

# River Riches

## Taking advantage of the Brandywine Valley's attractions and its waterway

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Richmond Magazine: May 2007

When I mentioned I was going away with my mother and sisters to Delaware, I heard a lot of, “You’re going where? Why?” Only when I added that we’d venture into Pennsylvania to Longwood Gardens and the Wyeth collection at the Brandywine River Museum did I detect a glimmer of understanding. Poor Delaware may not get much respect, but once our group had explored the garden-studded hillside at the lovely Inn at Montchanin Village, we agreed with my sister’s assessment: “Delaware — who knew?”

I started to get nervous about our impending trip to the Brandywine Valley when my mother called and said, “So I hear you’re trying to drown me.” Not at all, I assured her. The guy at Wilderness Canoe Trips (302-654-2227 or [www.wildernesscanoetrips.com](http://www.wildernesscanoetrips.com)) had promised that canoeing the mostly placid Brandywine River would be perfect for a 74-year-old novice, and it added adventure to the garden and museum visiting we had planned.

The idea was to treat our mother to two nights at The Inn at Montchanin Village (800-269-2473 or [www.montchanin.com](http://www.montchanin.com)), a posh country inn in the Brandywine Valley. She deserved a break, and while my sisters and I didn’t deserve it, we figured we’d bring a little joy into our, I mean her, humdrum life.

The Brandywine Valley, which encompasses parts of Delaware and Pennsylvania, is such a picturesque landscape, it almost shouldn’t matter where one stays, but it adds to the experience if one’s hotel is a beautifully restored 19th-century hamlet loaded with cottage gardens and charming pathways. Like most every attraction in the Brandywine Valley, there’s a connection to the industrialist du Pont family at Montchanin. Lucky du Pont workers used to live in nine of the buildings that now constitute the 28 guest rooms and suites, and the blacksmith’s shop has been transformed into Krazy Kats, the unfortunately named yet unmistakably sophisticated restaurant that serves breakfast, lunch and dinner.

After a quick stroll, we grabbed a scrumptious bite at cozy Buckley’s Tavern (302-656-9776) on the road to Longwood Gardens (610-388-1000 or [www.longwoodgardens.org](http://www.longwoodgardens.org)), Pierre du Pont’s horticultural masterpiece. Don’t be dissuaded by the \$14 entry fee. The breathtaking 1,050 acres brimming with 11,000 plants are worth it. It was astounding. It makes Maymont look like a bonsai.

Our spirits remained high when river day dawned sparkling. The helpful Wilderness Canoe folks suggested our mother try the front of a double kayak since it would be less likely to tip. We shoved off on her maiden voyage, two to a canoe and two to a kayak, just above the Brandywine River Museum

(610-388-2700 or [www.brandywinemuseum.org](http://www.brandywinemuseum.org)).

The night before, I'd had a nightmare of out-of-control watercraft slamming into each other, so I wasn't surprised when I suddenly found myself humming a few bars of "Dueling Banjos," the theme from Deliverance, the film about a particularly ill-fated canoe excursion. Not to worry; the Brandywine is a gorgeous river, and our trip proceeded as if it were a dream. Children waved from the museum as we slid under the first of three scenic bridges. Except for the heron leading us on, turtles lazing on logs, and the horses and riders fording the river just ahead of us on cue, we had the water to ourselves. My mother felt so comfortable with the river (and her daughters) that midway she hopped in the canoe with me so she could paddle that, too.

Exhilarated by our journey, we kept busy the rest of the day, returning after lunch to the Brandywine River Museum, going inside this time to view three generations of Wyeth paintings. Then we drove on to Simon Pearce Glassblowing (610-793-0949 or [www.simonpearce.com](http://www.simonpearce.com)) and watched the glassblowers at work, drooling over the well-made functional finery. We did the drooling. Glassblowers just sweat.

As we headed home the next day, we realized that we had packed so much into 48 hours, we hadn't had time to gossip about the siblings who weren't there. Now that's a vacation.

### **A Highlight of the Trip**

As we strolled along shady paths through the famous woodland gardens at Winterthur (800-448-3883 or [www.winterthur.org](http://www.winterthur.org)), yet another du Pont country estate, we suffered a bad case of azalea envy. With no time for the 175 period rooms in the museum, we browsed the galleries of American decorative arts and lolled around the reflecting pool, which is understated in a du Pont sort of way, imagining the parties we could have had if only we'd been born du Ponts. Blame it on Mom.