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Finding Food and Fun in the Finger Lakes

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
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Rochester, New York (Source:Visit Rochester)

Way before railroads, canals moved people and their goods from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. One of the reasons New York became a center of commerce was the Erie Canal system: "the ditch that forever changed the nation."

These days, the 524 miles of Erie Canal are used mostly for recreation, its tow path providing a place for biking and walking. Towns like Fairport and Pittsford have built shops and restaurants alongside its scenic vistas, making the region an ideal vacation spot. And the entire region is peppered with vineyards and tasting rooms showcasing New York State wines, ciders, and spirits.

In and Around Syracuse



Dinosaur Bar-B-Que (Source:Wainwright Photography)

Any trip to the Finger Lakes warrants a stop at the [Erie Canal Museum and Visitor Center](#) near Clinton Square's town center in Syracuse. Tour the Canal's last weigh-locked building, a museum since 1962, and see how they moved barges and packet boats of passengers across the region.

An original wooden cradle remains, on which a boat would rest as the water was pumped out of the lock to weigh the cargo: often large quantities of salt, of which Syracuse used to provide half the nation's output. Their famed 'salt potatoes' attest to the region's prodigious supply and are still available at the local favorite, [Dinosaur Bar-B-Que](#).

The mini-chain has grown from a mobile concession stand that founder John Stage built in 1983 to eight locations throughout the East Coast. The tradition of making everything from scratch, right down to the sauces, keeps Dinosaur Bar-B-Que a beloved favorite and warrants their handy hashtag, #WDFA (we don't f*ck around).

After you've stuffed yourself full of fried green tomatoes, Creole-spiced deviled eggs, St. Louis dry rubbed pork ribs, pulled pork, slow-smoked brisket, and apple-brined pit-smoked chicken, you won't be ready for much more than a slow cruise down the Erie Canal.

Take a short drive over to Camillus, where Dave and Liz Beebe lovingly restored the [Nine Mile Creek Aqueduct](#), offering historic boat rides past the picturesque red barns of the Thompson Farm. The Aqueduct's estimated 207,000 annual visitors include schoolchildren and guests enjoying Wednesday supper cruises.

Grab a relaxed dinner at the [Empire Farm Brewery](#) Tasting Room in Cazenovia. Opened in 2016, the 22-acre property produces nearly all the hops, vegetables, herbs, and fruit used, including a farm apiary to generate Empire's estate honey. This appears in menu items like Spent Grain Pretzels with house-smoked sea salt and hop mustard, the artisanal grilled cheese made with Jersey Gold cheese from 2 Kids Goat Farm, and the Meadows Farm Wagyu steak frites.

Innovative brews include Two Dragons Ale, made with tea from the Jing Wei Fu Tea producers; Belgian-style White Aphro beer, which features a pilsner and wheat malt blend; and chocolate and coffee notes in their dry

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Empire Farm Brewery (Source:Sean Hagan)

Black Magic Stout. Empire has even teamed up with nearby brewers Beak & Skiff Orchard to create Apple Harvest Ale, made with Empire and Honeycrisp apples.

Beak & Skiff, located in Lafayette, is worth a visit in itself, as the campus is gorgeous. The orchard has been there since 1911, but in 2007, two local families teamed up to produce vodka, gin, wine, and cider from the apples. It's an excellent place to go apple picking, do a tasting, or even just to pick up a box of their sugary apple cider donuts.



Marriott Syracuse Downtown (Source:Tony Secker, Lorient Studio)

After a long day of sightseeing, you'll be ready to fall into a comfortable bed at the **Marriott Syracuse Downtown**. Built in 1924 as a community-owned hotel with 600 rooms (and the state's first hotel with central air-conditioning), the property is being renovated to be more spacious. Lobby renovations reveal a 40-foot mural by Carl Roters, which has been restored to its original glory. Upon completion, the property will feature 320 guest rooms, three large ballrooms, and 11 conference rooms named after each of the Finger Lakes.

