ranges aflush in a patchwork of fall foliage. I made a beeline for the rocking chair on the verandah, with an aim to do the same on the dining terrace. 731 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, 860-651-0724, simsbury1820house.com

**Truman Gillet House Bed & Breakfast:** Based in Granby, this 1805-built B&B brings on the charm. Word is, the blueberry pancakes often served during the complimentary breakfast are worth the stay alone. Two rooms are available. The Connecticut Room Suite has a queen-size canopy bed and a trundle bed. The whirlpool tub in its bathroom is ideal for shaking off a fall chill. The blue and white Granby Room also has a queen-size bed. In the common areas, there's a crackling



Simsbury 1820 House

fireplace in the living room and a communal table in the dining room where the blueberry pancake magic happens. 151 N. Granby Road, Granby, 860-844-1212, trumangillehousebb.com

**The Goodwin Hotel:** As Talcott Mountain State Park is a mere six miles from Hartford, spending some time in the city might be in order. The Goodwin is an eye-catcher with its English Queen Anne terracotta façade. Not only that, the boutique hotel is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (nothing better than sleeping in a bit of history). Revel in the cobalt-blue accents in one of the hotel's distinctive guest rooms, suites or duplexes. Go romantic in the Deluxe King room, where the fireplace lulls with flickering candlelight. The hotel's Italian restaurant, Terreno, features dishes like chef Tyler Anderson's chicken scarpariello and East Coast cioppino. Grab a nightcap later at Bar Piña. 1 Haynes St., Hartford, 860-246-1881, goodwinhartford.com

## more foliage spots...

**Farmington Canal Heritage Trail & Farmington River Trail:** Soak in fall foliage by bike, on foot or via skates on the 56-mile Farmington Canal Trail and 18-mile Farmington River Trail. Running through 11 towns between New Haven and Suffield, this designated Community Millennium Trail is a member of our nationwide Rails-to-Trails Conservancy program. Look for an entrance at Drake Hill Road and Hopmeadow Street. Note: An area between Railroad Avenue and River Road in Unionville is currently closed on weekdays for trail work. 860-202-3928, fchtrail.org

**Talcott Mountain Collective:** Live entertainment, recreation and food on 75 acres of Farmington Valley? Sign me up. Beyond featuring live music, this year-round location showcases the works of local artists. There's plenty of room for pursuits like disc golf, cornhole and soccer. Food trucks are at the ready, and the Collective Kitchen also serves pub fare, including pizza, lobster rolls, bratwurst, kielbasa and wild game sausages. Not to be left out is a plentiful menu of beer, wine, whiskey and bourbon. 140-C Nod Road, Weatogue, 860-658-2337, talcottcollective.com

**Penwood State Park:** Just across the street from Talcott Mountain State Park is this 800-acre, Bloomfield-based park. Drive down through the grounds, and the atmosphere grows thrillingly dark due to the thickly tree-lined forest lining both sides of the road. There are seven trails to explore. One that brings with it rock formations—rockfall caves, glacial plucking and glacial erratics—vistas of ponds and the Farmington River is sections 18 and 19 of the 220-mile New England Trail (NET), a National Scenic Trail from Long Island Sound to the

Massachusetts-New Hampshire border. This NET portion, known as the Metacomet Trail, which includes a 1,797-foot ascent, is considered challenging. 560 Simsbury Road, Bloomfield, 860-242-1158, portal.ct.gov

**Rosedale Vineyards:** Part of the Connecticut Wine Trail, the vineyard has 15 handcrafted wines from which to choose. Stroll the farm trail while there. Better yet, get lost in the nine-acre corn maze. Be sure to visit before their seasonal close at the end of October. 25 E. Weatogue St., Simsbury, 860-651-3926, rosedale1920.com

## Penwood State Park





# HIDDEN VALLEY PRESERVE

WASHINGTON

A photo of the Henry David Thoreau Footbridge drew me to Hidden Valley Preserve. I could tell there were words etched into the rust-patinated, 2015-built bridge, so I commenced rock hopping on the Shepaug River for a view of the span in its entirety.

At the foot of the bridge is a bench. Etched on its seat: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Good start, Thoreau. I was excited to see what other wisdom the 19th-century philosopher and poet had to impart.

