

WILD, WILD WEST



Pennsylvania Wilds offers plenty of outdoor adventure

Red, yellow green.

Stay at home, quarantine.

Cover your face, contact trace.

Open up, shut it down.

Stay at home, don't leave town.

As the pandemic continues to threaten lives and livelihoods, government officials struggle to adjust policies designed to protect the public health and the economy. Deciding if you should travel for a summer vacation becomes a complex decision. Is your destination experiencing a surge? Are attractions, restaurants and hotels there even open? Is it in a state where you will have to quarantine when you return?

The safest option is to stay put, but after months of sequestering at home, many of us are going stir crazy. The next best option may be a trip where you don't leave the state, spend most of the day outdoors or in your vehicle, and spend nights camping instead of in a hotel.

Welcome to the Pennsylvania Wilds. This is a large area — about 25% of the state — in the north-central region, mostly above Interstate 80 and west of Scranton. It boasts more than 2 million acres of public land, 50 state game lands, 29 state parks, eight state forests, two National Wild & Scenic Rivers and hundreds of miles of trails. It offers abundant opportunities for sightseeing, hiking, biking, camping, fishing, water sports, ATV riding, snowmobiling, stargazing and just about every other outdoor activity. Numerous small towns offer unique dining, shopping and cultural experiences, although some may be limited because of the pandemic. If you want to explore this region, a good place to start is pawilds.com.

The website is loaded with information to help you plan a trip into

the Wilds. There are links to the five main sections of the site at the top of the page. The Explore Landscapes section introduces you to the various areas in the region, such as Elk Country, where you can see the largest elk herd in the northeast, or Pine Creek Valley, where you can view Pennsylvania's Grand Canyon.

The Take a Journey section of the site gives you numerous options for road trips offering spectacular views. Route 6 passes through the Wilds, providing what National Geographic called "one of America's most scenic drives." Besides several other picturesque road trips detailed in this section, there are also journeys on trails and waterways you can take.

The Find Activities section connects you with things you can do all year round. There's horseback riding, campsites, outfitters, wildlife viewing, visitor's centers and more. The Attend an Event section is temporarily suspended because of the pandemic. It would be wise to confirm that any activities you plan to do are still available in these uncertain times.

The Made in the PA Wilds section features regional businesses that are part of the Wilds Cooperative. The co-op consists of more than 200 businesses that provide a wide range of products and services, including artisans, retail, lodging, dining, brewers and more. Patronizing local businesses is always a good idea, especially during this pandemic-produced economic downturn.

Pawilds.com is well designed and easy to navigate. It's loaded with great photos, has good typography and a color palette that evokes the great outdoors. Each section is filled with good information, including videos, maps and links to the websites of the featured attractions. It's a great resource if you want to go wild on your vacation this year.

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