Director of Sales & Marketing Scott Becque worked hard to bring Executive Chef Thomas Kiernan in to create menus for the onsite restaurants Eleven Waters, the casual Cavalier Room, Shaughnessy's Irish sports pub, and the converted Barbershop Bar.

For the hipster feel of Brooklyn in the Finger Lakes, head to Skaneateles, where you can stroll quaint streets and pick up gluten-free dog treats at **Lucky Dog** and get the region's specialty -- flaky white fried scrod -- at **Doug's Fish Fry**. Founded in 1982, the home-style eatery is always packed with folks waiting to pick up their fish fry. As a sign notes, "If you made reservations, you're in the wrong place."

Just a short drive down the road is the picturesque **Anyela's Vineyards**, where the Nocek family has cultivated numerous award-winning wines. Since 2001, they have painstakingly buried their vines in the earth after fall harvest to insulate the primary buds. At their tasting room, Patti Nocek pours samples of their award-winning varietals, like the superb Sweet Riesling and the dark, peppery Noiret. Averaging about \$15 a bottle, these wines make the perfect souvenir.

Syracuse Pride was the week of June 17th, and featured a parade, a festival at the Inner Harbor, and a Gay 5K at Long Branch Park. On August 25, head to the Pride Day at the New York State Fair. For more information, visit www.cnypride.org/

Rochester Rocks!



Rochester Public Market (Source:Winnie McCroy)

If you liked the quaint, laid-back vibe of Skaneateles, you'll love Rochester, where museums and public art abound. The whole city comes out on Saturdays to **Rochester Public Market** to smell the fresh roasting coffee at Java's, get breakfast sandwiches from Scott's II, and peruse the stalls of fresh produce, baked goods, meat, seafood, ethnic delicacies, and plants.

Fueled up, you'll be ready to tackle the world's oldest photography museum, the **George Eastman Museum** and the sprawling collections-based **Strong National Museum of Play** (a highly-interactive hotspot for kids of all ages). Be sure to leave time for a tour of their butterfly garden. And of course, now's the perfect time to visit the **Susan B. Anthony House** as they

gear up for the Centennial Celebration of women's suffrage in New York State.

Rochester also features a 90-foot waterfall right in the middle of town, which serves as the backdrop for , where you can grab a sandwich and a cold 'Genny' for lunch overlooking the falls.

You can't do better for dinner than **The Cub Room**, where Mario Batali acolyte Chef Greg Johnson shows off his classic Continental cuisine. Settle into dark wood banquettes in the glow of Edison lightbulbs and tuck into amazing appetizers like the veal sweetbreads with cipollini agrodolce and black mission figs, and oozy burrata cheese with quince marmalade.

Winning entrees include the seared sea scallops with gold beet puree and blood orange, and the toothsome

host, offers tips to make the most of your summer vacation.

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The Cub Room (Source:Tammy Swales Studio)

tagliatelle Bolognese, with veal, pork, chicken and pancetta in a white sauce. The bar offers an excellent selection of local whiskeys and bourbons; the smoky Widow Jane is a superior pour.

Rest your head at the [Hilton Garden Inn Rochester](#) and head out the next morning to Fairport, razed in the mid-1980s to create an old-world, European-like city the Canal at the center. Since that time, they've held the wildly successful [Fairport Canal Days](#), one of the most popular art festivals in the state.



Abbott's Frozen Custard (Source:Visit Rochester)

End your trip with a tasty dinner at [Richardson's Canal House](#) where you can watch boats travel down the Erie Canal. This former tavern, which now dishes up steak and oysters, previously served as a hotel, the Town Hall, a nudist colony, and even a brothel. And save room for dessert down the road at [Abbott's Frozen Custard](#). It's a local favorite that's worth the long lines.

While you'll need more than two hands to count the number of attractions worth visiting in the Finger Lakes, as proven, there are plenty of good eats along the way.

The Rochester Pride Festival -- the second-largest in New York State -- runs from July 8-16, featuring a parade, festival, picnic and the ROC Pride Games. In October, they host the 10-day ImageOut: Rochester LGBT Film Festival.

For more information, visit www.gayalliance.org/pride

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.



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