



Farm Stays Offer Holiday Appeal

Tabitha Goodling, Central Pa. Correspondent, Dec 1, 2016

MOUNT JOY, Pa. — Not everyone goes home for the holidays.

Some folks choose to head to a farm and celebrate Christmas in the country.

Whether a family with young children, a middle-aged couple, or retirees looking for something different to do, these travelers prefer the interactive adventure of a “farm stay,” or overnight accommodations at a working farm. Instead of the standard hotel visit, farm-stay visitors might end up feeding calves, gathering eggs or herding sheep. Or, if it’s winter, they may add ice-skating on the farm pond, sledding down a snowy hill, or hanging out by a warm fireplace to their farm activities.

Some of the members of the PA Farm Vacation Association make their farm-stay setting appealing to those seeking a winter holiday visit.

Charlie and Bunny Yinger make the public their family during the holidays at the Berry Patch Bed and Breakfast north of Lebanon. The couple operates a gentleman’s farm and guests stay in a 10,000-square-foot log home.

“It’s a romantic setting,” Bunny Yinger said, “We built this in 1999, and we have 11 acres of horses, donkeys, Nubian goats which are all rescue animals.”

Last year, the Yingers decorated their bed and breakfast accommodations with 64 Christmas trees.

“We host Christmas parties, banquets and so forth,” she said. The farm is also opened up to senior citizens in assisted-living facilities to share in a visit.

“They spend hours here enjoying it,” she said.

Folks enjoy the large wrap-around porch and sip on hot beverages.

Giant Santa displays and various types of snowmen are part of the décor.

“People come here just to get a picture with my Santa,” Yinger said, “because he looks so real.”

Berry Patch hosts individuals and families on Christmas Day, and the Yingers do not feel like their own holiday is invaded.

“People book over Christmas simply because they don’t have any other place to go. People come in here not because they are going to see family, but to just get away. I invite them all to dinner with us. I just love to cook.”

Yinger makes ham, turkey and all the trimmings. Last year she hosted 30 guests around the table.

Offering a Christmas meal is something the couple has done prior to 1999 and their bed and breakfast business.

“We had elderly in the area who would come and have dinner with us at Christmas,” Yinger said.

The owner of Berry Patch said she has a special place in her heart for this time of year.

“I absolutely love Christmas,” she said.

“People who come here become a part of our family. It’s hard for people to understand. Christmas is about sharing and giving.”

In the southeastern part of Pennsylvania, Holly Noll helps her parents Galen and Eileen Benner operate Rocky Acres Farm near Mount Joy. The stone farmhouse is 200 years old and has been a B&B for decades. It was even once part of the Underground Railroad. During the holidays, it is decorated inside and out with garlands and hues of red, white and green.

The farm offers a hayride and a train ride of sorts. A large, red, four-wheeler pulls train cars around the property during the holiday season.

For those who just want to kick back and relax during the holiday, Noll said they do their best to make visitors feel at home.

“We have a coffee-and-tea bar and cookies,” Noll said.

The bed and breakfast is busy through Thanksgiving and beyond. The Benner family hosts their own relatives the weekend prior to Christmas — up to 40 individuals.

They reopen their business between Christmas and New Year’s Day, keeping the country Christmas atmosphere alive.

“During that time people come here to stay and they like to visit Hershey Park and the lights,” Noll said.

“We have regular people who come back every year. They like to see it all lit up here.”

For more information on the farm stays, go online to www.pafarmstay.com.

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