

# Happy Valley, Pennsylvania!

by Victor Block, Travel Columnist! Photos by Victor Block!

**D**uring the 1930s Depression era, people in a compact region of Pennsylvania avoided the worst of the hard times. They occupied a canyon that separates the Appalachian Plateau from the Appalachian Mountains. It's an area of rugged foothills, limestone valleys and dense forests.

The reason this locale managed to escape the dire consequences of the economic crash was Pennsylvania State University. That institution provided jobs and financial stability to those who lived and worked nearby.

Somewhat later, newspaper columnists began referring to State College, the town where Penn State University is located, as the "Happy Valley." That name stuck.

I recently visited the community and returned home with an understanding of why Happy Valley is an apt title, and description.



Happy Valley Overview! Photo by Victor Block.

Penn State offers an atmosphere characterized by youth, vibrancy and culture. Founded in 1855, it has 20 campuses throughout Pennsylvania, its main site being adjacent to the center of downtown State College.

The university and its surrounding grounds offer an inviting choice of attractions. One is the collection at the Palmer Museum of Art. It spans centuries and represents a diversity of cultures, from American and African creations to works on paper.

The Museum is situated within The Arboretum at Penn State, a lovely landscape that seamlessly blends art, architecture and nature. Among its features are acres of gardens, rolling meadows, colorful seasonal plantings, sculptures and gentle walking paths.

Nearby, outdoor art turns the entire downtown heart of State College into an outdoor museum. A downtown Art Walk trail features 40 murals, sculptures, statues, stained glass and other works.



Boal Museum! Photo by Victor Block.



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Travel Columnist

Treats for the taste buds rather than the eyes are served up at the Penn State Berkey Creamery, the largest university ice cream maker in the United States. The milk comes from university cows and agricultural students contribute to making the delicious dessert.

Those dairy delights hint at the variety of field-to-fork foods which add to the destination's appeal. Amish family farms provide beef, cheese and produce.

The Heirloom Farmer offers milk, muffins, honey and more, harvested from nearby fields. The history of the Way Fruit Farm dates back to 1872, when 1,000 apple trees were planted.

History also lives in museums which recount chapters of the area's story. Iron-making began in Pennsylvania as early as 1720 and evolved into a key industry. While advances in technology resulted in the closing of most iron furnaces in the late 19th century, I was immersed in the heyday of that industry at the Eagle Iron Works and Curtin Village. The story of what became the region's leading business is told there through hands-on demonstrations and walking tours. The Curtin Mansion engulfs visitors in the genteel ambience of an upscale Federal-era manor house.

The Boal Estate has been that family's home for over 200 years, and displays the original furnishings, artwork, and artifacts, I found more intriguing the adjacent small, but imposing, Columbus Chapel. It houses what's said to be the most extensive collection of Christopher-related items in North America, including an Admiral's Desk which is believed to have belonged to the famous explorer.

The Matson Museum of Anthropology displays casts of ancient fossil life. Artifacts that demonstrate various aspects of farming and rural life are highlighted at the Pasto Agricultural Museum.

Tiny towns that are scattered about the area, each with its own appeals, are equally varied, and inviting. Boalsburg is a walkable community that clings to its quaint village atmosphere. Philipsburg displays ties to the region's industrial past. Founded in 1795, Bellefonte (pronounced Bell-font) retains much of its original Victorian architecture.

For more information log onto [happyvalley.com](http://happyvalley.com).



Boalsburg! Photo by Victor Block.



Arboretum at Penn State! Photo by Victor Block.



Columbus Chapel – Boal Mansion! Photo by Victor Block.



Palmer Museum of Art! Photo by Victor Block.