The first railing of the bridge did not disappoint. "The Universe is wider than our view of it." This almost seemed a directive. I'd been so busy focusing on Thoreau's words, I'd neglected to pay attention to their very inspiration: nature. How was it possible I'd missed it? The season was showing off, autumnal colors in full sway. The 134-foot-long footbridge led the way to wooded paths, with more insight from Thoreau inscribed along the way.

There are myriad vantage points for observing foliage within the preserve. One mile into the Van Sinderen Loop is a stone-wall lookout with sweeping valley views. An offshoot of the loop leads a half-mile up to an 820-foot elevation to the Pinnacle. Look for a plaque with a diorama of Washington pointing out locations in the distance. Still to see is a 1.34-mile (one-way) trail meandering to a former quartz mine. The river, hills and switchbacks hold delight at every turn.

198 Bee Brook Road, Washington Depot,  
[steeprocksassoc.org/preserve/hidden-valley](http://steeprocksassoc.org/preserve/hidden-valley)

One of Connecticut's newer outdoor attractions, the Thoreau bridge offers a chance to be enveloped in amazing autumn hues.

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## Where to eat

**G.W. Tavern:** The atmosphere of this circa-1850 former home is romantic, but the environs are mesmerizing. Procure a table on the balcony or flagstone patio to hear the Shepaug River rushing past the tree-lined banks below. If weather is uncooperative, opt for a seat by the fieldstone fireplace. As the tavern gained its name due to a visit by George Washington, he might have warmed his hands from this very spot. As for the food (lunch and dinner available), the French onion soup, spiced pigeon prepared with ale and artichokes, and burger are highly recommended. 200 Bee Brook Road, Washington Depot, 860-868-6633, gwtavern.com

**The Po Café:** A haven for breakfast sandwiches, “The Po” delivers deliciousness in the Chicken Sinner, a “Southern-fried chicken thigh on freshly baked buttermilk biscuit with our maple-based Sinner Sauce.” Chef Maggie Colangelo’s lunch menu will lead to lingering in the Washington Green Historic District. 5 Kirby Road, Washington, 860-868-1879, tinyurl.com/thepocafe

**The Pantry:** Fresh-baked pastries top the menu, and breakfast sandwich fans get their due with items like the pasture-raised egg sandwich with Havarti. At lunchtime—bring on the pastrami Reuben! 5 Titus Road, Washington Depot, 860-868-0258, thepantryct.com

**The Smithy Café at 9 Main:** To make the most of the great outdoors, head to this quaint venue for picnic provisions—although the cafe’s book nook might find you cozily dining inside. 9 Main St., New Preston, 860-619-0699, cafeat9main.com

**Community Table:** Enjoy locally sourced foods to their utmost via items like the yuzu-lacquered Hudson Valley duck breast, Creole corn griddle cake, Hungry Reaper dandelion greens and radish salad. 223 Litchfield Tpke., New Preston, 860-868-9354, communitytablect.com



G.W. Tavern

## Shopping

**Hickory Stick Bookshop:** Book lovers will want to spend time luxuriating over the shelves of this independent bookstore that’s been going strong for 70 years. Fans of the TV series *Gilmore Girls*—its setting is said to be inspired by the area—will encounter kindred spirits here. Check out hickorystickbookshop.com/gilmore-girls for inspiration. 2 Green Hill Road, Washington Depot, 860-868-0525, hickorystickbookshop.com

**The Smithy:** This restored blacksmith shop with its timber and stone touches switches on the urge to, well, shop. Local produce, baked goods, gourmet fare and gifts are available for purchase. There’s an artists’ gallery to inspect in the loft. 10 Main St., New Preston, 860-868-9003, thesmithymarket.com

## Hickory Stick Bookshop



**Privet House:** This shop describes itself as an “emporium of home goods, antiques and curiosities.” Proprietors Richard Lambertson and Suzanne Cassano have curated an enthralling collection of interior accents, antiques, tableware and kitchenware. 13 E. Shore Road, New Preston, 860-868-1800, privethouse.com

**Pergola:** A special perk when shopping here—a spectacular view of New Preston Falls. Owners David and Peter Whitman have brought together an elegant selection of plants, ceramics, lighting and antiques, with many items directly from Japan. 7 E. Shore Road, New Preston, 860-868-4769, pergolahome.com

