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EXPLORING

AMISH ACRES



Visitors gain insight into Amish history and culture at a popular Indiana attraction.

By Steve Slosarek



ucked away in the tranquil countryside of north-central Indiana thrives an

endearing homage to the Amish that should not be missed.

Amish Acres Historic Farm & Heritage Resort on U.S. Highway 6 in Nappanee shines a light on the Amish, who first settled in Indiana in the 1830s. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Amish Acres devotes 80 acres to celebrate everything Amish through tours, restaurants, musical theater, craft demonstrations, shops and inns.

Indiana Amish One appreciates the Amish better by learning their history, and Amish Acres covers that territory quite well. Two short documentary films may be screened in the meeting house, which constitutes one of more than two dozen historical structures or outbuildings spread across the farmstead. The films educate viewers on how the Amish formed as part of the 16th-century Anabaptist movement in Europe, why they developed their customs and came to America, who first settled at the current

Amish Acres site and how the Amish live today.

Led by a guide, a 45-minute walking tour takes visitors over a portion of the grounds on the way to the site's original 1874 house. Highlights include a brick bake oven, which was used to bake 15 loaves of bread weekly, and a smokehouse used to preserve meats. A smoldering fire in each brings these historical outdoor "appliances" to life.

The original house was constructed by Christian Stahly, the Nappanee area's first Amish settler, who built the house for his son, Moses. Highlights include a pie safe and a still-operating dinner bell at the roof peak. Visitors meander next door into an 1893 house built by Moses Stahly's father-in-law. It features symmetric Germanic architecture and an original color scheme.

The guide explained why Amish men have no mustaches but some have beards, why they don't wear buttons on their clothes, why they reject electricity, and why they ride in buggies instead of in automobiles.

Amish work on quilts, weave rugs and make brooms in the houses, except on Sundays. Visitors may explore nearby buildings on their own. We enjoyed



Those interested in a farm wagon or horse-and-buggy ride meet at the Wagon Shed to begin their tour.

Planning Your Trip

Amish Acres offers a variety of activities, tours and packages, including a two-day, one-night Getaway Package or a three-day, two-night Girlfriends' Fall Getaway Weekend (Oct. 7–9), among others. To learn more, visit amishacres.com. For trip-planning assistance, call your local AAA Travel agent or visit AAA.com/travel.

perusing an 1876 bank barn that housed turkeys, hens, peacocks and a mule.

A short walk to a sheltered wagon shed provides a meeting point for a guided 15-minute farm wagon ride or a 10-minute horse-and-buggy ride around the rest of the grounds. The wagon ride stops at an 1870s one-room German schoolhouse, where visitors can sit at desks while the guide details Amish schooling and points out a nearby original horse-drawn school bus.

Amish Acres is much more than a living history lesson. It's a fun place to relax, browse shops, eat Amish food and watch theater productions. The grounds feature shops filled with food, quilts, antiques and crafts. There's a soda shop, meat and cheese shop, bakery, cider mill, gristmill and more.

Food and Fun The restaurant, constructed from two bank barns built in the 1870s, seats 400 guests, oversees a large pond, and offers a Threshers Dinner. Family-style meals include the choice of two meat entrees. Accompaniments include beef and noodles, sage dressing with gravy, mashed potatoes, vegetables, ham and bean soup, and freshly baked hearth bread with a crock of apple butter. All dishes are refillable, and diners choose one dessert. A barn loft wine room offers seasonal wine tastings.

Perhaps Amish Acres' most underrated asset is its musical theater. Performances take place in the Round Barn Theatre, built in 1911. The 400-capacity round barn features a 60-foot, self-supporting dome and cupola for superb acoustics. It is home to a resident repertory professional theater, and the stage was dedicated to playwright Joseph Stein. His 1955 musical *Plain and Fancy* is performed in rotating repertory from May to October, while popular musicals are performed year-round.

Plain and Fancy, a surprisingly amusing, lively tale about the intermingling of Amish families with visiting New Yorkers, has played at the Round Barn Theatre for 30 years. The professional cast is composed of stellar performers from around the country.

After taking in all these Amish-related experiences, it was time to go home. Driving out of town, we heard the clip-clop of hooves and saw an Amish family in a horse and buggy. Instead of thinking their simple life is ordinary, we reflected on how it's so extraordinary. **H&A**

Steve Slosarek is a freelance writer from Carmel, Ind.

The Round Barn Theatre (left) stages a variety of musicals throughout the year. Freshly baked hearth bread and apple butter is served as part of the Threshers Dinner (right).



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