



PHOTO BY SUSAN LANIER-GRAHAM

Niagara Falls is home to one of the world's most breathtaking natural wonders, but a visit to the falls is also a chance to explore some of the richest cultural history in the U.S., hike through the Niagara Gorge, and explore caves and canals – plus, sample local flavors and sip award-winning wines.

Niagara Falls

Established in 1885, Niagara Falls State Park spans 400 acres along the Niagara River and, of course, the magnificent falls. Three waterfalls make up Niagara Falls – Horseshoe, American and Bridal Veil falls – and you can view all three from the U.S. side of them (in New York) without crossing into Canada.

The best first view is from Terrapin Point, looking down on Horseshoe Falls. The historic overlook was restored in summer 2016. You can then board the Maid of the Mist, originally launched in the 1800s as a scenic boat tour and still one of the most thrilling experiences at Niagara Falls. After donning a blue raincoat, set off for a 30-minute ride past the base of American Falls toward the

FALLING FOR
NIAGARA

Up close to an American wonder

BY SUSAN LANIER-GRAHAM

thundering power of Horseshoe Falls. As the water rumbles nearby, you suddenly feel quite small.

Another equally impressive experience is Cave of the Winds, giving you a chance to walk on the Hurricane Deck at the base of American and Bridal Veil falls, and a chance to get up close with water crashing inches away. Workers tear down these massive decks each fall and rebuild them every spring to keep them from being damaged by heavy winter ice.



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After experiencing the falls, head to Schoellkopf Power Station. When completed in 1924, it was the largest hydroelectric power station in the world. After the original station collapsed in 1956, the area became part of the Niagara Gorge hiking trail system. Today, there is an impressive elevator that takes you from the upper roadway down to the river.

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places



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A favorite, in nearby Gasport, New York, is Vizcarra Vineyards at Becker Farms, pouring more than 20 varieties of wines (you must try the award-winning pinot noir). You'll also find hard cider, homemade goodies, and beautiful gardens to stroll.



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Cultural History

One of the best places to explore Niagara's rich cultural history and get a look at the countryside is to drive 20 minutes north to Old Fort Niagara. Located on the shores of Lake Ontario, Fort Niagara was originally established as French Fort Conti in 1679. It has been under French, British and U.S. flags during its time in service. Now fully restored, it offers visitors a chance to step back in time, experiencing a soldier's life during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The 363-mile long Erie Canal was the first transportation system to run from New York City to the Great Lakes. Head to Lockport, about 35 miles east of Niagara, to take an excursion on Lockport Locks & Erie Canal Cruises. The two-hour cruise takes you through five of the original locks, including Locks 34 and 35, the only double set on the Erie Canal. While

you watch, 3 million gallons of water fill the locks, raising the boat 50 feet.

Wine Tasting

The countryside around Niagara Falls sits on the shores of Lake Ontario. With its cool climate (but long days during growing season), there are some great wines in this unique place, including lovely pinot noirs. While traditionally known for its late harvest and ice wines, this is an ideal destination for even the most discriminating wine lovers.

Dining and Lodging

If you can pull yourself away from the natural beauty, there are amazing places to eat in Niagara. Book dinner reservations at Savor, a fine dining restaurant inside the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute. Savor provides students a hands-on learning experience where you'll enjoy dishes prepared with ingredients sourced from local farmers.

Nearby Lewiston is a charming village filled with boutiques and shops, and food is plentiful for such a tiny town. Afternoon lunches are ideal on the patio at Water Street Landing – order the crab cakes to start. A favorite dinner spot along Center Street is Carmelo's, which serves rustic Italian cuisine. Though Chef Carmelo Raimondi changes the menu daily, the housemade pastas are a must.

After all the activities and ailments, head to The Giacomo, a luxury boutique hotel in the old United Office Building in downtown Niagara. The building and its 41 hotel rooms, constructed in 1929 art deco style, is on the National Register of Historic Places. If you aren't quite ready to end your day, head to the Sky View Lounge on the 19th floor on weekdays at 10 p.m. to see fireworks over the falls.

Learn more about Niagara at www.niagara-usa.com.