

A Hudson Valley Getaway

By Nicole Pensiero

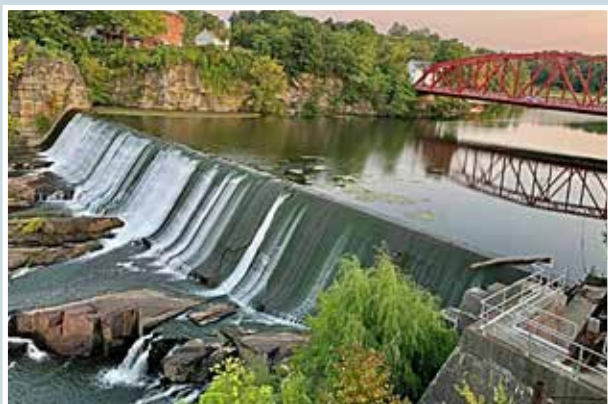


PHOTO BY NICOLE PENSIERO

As New Jersey (and the world) began reopening in spring 2021, the time felt right for a little girlfriends' getaway. Somewhere not too far, an easy drive, but also a place that would feel decidedly different from the Garden State.

We decided on Ulster County, NY, a region nestled between the Hudson Valley and the Catskill Mountains. Rustic, charming and filled with breathtaking natural beauty, this not-too-far destination (three hours from South Jersey, including a rest stop) proved to be the perfect long-weekend escape.

Our home base was the historic town of Saugerties, on the west bank of the Hudson River. This equal parts hip and quaint village — which, in the 1800s had a booming mill industry — now features a downtown with boutiques, bookstores, and fun restaurants. Saugerties, which happens to be comedian Jimmy Fallon's hometown, also has many great outdoor attractions and is a short drive to other neighboring communities.

Heading north into the Hudson Valley on day one, we made a lunch stop in the famed town of Woodstock, NY, which has many fun (and somewhat hippie-dippie) boutiques, and good restaurants. We enjoyed our casual gourmet meal at the newly opened Millstream

Tavern, which has a kitchen led by Michelin Star Chef Ryan Tate. Millstream Tavern offers upscale appetizers and entrées, served either indoors or outside, next to a bubbling stream on the grounds of a golf course (www.millstreamtavern.com).

From there, we set off to Saugerties, with a stop at one of its most unusual and popular attractions, Opus 40 (www.opus40.org). Created by the late pioneering sculptor Harvey Fite — who purchased what had been an abandoned rock quarry in the 1930s — Opus 40 got its name from the number of years he expected it would take to complete this astounding structure (Fite died 37 years into the project). It's hardly your typical "sculpture garden," and we enjoyed this quirky, beautiful and hard-to-describe artistic wonder.

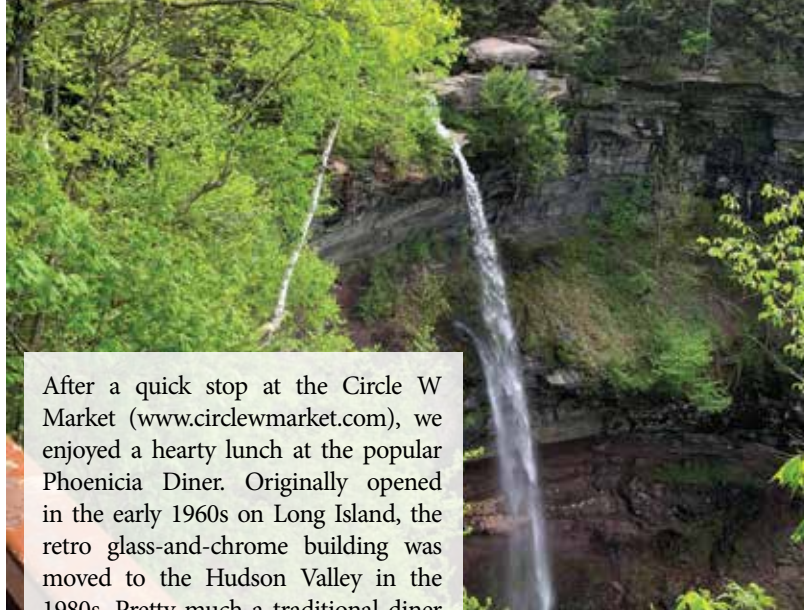
We arrived at our Airbnb apartment in the center of downtown Saugerties in the late afternoon. Clean and spacious, it afforded us privacy and an ideal "jumping off" point for our adventures. We had time, after checking in to our apartment, to explore some of the many nice boutiques and galleries in downtown Saugerties. One of the most popular shops is the Inquiring Mind Bookstore (www.inquiringbooks.com). Hudson Valley's largest independent bookstore, it offers a café, live music, film screenings and plenty of books and used album/CDs.