**Plain Goods:** This boutique that’s all about the “beauty of living, and the beauty of dressing” features vintage furnishings, clothing and antiques from global artisans. Not to miss: their private label clothing, accessories and provisions. 17 E. Shore Road, New Preston, 860-868-0280, plain-goods.com

## Culture

**The Institute for American Indian Studies:** Venturing beyond indoor exhibits, this museum showcases the lives of the Algonkian peoples with a replicated village replete with bark-covered wigwams. The 15-acre property also contains a Healing Plants Garden and several nature trails. Among the indoor exhibits is *Quinnetukut*, which shares the story of Connecticut’s Native Americans from the days after the Ice Age to today, and the newly introduced *I is For Indian: Native American Identity Stolen, Sold, & Reclaimed* installation. 38 Curtis Road, Washington, 860-868-0518, iaismuseum.org

## Overnights

**Mayflower Inn & Spa:** The 58 acres of gardens and woodlands found at the Mayflower Inn & Spa are so gorgeous, an inner struggle as to whether to tarry outside or head indoors to sojourn by the fireplace might transpire. The inn’s spa, THE WELL, provides a program with this conundrum in mind. Expert guides will happily lead you through a two-hour forest-bathing experience. Another option is a guided hike in Steep Rock Nature Preserve. Back inside, there are three dining venues to enjoy, including The Tap Room. Perfect for an autumn evening are hearty entrées like the red wine-braised short rib. 118 Woodbury Road, CT-47, Washington, 860-868-9466, aubergeresorts.com/mayflower

**The Hopkins Inn:** There are myriad ways to enjoy the dreamy Pantones of the leaves from this 1847-established property. The on-site restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner with an eye on including north-shore Lake Waramaug vistas in the experience. Owners Franz and Beth Schober are behind the menu’s Austrian cuisine. There’s a

Victorian dining room overlooking the lake, a flagstone terrace shaded by a horse chestnut tree, and the Tavern Room, which is warmed by a fireplace. An overnight stay is another consideration, with 11 guestrooms and two apartments from which to choose. 22 Hopkins Road, Warren, 860-868-7295, thehopkinsinn.com

## Mayflower Inn & Spa



## more foliage spots...

**Spring Hill Vineyards:** This 18th-century farm on the banks of the Shepaug River lends itself to vineyards reaping five varietals: a Marquette, Pond House Reserve, cabernet Franc, chardonnay, and a rosé of pinot noir. Come for the wine tastings, stay for the immersive art experiences found on the property. Open through October. 292 Bee Brook Road, New Preston, 860-868-7172, averillfarm.com

**Mount Tom State Park:** Upon spotting Mount Tom Pond, the inclination may be to picnic on the sand and simply gaze at the surrounding trees. While this is a worthwhile endeavor, the 1.3-mile yellow loop trail through the forest leading to a stone observation tower at the summit is dazzling. With 400 feet of elevation gain, the climb is moderately challenging. Ascend the 34-foot stone edifice for 360-degree views, including of Mount Everett in Sheffield, Mass., the Catskills and Long Island Sound. Watching nature unfold below you during sunrise or sunset—magnificent. Mount Tom Road, Washington Depot, 860-567-8870, portal.ct.gov

**Averill Orchards:** The scent of apples tints the breeze at this 1746-established family farm. Much of the 260-acre property is devoted to apple trees (pears, too). Purchase a basket from the shop and head to the fields to pick your own. There are baked goods to be had, too. Hello, apple cider doughnuts! 250 Calhoun St., Washington Depot, 860-868-2777, averillfarm.com

**Lake Waramaug State Park:** Drive around this tree-lined lake at the base of the Berkshire foothills, and visions of families spending summers here will occur. Kayak or canoe (rentals available) on the lake to be surrounded by fall foliage reflected on the surface. The 95-acre state park boasts a 76-site wooded campground that’s open through Oct. 9. The alluring cabins onsite are only available for rent through Sept. 3, so book ahead for next summer. 30 Lake Waramaug Road, New Preston, 860-868-2592 (campground), portal.ct.gov

## Lake Waramaug State Park

