

Litchfield County, Connecticut: A Sophisticated, Bucolic Escape Just Two Hours North of Manhattan

by Jackie Cooperman | May 15, 2025



Just two hours north of Manhattan, bucolic Litchfield County, Connecticut, is booming. Long prized for its access to hiking, sailing, and antiquing, the 8,200-person county's new luxury hotel openings, sophisticated art galleries, and varied restaurants make any season a good time to visit. From the town of Litchfield itself — with an idyllic town green and a newly bustling hospitality scene — to nearby Bantam, Washington Depot, and Kent, the hilly communities offer nature, culture, and recreation, minus the crowds and pretense of other popular weekend destinations.

"After the pandemic, we got so many more families, so many more stores. Three hotels just opened in Litchfield that are gorgeous, stylish, fabulous, and cool. There are so many exciting options now," says Pilar De Mann, owner of [Pilar Beauty](#) in Washington Depot. De Mann, a Los Angeles native, moved to Litchfield County with her artist husband 13 years ago, and has grown increasingly enamored.

It's a common refrain.

Anthony Champalimaud had been visiting his stepfather's Litchfield home since he was 13 years old. Drawn to the area's combination of beauty and culture, he decamped to Litchfield from Manhattan 12 years ago. This May, Champalimaud unveiled [Belden House and Mews](#), a 31-room luxury hotel in a meticulously renovated 1888 building.

"Litchfield's a unique and beautiful place, with an extraordinary history," says Champalimaud, founder of Dutchfield, the hospitality firm that manages both Belden House and [Troutbeck](#), a rustic-chic resort in Amenia, New York. Champalimaud enlisted his mother, esteemed interior designer [Alexandra Champalimaud](#), to create each property's stylish aesthetic. "In the last five years, there's been a great influx of a lot of wonderful people, but Litchfield's also worked pretty hard not to change too much."

That dynamic keeps Litchfield's essential vibe — nature meets high-end, quiet New England town life — strong, and visitors can easily go from the town's shopping and art galleries to hikes at the nearby 4,000-acre [White Memorial Conservation Center](#).

Balancing town and country life defines Litchfield living, says James O'Shea, a pioneering restaurateur who opened the ever-popular [West Street Grill](#) in 1990. "Litchfield was beautiful but desolate then," says O'Shea, "But it's changed, absolutely and completely. Every house has been upgraded, some multiple times, and there are a lot of younger people here." O'Shea, who lives near the Litchfield Green, adores the town's proximity to nature. "I love the elegant simplicity of this place," he says. "It's unimaginably spectacular."

What to Know About Litchfield County

Since its founding in 1719, the town of Litchfield has played a small but important role in American history. [Litchfield Law School](#), the nation's first, opened in 1784 and educated Aaron Burr, Jr. and Horace Mann. Oliver Wolcott, Sr., one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, was Litchfield's sheriff from 1751 to 1771. Visit the [Litchfield Historical Society](#) to learn more about the town's history, or download the self-guided tour from its website.

Litchfield also drew some of the 20th century's great architects. [Marcel Breuer](#) designed a number of private homes, and in 1956, he built Litchfield High School, which is now Plumb Hill Middle School. Breuer, an instructor at the [Harvard School of Design](#), and his proteges — [John M. Johansen](#), [Landis Gores](#), [Philip Johnson](#), and [Eliot Noyes](#) — were known as the "Harvard Five" and spent a good deal of time in Litchfield, collaborating with artists like sculptor Alexander Calder, who lived in nearby Roxbury.

"Sometimes, I get these kind of 'peekaboo' moments as I'm driving around or walking, and I'll see the school's Breuer arch," Champalimaud says.

Litchfield also has an impressive track record of women writers. Author Harriet Beecher Stowe was born in Litchfield in 1811, and a century and a half later, writer Elizabeth Gilbert ("Eat, Pray, Love") grew up on a Litchfield Christmas tree farm.

What To Do For Arts and Culture

That history of art and aesthetes still resonates throughout the county, as evidenced through the depth and variety of artists showcased in local galleries. In Litchfield town, Craig Connolly, an artist and former marketing executive, opened [Alofft](#) in 2021, with the motto "art is the highest form of hope." Connolly's sunny, narrow storefront showcases work by contemporary painters, photographers, and sculptors.

Just four miles west, on busy Route 202 in Bantam, Artur Matuszewski's [AMArtHouse](#), an ambitious gallery in a renovated 1745 Colonial home, features striking outdoor installations by artists like [Richard Pitts](#). Inside, Matuszewski displays a rotating mix of contemporary and modern artists working in a variety of media.

