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A RELAXING DESTINATION

FOR 200 YEARS AND COUNTING

ARTICLE BY SHUAN BUTCHER



PHOTOGRAPHY: LEFT: SHUAN BUTCHER; RIGHT: COURTESY GREENBRIER COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



Nestled in the foothills of Southern West Virginia is a place that can far exceed the average traveler's expectations. Forgo all the preconceived notions you may have of the region and put it on your list of must-visit destinations. A recent weekend getaway to Greenbrier County left my wife and me yearning for more.



PHOTOGRAPHY: SHUAN BUTCHER



PHOTOGRAPHY: LEFT: SHUAN BUTCHER; RIGHT: COURTESY GREENBRIER COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

LEWISBURG

Lewisburg was named America's Coolest Small Town a few years ago by Budget Travel magazine, and there are plenty of reasons why. The town hosts several big events throughout the year such as a literary fest, chocolate festival and music fest.

Our stay at the General Lewis inn, a historic structure with lots of history was the perfect location to begin our trip. In addition to the friendly staff, the rooms are well appointed and very neat. Each room has its own sense of character, and when the opportunity arises, guests may choose which one resonates with them the most. We particularly liked the canopy bed, along with the chest of drawers, nostalgic fixtures, china, glass and overall décor in our room.

This antique theme was carried throughout the inn, inviting guests to peruse the whole place. Make sure you partake in at least one meal at the inn's restaurant. Dining takes place in the original 1834 section of the structure and all food is made from scratch and sourced locally, when possible. One breakfast, I enjoyed a Caprese omelet, with eggs, tomatoes, basil and mozzarella that exuded

freshness. My wife said her waffles were the best she's ever had.

A number of other great places to eat exist in Lewisburg. We enjoyed a wonderful dinner at The Livery Tavern, located in the historic downtown just a few doors down from the General Lewis Inn. The ambiance was striking, with a masculine interpretation of a 19th Century tavern. Its earthy tones, natural materials and open-beam ceiling give a professional, yet romantic feel.

Although its farm-to-table theme is not unique these days, the restaurant's owners have their own herb and vegetable garden and do get a number of their meats from just a few miles away. We enjoyed a fantastic dining experience and left knowing why The Livery Tavern received Open Table's 2014 Diners' Choice Award.

There's more to do in Lewisburg than just eat. Downtown shops range from antique stores and art galleries to unique specialty shops such as a gourmet food and kitchen store. A special treat for us during our visit was a stop at Carnegie Hall. Most of us think of the one in New York City, but there are four Carnegie Halls still used as performing arts

centers, all built by steel baron and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

Music has been heard through the halls of the Lewisburg venue for nearly a century. The night we attended, we caught a performance by Tom Hambridge, a Grammy-winning singer, songwriter and producer with more than 350 songs recorded by artists such as Buddy Guy, Eric Clapton, BB King, Lynyrd Skynyrd and Rascal Flatts.

Prior to the concert, we enjoyed a "Southern Biscuit Bar" created by B. Sweet Confectionery in the theater's Main Stage Lounge that included sweet and the savory biscuits. Choosing between sweet potato, cheddar garlic, flaky or others was a tough decision, but even tougher was deciding on a topping: brown sugar bacon, country ham, whole grain mustard, marmalade, fruit spread, pimento cheese, sweet cream butter, honey butter and lemon curd.

Opportunities in nature abound in Greenbrier County, including the Greenbrier River Trail, 78 miles of terrain that is great for biking, hiking and horseback riding. The trail once was part of the C&O rail system.



Shuan Butcher As an Army veteran, Shuan has spent most of his life working in the nonprofit sector on issues such as arts and culture, heritage tourism, civic engagement, and community development. He is a member of the National Press Club. He published "Inspiration to Serve: 101 Quotes about Kindness, Caring, and Giving," co-authored "Making Change for the Better: The Importance of Youth Giving," and contributes to a variety of local, regional, and national publications.

During our trip, we thoroughly enjoyed a tour of Organ Cave. Reportedly, this is the second longest cave on the East Coast, with more than 70 miles of documented underground space. Dating back to the 18th Century, Organ Cave is both a National Natural Landmark and a National Historic Landmark. Gen. Robert E. Lee used the cave to make ammunition, and it houses the largest collection of Civil War Hoppers left in the United States. Aside from Civil War artifacts, there are examples of calcite, gypsum, agate, quartz, crystal and fossils and so much more to see. In fact, the discovery of the first prehistoric Three-toed Sloth, the *Meglongyx Jeffersonii*, is on display. (It recently was proclaimed the official state fossil for West Virginia).

