



Unlike a paraglider, who uses a modified parachute, a hang glider is harnessed into a kite-like glider before soaring off from a cliff—this ride has views of Hawaii's Haleakala crater on Maui.

■ **SANTA BARBARA, CALIF.** “This is the American Riviera,” Rob Sporrer says of Santa Barbara, where ocean breezes collide with mountain cliffs to create near-perfect conditions for flying year-round. Sporrer heads Eagle Paragliding (www.eagleparagliding.com), one of the country's most respected paragliding schools, offering tandem flights and pilot certification programs at several Santa Barbara sites. Launching from the inland mountains lets paragliders descend 4,000 feet over manzanita-covered hills and ridges to land at the beach.

■ **HENSON'S GAP, TENN.** Radial Ramp atop Henson's Gap near Chattanooga is revered among hang glider pilots as one of the world's finest places to take flight. A tongue of wooden planks extending off the forested ridge bordering the Sequatchie Valley's quilt of cornfields, the ramp boasts aerodynamics that smooth winds and improve takeoff conditions; once you're airborne, the valley's gentle thermals facilitate long, sustained flights. “It's a fantasy land for hang gliders,” says Clark Harlow, an instructor with Thrill-A-Minute Hang Gliding (www.hangglidetennessee.com), which offers tandem flights off Radial Ramp.

■ **SEATTLE, WASH.** Tiger Mountain near Seattle is one of the country's most reliable launch sites: May through September, wind conditions are almost always favorable for flight. Aerial Paragliding (www.paragliding.us) can arrange tandem trips here with instructors reputed to be the best in the business. “We really focus on safety,” says instructor Denise Reed. She favors Tiger Mountain for its scenery as well as its winds. “You start off in the foothills, tucked up against the Cascades,” Reed says. Paragliders then savor views of the forested valley unfolding to the ocean, the Seattle skyline to the west, and the Olympic Peninsula.

■ **MAUI, HAWAII** The flanks of Mount Haleakala, Maui's mighty 10,000-foot volcano, serve as a scenic year-round glider launch pad. “You take off about a mile above the ocean,” says pilot Dexter Binder of Proflyght (www.paraglidehawaii.com), a paragliding school offering pilot certification as well as introductory tandem trips. Flying from Haleakala features panoramas that include most of Maui, plus the popular snorkeling island of Molokini and uninhabited Kahoolawe.

■ **ASPEN, COLO.** As one of the highest and most scenic places to fly, Aspen attracts glider pilots from across the globe. The 10,800-foot-high Aspen Mountain launch site sits a full 3,000 feet above the valley, letting pilots savor flights made exciting by the thin, high-altitude air. “Low-density air allows all aircraft to travel at higher speeds, including paragliders, so everything happens a little faster,” explains Dick Jackson of Aspen Paragliding, which offers tandem flights year-round.

ON THE ROAD

Living Like Royalty

A Delaware road trip through the Brandywine Valley offers a taste of American aristocracy.

By VERA MARIE BADERTSCHER

In the Brandywine Valley of Delaware and Pennsylvania, Routes 100 and 52 loop through scenic château country. In the former country mansions of the ultrarich, travelers glimpse the early 20th-century extravagant lifestyle of a fascinating New World royalty. The du Ponts, one of the wealthiest American families, built estates graced by lovely gardens and filled with world-class art.

E. I. du Pont, the first family member to leave France, came to America in 1800 and planted miniature fruit trees and other plants on a bluff overlooking the Brandywine River. His industrial innovations in making gunpowder resulted in a patent and a very prosperous business. Succeeding generations inherited his business and gardening genes, expanding into plastics and consumer products and creating extraordinary botanical collections.

Residents of the Brandywine Valley



Hydrangea blooms cascade and form a canopy in the Acacia Passage at Longwood Gardens.



This bucolic valley was both home and inspiration to artist N. C. Wyeth and his family who painted the landscape and its people.

resolutely protect the pastoral views. The narrow, twisting roads that trace the river force slow progress through lanes shaded by overarching branches of tulip trees and oaks. Wildflowers, not billboards, line roadsides. The 12-mile stretch of the Brandywine Valley from Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, southeast to Wilmington, Delaware, may seem brief, but it takes a few days to truly enjoy.

■ **ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS** From the Philadelphia airport, take I-95S to 322W to U.S. 1. In 45 minutes, you arrive at Longwood Gardens, about three miles northeast of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania.