Another eight miles southwest, in Washington Depot, Kathy McCarver Root, a former photo editor at [Esquire](#), brings her Manhattan sensibility to [KMR Arts](#), showing vintage and contemporary fine arts photography in a sunny two-floor house turned gallery.

The town of Kent, 18 miles northwest of Washington Depot, is well known for its art scene. Standout galleries include [Craven Contemporary](#), where you're just as likely to find an [Alex Katz](#) portrait as prints of irises, elegantly captured by Japanese photographer [Mio Akashi](#), and [Kenise Barnes Fine Art](#), a 31-year-old gallery with an impressive roster of contemporary artists. There's also [James Barron Art](#) (open by appointment) in Kent, which specializes in modern and contemporary American and European art.



Other Things to Do

In addition to White Memorial Conservation Center, [Mount Tom State Park](#) has easy hiking and swimming, and [Topsmead State Forest](#) offers nature walks on the flower-filled grounds of a former private estate. In the spring, [Laurel Ridge Farm](#)'s 10 acres of daffodils are open to the public, and very much worth a stroll.

From May to November, families with young children and/or avian aficionados should check out the [Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy](#), home to more than 500 birds, including 90 endangered and rare species. For water enthusiasts, [Bantam Lake](#) and [Lake Waramaug](#) have small sandy beaches, standup paddle boarding, and kayaking. Local company [Connecticut Watersports](#) offers waterski lessons and pontoon rentals.

Where to Shop

The area's retail offerings cater to well-heeled weekenders. The bright and airy [Milton Market](#), tucked away in a cobblestone court just off of Litchfield Town Green, carries high-end design objets, like lamps from local designer [Dumais Made](#); delicious-smelling body mists from French company [Kerzon](#), and handblown vintage glass. Clothier [R. Derwin](#), with windows overlooking the Green, specializes in Connecticut's effete take on quiet luxury: Think [Herno](#) outerwear, Italian cashmere, menswear from English brand [Seaward and Stearn](#), and jaunty straw hats imported from Florence, which may come in handy on one of Litchfield's many trails.

The [Mayflower Inn and Spa](#) in Washington inspired "[Gilmore Girls](#)" creator Amy Sherman-Palladino to create her seminal series. To live out your own "[Gilmore Girls](#)" fantasies, head down the hill from Washington to Washington Depot, just 13 miles southwest of Litchfield. Stop in at beloved local epicurean shop [The Pantry](#) for coffee and delicious blueberry muffins, or lunch options like chilled cucumber avocado soup and lasagna. [The Hickory Stick](#) bookshop can sustain hours of browsing, displays signed books from local authors, and has a robust "[Gilmore Girls](#)" section.

Cross the street to the [Judy Black Memorial Park](#) for the farmers market, which runs from Memorial Day to the weekend before Thanksgiving and usually has live music. Around the corner, [Five Janes](#), a mother-daughter-run boutique, stocks a great selection of sweaters, jewelry, body care products, and some sweet "[Gilmore Girls](#)" souvenirs. For the finishing "[Gilmore Girls](#)" touch, make like Lorelai and head up the hill to New Preston for locally sourced coffee and gourmet sandwiches at [The Smithy Cafe](#). Locals sit in bay windows overlooking a waterfall, Carole King plays on the sound system, and Stars Hollow feels very real.

Where to Eat

James O'Shea has been feeding Litchfield at his [West Street Grill](#) since 1990. The charming Irishman remains the consummate host, seating his regulars in the dining room for local heirloom tomato salad, Black Angus burgers, and linguini with Long Island clams.

In Bantam, [Materia](#)'s chef David Di Stasi trained under Michelin-starred chefs [Enrico Bertolini](#) in Italy and Eric Ripert at [Le Bernardin](#), and it shows, particularly in dishes like amberjack crudo with spring peas in a wasabi and lime emulsion and the lobster tagliolini. And a bonus: Di Stasi recently added three bedrooms above the restaurant, so visitors can enjoy one of his six-course tasting menus with matching wines and collapse into bed.

Another high-end choice in Bantam: [Arethusa Al Tavolo](#), a pioneer in the area's fine dining scene when it opened more than a decade ago. Chef Dan Magill, who trained with Daniel Boulud, showcases local produce, as well as the excellent cheese and yogurt from Arethusa Farm, started by two Manolo Blahnik executives. Next door, [Arethusa Farm Dairy](#) dishes out exceptionally creamy ice cream made with milk from Arethusa's award-winning cows. "They make the best coffee milkshake I've ever had," says De Mann, adding that visitors should also order sweet cream chocolate chip and a strawberry ice cream sandwich, in which ice cream is nestled between housemade sugar cookies.