Due to our interest in history, we took the Civil War themed tour, but there are other options as well, such as a traditional "commercial" tour or a guided 90-minute walking tour. And for the more adventurous, a daylong excursion and opportunities to sleep in the cave (called "undnigheters") are available. Some of these expeditions require crawling, straddling or climbing in tight and wet spaces, but it's well worth it.

Before leaving Lewisburg, we popped into the Stardust Café for lunch. This green restaurant has been open for 10 years and offers an array of

gourmet sandwiches and salads. FYI, their "Trust Me Salad" was featured in Southern Living's Cookbook "Off the Eaten Path."

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS

For the second half of our trip, it was time to head to White Sulphur Springs. We checked into The Greenbrier, the region's crown jewel located on thousands of acres in the Allegheny Mountains. Throughout its 235-year history, "America's Resort" has hosted royalty, presidents and other dignitaries. During your stay here, you will feel like royalty, too. This Five Diamond Resort boasts impeccable service from the moment you arrive until the minute you depart. Several special touches were memorable for us, including being offered a complimentary beverage upon check-in and having a chocolate placed on our pillow during turndown service later in the evening.

We arrived just in time to partake in their daily afternoon tea. Guests may choose from a traditional southern iced tea or hot tea along with an assortment of petite sweets. All along, classical piano music plays live in the background. Afterward, we explored the resort inside and out. There is so much to do here, that you do not need to leave the property.

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Of course The Greenbrier is a top golf destination (home to the Greenbrier Classic each July) and is known for its spa facilities, but there are tons of things to do during your stay including shopping at several fabulous stores, daily recreational offerings, swimming pools and a bowling alley. Sometimes it's nice to enjoy the small things in life, which is why we had a great time watching the nightly film shown in The Greenbrier's own movie theater (with complimentary popcorn, too). I can't even begin to cover the amenities offered at this resort.

Before heading to dinner, we stopped by the bar for a few specialty cocktails and then ended up eating at Drapers, a bright and colorful restaurant that stands as tribute to the legendary interior designer Dorothy Draper, who was responsible for the elegant décor throughout the resort. This restaurant offers a casual dining experience that includes classic recipes as well as traditional Southern dishes.

The following morning we enjoyed brunch in the main dining room, a buffet of Southern breakfast delights. Then we took a tour of the Greenbrier Bunker, something I've wanted to do since it was first revealed in a May 1992 article in The Washington Post. The bunker was a Cold War-era hideaway that was kept secret for more than 30 years. This facility served as the emergency relocation center for the U.S. Congress in the event of a national crisis. President Eisenhower, considered the "Father of

the Bunker," saw it as an important element in his continuity of government plan.

Now, approximately 35,000 people tour the bunker each year to see artifacts of a bygone era. Before hitting the road to head back home, we made one final stop on the property. Located in a series of row cottages overlooking the original

Springhouse, a number of shops showcase the work of skilled artisans in diverse media, including glass, metals, leather, brass, wood and pottery.

Visitors have been traveling to this destination since 1778 to "take the waters" and still today Greenbrier County, W.Va., offers a relaxing, romantic or adventurous destination for all travelers.

RESOURCES

The General Lewis Inn
301 E. Washington Street, Lewisburg
304-645-2600
www.generallewisinn.com

The Livery Tavern
217 E. Washington Street, Lewisburg
304-645-9836
www.liverytavern.com

Carnegie Hall
105 Church Street, Lewisburg
304-645-7197
www.carnegiehallwv.com

Organ Cave
Route 63, Ronceverte
304-645-7600
www.organcave.com

Stardust Café
102 E. Washington Street, Lewisburg
304-647-3663
www.stardustcafewv.com

The Greenbrier
300 W. Main Street, White Sulphur Springs
855-453-4858
www.greenbrier.com

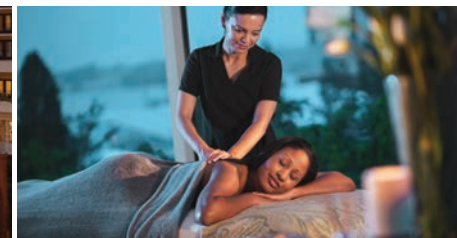
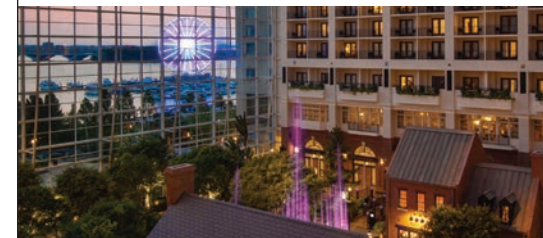
Greenbrier County Convention & Visitors Bureau
800-833-2068
www.greenbrierwv.com

Greenbrier State Forest CCC Era Cabins & Campsites
HC 30 Box 154, Caldwell
304-536-1944
www.greenbriersf.com

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