

THE MORNING CALL

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Bloomin' beautiful

Tour Pa.'s Apple Country for scenes grander than D.C.'s cherry blossoms

By Diane Stoneback
The Morning Call

Adams County tourists who see only Gettysburg's somber battlefields and hear its sad stories are missing one of the region's most beautiful and peaceful productions -- apple blossoms.

It's blossom time in Apple Country. And the stunning scenery a few minutes drive north and west of Gettysburg, easily rivals the beauty of Washington, D.C.'s cherry blossoms. There are zil-

lions more blossoms than D.C.'s mere 3,750 cherry trees can produce in East Potomac Park and the Tidal Basin.

At this moment, millions of Adams County apple trees are blooming and nearing their peak, more than a week earlier than usual. Covered in tiny dabs of pink and white, the trees fill vast orchards wrapping the hillsides, hugging the valleys and stretching to the horizon.

Sadly, the showy blossoms might be gone before Adams

County's annual Apple Blossom Festival on May 1 and 2.

Adams County's 100-plus orchards make it the state's largest apple growing area and the major reason why Pennsylvania ranks No. 4 in the nation for apple production.

Bushels of arguments can be made for taking a trip to Apple Country.

It's closer than D.C. and its quiet, two-lane roads make driving less hectic.

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It's less costly than D.C. because Gettysburg has many more affordably priced hotels and restaurants.

It is much less crowded than the nation's capital at cherry blossom time. Most times, it will be just you and the trees.

And you can pick and choose your experiences as you go, including buying produce and gifts in an unusual and historic round barn and gaining an appreciation for hard cider on a sunny terrace above the orchards.

Can't go now to see the blossoms? Save the info for an Apple Country trip later this summer or in the fall, which is a delicious time to visit. Because the county's better-known Apple Harvest Festival draws large crowds, go before or after the festival weekends of Oct. 2 and 3 and 9 and 10 to avoid hoardes of shop-

pers snapping up new apples and apple goodies

At any other time, Apple Country is Adams County's quieter, soothing side. Stop and sniff the blossoms -- nature's gift in 3-D. Picnic in an orchard. Contemplate whether the beauty that surrounds you is nature's way of softening the sadness of so much tragedy in Gettysburg's past.

Give thanks, too, for this largely undiscovered and underrated tourist area which is sometimes taken for granted by local residents.

Kay Hollabaugh, whose family has been growing apples north of Biglerville for three generations, says: "When the trees are in full bloom, it's like heaven. But as my husband said recently, 'Although we live in paradise, there's no time to enjoy it.'"

Time to enjoy the blossoms is

short for visitors as well. Growers estimate most blossoms won't last much longer than another week. April's four days of 90-degree weather and continuing warmer-than-normal temperatures jump-started the blossoms.

Because apple blossoms are so delicate, even the least little wind or rain will send them fluttering to the ground. It's wise to call the Gettysburg Convention & Visitors Bureau for an up-to-the-minute blossom report before making the trip.

"Blossom time usually starts around the third week of April and lasts through May," explains Hollabaugh. She says flowering at Hollabaugh Bros. Fruit Farm could peak today.

Dave Garretson's nearby Beechwood Orchard is blooming, too.

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“Tell people they’d better hurry,” he warns. (If you miss the blooms you still can taste Beechwood’s apples because Garretson is opening a stand at the Easton Farmers Market.)

“I’m figuring one more week for apple blossoms, because our later varieties aren’t flowering yet,” says Winifred Schulteis, who owns Quaker Valley Orchards and Guesthouse, with husband Winn.

She and her guests can keep an eye on blossoms’ progress because orchards surround the house on three sides. Although this is a prime spot for blossom-watching, Schulteis has rooms available now.

Even if you discover blossoms are past their peak when you arrive in Apple Country, it is a grand place to do nothing or just a little more. It’s an escape to a quieter, more pastoral world. Relax. Read. Sink into a delightfully behind-the-times lifestyle. But if you tire of doing nothing, the roads to Biglerville, Arendtsville and Cashtown are well-seeded with farm markets.

Sandoe’s Fruit Market, north of Biglerville, and Reids’ Orchard and Winery in Orrtanna, stay open year-round. The Round Barn and the Hollabaughs’ farm market have just opened for the season. More will open soon.

Shop them for all kinds of apples, apple treats and gifts, as well as modern and heirloom seasonal produce. Don’t miss seeing the Round Barn, which measures 87 feet in diameter and 282 feet in circumference. Encircling a 60-foot-tall central silo, the 1914 structure is on the site of one of the area’s first commercial apple orchards. Climb to its second floor to see the amazing carpentry that went into it.