Also in Bantam, [West Shore Seafood](#) offers an ideal casual summer lunch or dinner at its easy outdoor eatery, perfect for lobster rolls, oysters, and salmon burgers.



On the road between Bantam and Washington Depot, **Community Table** is popular with locals and artists. Led by chef **Christian Hunter** and managing partner Jo-Ann Makovitzky, an ex-New Yorker who ran Tocqueville in Union Square, the restaurant brings a new American perspective to dishes like steelhead trout, served with sunset fingerling potatoes, black morels, and wild spring onions, and white and green asparagus with poached farm egg, brown butter crumbs, parmesan crisp, and fermented white asparagus sauce.

Kent's **Swyft** may have Connecticut's best pizza outside of New Haven, and sources much of its produce from nearby **Rock Cobble Farm**. In addition to innovative pies like the Tiger King (San Marzano tomato sauce, housemade mozzarella, fresh basil, calabrian chili oil, pecorino), the summer menu includes bluefin tuna aguachile, crab spaghetti, a much-adored smash burger, and a strawberry arugula salad.

Where to Stay



The most luxurious option in the center of Litchfield, **Belden House and Mews** offers butler service, a spa, an outdoor pool, and two BMWs at guests' disposal. Alternatively, the **Abner Hotel**, in Litchfield's former courthouse building directly on the Green, has 20 boutique rooms and a chic rooftop terrace.

Nearby in Washington, **Mayflower Inn and Spa** remains the area's premier resort, with 35 rooms and suites spread over 58 acres, indoor and outdoor pools, and a 20,000 square foot spa.

Five miles south of Litchfield in Morris, **Winvian Farm** celebrates a distinctly whimsical form of luxury, with 18 individual cottages (one in a treehouse), and a newly renovated restaurant that uses produce from Winvian's three-acre organic farm.

The new **Lost Fox Inn**, just two and a half miles north of Litchfield, on the road to Torrington, offers a deep sense of local history: The inn's tavern dates back to 1745 and accommodations include 10 guest rooms, three suites, and a guest cottage in what was once a 19th-century schoolhouse.

In Kent, **The Kent Collection** has recently turned three turn-of-the-century buildings into appealing guest houses.



When to Go

Litchfield County is charming all year long (and hotels prices don't fluctuate too much from season to season). Autumn brings quintessential New England foliage, hiking, apple picking at [Averill Farm](#) in Washington, and [March Farm](#)'s impressive corn maze in Bethlehem. Winter is perfect for nestling by a roaring fire and admiring the frozen, Norman Rockwell-esque lakes in Bantam and New Preston or skiing at [Mohawk Mountain](#) in Cornwall, about 12 miles north of Litchfield. Golden waves of forsythia mark the spring, and garden aficionados love the annual [Trade Secrets Garden Tours](#). Summer is Litchfield's liveliest season, when flowers and farmers markets are abundant (such as those in [Washington](#), [Litchfield](#), and [Bantam](#)), as are cultural offerings, with performances from [Shakespeare in the Hills](#), [Pilobolus](#), [Litchfield Jazz Festival](#), and wine tasting and outdoor concerts at [Spring Hill Vineyard](#) and [Hopkins Vineyard](#).

How To Get There

Litchfield County is about a two-hour drive from downtown Manhattan (pro tip: if you need to stop for dinner on the way, Armonk, NY, has excellent restaurant options such as [Zero Otto Nove](#) and [Kuko](#)). It's also about a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Boston. The area's luxury hotels coordinate car service from [Wassaic](#) or [Waterbury](#) train stations, but be aware that [Amtrak](#) and [Metro-North](#) schedules are limited.

Know Before You Go

Public transportation does not exist in the area, so be prepared to drive. That said, distances are short, traffic lights are few, and the scenery is often spectacular.

Combine With

New York City and Boston are both within a couple of hours' drive, so a trip to Litchfield County can be easily paired with a visit to either city. Hotel options in New York include [MADE Hotel](#), [The Pierre NY](#), [The Knickerbocker](#), and [many others](#). In Boston, check out [The Newbury Boston](#), [Boston Park Plaza](#), or [Boston Harbor Hotel](#).

Or, head across the border to New York State and spend some time in the [Hudson Valley](#), too.

Make it Happen

Plan your journey and connect with the ideal travel advisor, who will help customize your trip. Click the button below or let us answer some questions first.



What are some dining options available in Litchfield County?



Which historical figures are associated with Litchfield County?



What is the history of Litchfield Law School in Connecticut?



What are the transportation options for getting to Litchfield County?