On our first night in town, we enjoyed a fabulous dinner at the popular eatery, Miss Lucy's Kitchen. After making a toast for the adventures that lay ahead, we savored our meal, which was nothing less than incredible — from the fried chicken to the mac and cheese, and tomato bisque soup, this was "soul food" at its finest (www.misslucyskitchen.com).

The next morning — the start of what I dubbed our "big adventure day" — started with fantastic bagels from the recently opened Village Bagels, located on Main Street. The array of breakfast options was impressive and these freshly made bagels kept us full until lunchtime. Our first sightseeing stop was at one of the Catskill Mountain's most famous sights: Kaaterskill Falls in nearby Greene County. The tallest waterfall in New York State (nearly 100 feet taller than Niagara), this two-tiered waterfall has been the subject of countless paintings and photos dating back to the 1800s. It is a magnificent natural wonder, not to be missed.



PHOTO COURTESY OF OPUS 40 SCULPTURE PARK



After a quick stop at the Circle W Market (www.circlewmarket.com), we enjoyed a hearty lunch at the popular Phoenicia Diner. Originally opened in the early 1960s on Long Island, the retro glass-and-chrome building was moved to the Hudson Valley in the 1980s. Pretty much a traditional diner until reopening under new ownership in 2012, there is now more gourmet than grub on the menu — can you say “Vanilla Bourbon Milkshake?” — but still offered at traditional diner prices (www.phoeniciadiner.com). We then headed to Fabulous Furniture (www.fabulousfurnitureon28.com) in nearby Boiceville. The brainchild of furniture-maker Steve Heller, the outside of the store is a true eye-catcher. There, a strange and wonderful sculpture garden will have you rubbernecking if you drive by. Using everything from car parts to scrap metal, it's a retro-futuristic sci-fi adventure — whimsical and fun. Inside, Heller displays his beautiful handmade furniture. We left with a clock and a cutting board, although I was most smitten with a metal robot giving a peace sign that stood outside the store!

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Kaaterskill Falls

Sci-fi fun



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Ashokan Rail Trail



1869 Saugerties Lighthouse

(PHOTOS BY NICOLE PENSIERO)

From there, it was a quick ride to the Ashokan Rail Trail (www.askhokanrailtrail.com), which opened to the public two years ago and is accessible from sunrise to sunset year-round. This 11-mile, ADA-compliant trail showcases some spectacular scenery, including a sparkling reservoir of water nestled amid the mountains. Our last sightseeing stop of our 60-plus mile loop through Ulster and into

Greene County was the secluded 1869 Saugerties Lighthouse. Closed during much of the COVID pandemic in 2020, the half-mile wooden trail to the lighthouse is now open and you can get some pictures of the historic building from a slight distance (www.saugertieslighthouse.com). There's even a B&B inside if you're the kind of person who doesn't mind having to hike a bit to your accommodations!

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Our final morning in Saugerties got off to a great start with breakfast at the lovely Ohana Café & Creperie (www.ohanacafeny.com). Owned by a former resident of Hawaii, this appealing breakfast and lunch eatery offers everything from sweet or savory crêpes with an island flair, to traditional breakfast and lunch fare. We were impressed with the quality of the food and the terrific service — not to mention the wonderful vibe of the place.

Heading back to New Jersey, we decided to take a stroll across the Hudson River via the “Walkway Over the Hudson” (www.walkway.org). Billed as the world’s longest elevated pedestrian bridge, the Walkway — at 160 feet high and 1.28 miles long — has been open to strollers, bikers and dogs since 2009. A former 1899 railroad bridge that sat unused for decades now offers the best vantage point to get a sweeping view of the Hudson River Valley. It’s free, with easy parking and clean restroom facilities. It was the ideal way to close out our visit to this very special part of New York State.

For more information about this region, visit www.ulstercountyalive.com; for more information about Saugerties, go to www.destinationsaugerties.org.

Nicole Pensiero is a South Jersey-based freelance writer and a member of the North American Travel Journalists Association (NAJTA). You can follow her on Twitter @NicoleWrytr.



Ohana Café & Creperie

(PHOTO BY NICOLE PENSIERO)

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