Pierre du Pont, who reshaped the family company for the 20th century, found spare time to personally design Longwood Gardens (www.longwoodgardens.org). The property includes forest rambles and walks in Italianate gardens. The conservatory, with 4.5 acres under glass, nurtures 5,500 kinds of plants, including a room of orchids. In the 1930s, Pierre created fountains that still leap and sway with an evening light and music show.

Leaving Longwood, head for U.S. Rte. 52/Kennett Pike, the National Scenic Byway that meanders through the heart of the Brandywine Valley, providing glimpses of country estates hidden in the trees. After seven miles, turn left

on Kirk Road. Check in at the big gray barn at the Inn at Montchanin Village (www.montchanin.com). Eleven structures, some stucco-and-frame, were built between 1799 and 1910; they once housed workers of the DuPont Black Powder Mills. Now 28 rooms pamper guests with four-poster beds, gas fireplaces, and private gardens filled with lilies.

Learn all about where the du Pont story began at the stately Hagley Museum (www.hagley.lib.de.us), less than a mile away from Montchanin. Take Rte. 100 south and turn left on Rte. 141 to the spot where E. I. du Pont built his gunpowder mill. After seeing DuPont innovations from nylon stockings to NASCAR race cars in the museum, you may wander on your own or tour in a bus with a guide to see the small stone buildings of this early American industry. Eleutherian Mills, the first du Pont home in America, sits on the cliff above the powder works. The three-story Georgian home reflects family life through memorabilia of five generations of du Ponts. Its barn shelters old vehicles, including the 1928 roadster manufactured by E. Paul du Pont. Employees' homes and a schoolhouse provide a view of 19th-century life.



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UTAH
LIFE ELEVATED

Back on Rte. 141, take a three-mile jaunt to the new visitors center for Nemours Mansion & Gardens. Alfred I. du Pont, the great-grandson of E. I., built the 70-plus room Nemours in 1910. The Louis XVI style of architecture and Versailles-like gardens emphasize the family's French roots. Here every rosebush has been recently replanted, and every statue and sconce repolished during a 39-million-dollar housecleaning.

Head north on Rte. 52 to the nearby Winterthur (www.winterthur.org)—the country estate so big that it has its own post office address (Winterthur, Del.). It takes a full day to take in the wonders of this 982-acre family residence that Henry du Pont turned into a museum. Architectural details, borrowed from historic houses that he dismantled, surround the premier collection of American furniture and decor. A trained horticulturist, Henry also designed the gardens surrounding the mansion, choosing the location of each bulb in the hillside known as March Bank.

Continue on to the Brandywine River Museum on U.S. 1 in Chadds Ford, Pa., (www.brandywinemuseum.org). The museum sits in the midst of the Brandywine Conservancy, straight north on Rte. 100, just ten minutes from Montchanin. The museum occupies three floors in a 19th-century brick gristmill surrounded by wildflowers. The collection of American

art features works of the Wyeths, who lived and painted in homes and studios nearby. N. C. Wyeth's illustrations for classics like *Treasure Island* join works by his son Andrew and grandson James.

To stave off the pressure of development, Lammot du Pont Copeland and his wife created a hilltop island of nature that surrounds their former home. You can get to Mt. Cuba Center (www.mtcubacenter.org) via a tangle of country roads that wind through woods, but it might be best to take the easy way and go south to Rte. 141, then northwest to 3120 Barley Mill Road. Knowledgeable guides introduce guests to Mt. Cuba's woody preserve by reservation only (call ahead). From Mt. Cuba, leave Barley Mill Road and pick up Rte. 141, jog north to Rte. 52, and then head southeast into Wilmington.

In this pleasant small city, the largest city in Delaware and home of the DuPont company, stroll along the riverfront and give your credit card a workout—tax-free—at the Shipyard Shops. An overnight at the Hotel du Pont (www.hoteldupont.com), at 11th and Market Streets, features the best of everything, from the Bösendorfer piano in the lobby to a collection of original paintings by regional artists including N. C. and Andrew Wyeth. The hotel's over-the-top amenities include a Broadway-size theater that features touring shows, such as *Rent* and *Les Misérables*.



A visitor to Brandywine Valley can see antique carriages like this one during Winterthur's Point-to-Point Steeplechase races, which celebrates its 30th anniversary May 4 with a day of activities.