Hollabaughs offers apples, apple dumplings, apple pies and apple

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Touring Pennsylvania’s Apple Country

WINERIES MAKING APPLE WINES OR HARD CIDERS

Adams County Winery, 251 Peach Tree Road, Orrtanna, PA, 717-334-4631, www.adamscountywinery.com

Hauser Estate Winery, 410 Cashtown Road, Biglerville, PA, 717-334-4888, www.hauserestate.com

Reid’s Orchard & Winery, 2135 Buchanan Valley Road, Orrtanna, 717-677-7047, www.reidsorchardwinery.com

FRUIT FARMS AND MARKETS

Beechwood Orchards, 984 Carlisle Road, Biglerville, 717-677-6536, www.beechwoodorchards.com

Boyer’s Fruit Farm, 405 Boyer Nursery Road, Biglerville, 717-677-8558, www.boyernurseries.com

Historic Round Barn and Farm Market, 298 Cashtown Road, Biglerville, 717-334-1984, www.roundbarngettysburg.com

Hollabaugh Bros. Fruit Farm & Market, 545 Carlisle Road, Biglerville, 717-677-9494, www.hollabaughbros.com

McDannell Fruit Farm, 332 N. High St., Arendtsville, 717-677-6922, www.mcdannellsfruitfarm.com

APPLE COUNTRY LODGINGS

Canter Berry Tails Apple Ranch, 989 Center Mills Road, Aspers, 717-677-8900, <http://www.farmstay.us>

Hickory Bridge Farm, 96 Hickory Bridge Road, Orrtanna, 717-642-5261, <http://www.hickorybridgefarm.com>

Quaker Valley Guest House, 315 Quaker Valley Road, Biglerville, 717-677-7351, <http://www.quakervalleyorchards.com>

OTHER GOOD STOPS IN APPLE COUNTRY

The Apple Bin Grill & Bakery, 674 Arendtsville Road, 717-677-4141.

South Mountain Fairgrounds, for Apple Blossom Festival and Apple Harvest Festival info, 615 Narrows Road, Arendtsville, 717-677-9663

National Apple Museum, 154 Hanover Street, Biglerville, 717-677-4556, www.nationalapplemuseum.com



streusel bread plus plants, flowers, veggies and more fruits.

More than 45 apple varieties from more than 100,000 trees in the Hollabaughs' orchards are available during the harvest. Don't know which ones you'll like? Nittany is a local favorite. Ask for samples or shop the bin porch way. Pay a flat-rate to fill a bag with any apples you want.

Hollabaugh's hive-viewing window and bee display give visitors a close look at live bees and their work of pollinating apple blossoms and "setting" the fruit.

Biglerville, at the epicenter of apple growing, is home to the National Apple Museum. Located in a restored bank barn, the museum has weekend guided tours explaining how the county's orchards took root. Besides collections of apple peelers, cider presses, packing labels and postcards, it contains a Johnny Appleseed statue, a room filled with an old-fashioned country store's contents and another space recreating an 1880s farm kitchen. The gift shop stocks affordable apple souvenirs.

If touring Apple Country makes

you hungry, stop at the Apple Bin Grill and Bakery for inexpensive home cooking in an apple-intensive atmosphere -- apple-shaped seats on bar stools, apple window curtains, apple-studded tablecloths and more. For finer cuisine at higher prices, try the historic Cashtown Inn.

Want to stay overnight? You won't be sorry, particularly at Quaker Valley's guesthouse on the eastern side of our driving tour. Its first-floor living room, bedroom, bath and kitchen rent for \$90 per night. If you need more space, the second floor's two bedrooms can be added for \$50 apiece. No meals are provided, but you can cook for yourself in the kitchen.

Mary Lynn Martin's Hickory Bridge Farm Restaurant and Bed & Breakfast in Orrtanna host visitors traveling the roads on the western side of our tour. Martin mixes good food with attractive accommodations in her farmhouse (starting at \$135) and nearby cottages (\$115). Overnight guests are greeted by a morning fresh-fruit plate that's built around Adams County apples before moving on to fluffy French toast

with homemade blueberry sauce; smoky, thick-sliced bacon, and tasty stewed apples.

Martin's antique-filled dining room, where breakfasts are served, features a cozy fire whenever there's a chill in the air. Her restaurant, open weekends, offers hearty, from-scratch country foods served family-style.

Our tour also includes stopping to taste apple wines at Reid's Orchard and Winery and Adams County Winery near Orrtanna, and Hauser Estate Winery between Arendtsville and Cashtown. There's an added reason to linger longer in Hauser's glass-enclosed, hill-top tasting room or on its terrace -- growing your appreciation for hard cider.

Even if you think you won't like it, try it. Michelle Oakes, Hauser's wine and cider-maker, makes four standards and more. "It's not as mainstream as wine or beer, but cider is up-and-coming," she says.

When I found my favorite, Rome, I couldn't think of a better way to toast the beauty of Adams County's Apple Country over and over again.