

Treasures of America Quilt Tour

written by Pam Baker



If you're like most Americans, you pine for the simpler days of yesteryear when men were men and women made their own quilts! Well now you can travel through the pages of history and learn the art of quilt-making to boot. The Treasures of America Quilt Tour is also a bargain at about \$1110 per person considering it includes six nights deluxe accommodations in Washington, D.C. and Lancaster, PA, plus nine meals (6 continental breakfasts and 3 dinners), and a host of private tours and admission tickets to some very interesting places and events in and around our nation's capital.

The most striking features of this tour include a dinner with an Amish family, a two-day admission to the Quilter's Heritage Celebration, one-day admissions to Longwood gardens and the Winterthur Museum, and a private lecture by noted Pennsylvania quilt historian Rachel Pellman.

The tour begins with an expert guided tour of the U.S. Capitol Building, the White House, and the famous Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln monuments followed by free time to explore other Washington attractions as may fit your personal interests. Later in the afternoon, you'll visit the fabulous shop of Jinny Beyer, a noted quilt -maker and seamstress. The day ends at a resort hotel in the heart of the Amish country where you'll stay for the rest of the tour.

The next morning noted Pennsylvania quilt historian Rachel Pellman will inform and entertain the group with her award winning Country Bride quilt series and techniques, and with her delightful stories about what it was like to grow up with the Amish.

Following that interesting encounter, the group embarks on a rare insider's journey into the Amish country. Along the way, you'll visit real Amish shops with shelves loaded with low-priced calicoes and needlework supplies. There are also shops that feature regional specialties like Amish quilts, scherenschnitte, fraktur, and hand-made pretzels. Lancaster is also home to the Amish Quilt Museum, which showcases America's only authenticated Pennsylvania-Amish antique quilts.

Traveling by motorcoach, the scenic route delivers many snapshots of Amish life: farmers driving working mule teams, old-fashioned buggies carrying Amish women to market, and a one-room schoolhouse, among other sights... plus the tour stops by some great places for bargain fabric along the way. When evening arrives, your tour group will join a true Plain family at their kitchen table to enjoy a home-made family-style dinner. This is not a restaurant made to look like an Amish house; it's a real home where you will be an honored guest.

The following morning, the group will journey through the beautiful Brandywine Valley to the Winterthur Museum and Gardens. The former estate of Henry Francis du Pont, over 196 rooms are furnished with the world's greatest collection of antique furniture, textiles, and art. Longwood Gardens is the next stop which is filled with opulent architecture, elaborately landscaped gardens, and sculptured topiaries that extend over 350 acres. Your private tour will include the extraordinary greenhouse where over 11,000 different varieties of plants thrive in spectacular settings.

Day five will be spent at the Amish country's largest quilting weekend. The celebration is town-wide and includes several quilt shows. Among the festivities is the annual Quilter's Heritage Celebration show with its display of wonderful quilts. There are hundreds of merchant booths offering a variety of merchandise from antique sewing supplies to the latest in sewing notions.

Day six is a free day and you can choose between re-visiting the quilt show, or joining the tour guide for a shop-hop of Lancaster's quilt shops.

The last day of the tour is spent in Philadelphia, where an authentically costumed guide will accompany your tour group through the historic streets of Olde Philadelphia to explore historic places where the legends of liberty reside: places like the Betsy Ross house, the Liberty Bell, and Independence Hall. You'll also get time to shop in the historic Reading Terminal Market, where Amish vendors have been gathering since 1892 to sell their produce, baked goods, and ethnic delicacies, before you depart for your journey home again.

TIP #1: Sign Up Early

This trip is timed to coincide with the Amish country's largest quilting weekend so it fills up early every year. Most likely, you'll need to register on a waiting list. Sometimes the tour company adds additional tours to accommodate more people in a single season - but you may have to wait until next year to go. Either way, signing up now is your best bet.

TIP #2: Pack Your Tact

This tour is fun and educational and you'll be spending time with the Amish, a very private people, in their actual homes. In many ways, they have kept the art of quilt-making alive and well in this century and there is much to learn from them. Please remember that they are devout in their religious beliefs and way of life and treat these with respect.

TIP #3: Take a Pocketful of Small Bills

Tipping is a little tricky on this tour. On the one hand, gratuities are included in the tour price for all bell persons and wait staff who serve you as part of the tour itinerary. On the other hand, there are a slew of gratuities not included in the tour price. Carry a pocketful of small bills to tip for step-on guides in individual cities (to be offered at the time of service) and for personal items such as additional food or beverage orders, room service, valet or laundry service, meals not listed as included, phone access charges, or tipping for personal services not part of the tour's included features.

The traditional end-of-trip gratuities to your tour manager and motor coach driver are also not included. You are expected to enclose a gratuity in an envelope and present it individually at the end of the tour.

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