

## TRAVEL

# Land O' Goshen

## Get away for a relaxing weekend in Indiana's Amish country

BY THREEOLBAGS  
SPECIAL WRITERS

"Our guests would like to try some garden tea," our gracious hostess said to her daughter. "Bring in some peppermint and spearmint."

Without a word the young girl found some scissors and headed out the front door. Minutes later the ThreeOlBags sat down to a wonderful cup of freshly brewed "garden tea." Our chance to visit the tidy home of this hospitable Amish family was the highlight of our two-day trip to Amish country in northern Indiana.

Our adventure began on Friday morning when we drove the short four hours from Detroit and arrived at Market Street Guest House in Nappanee, Ind. It's a beautiful historic home on the main street in town. We found our accommodations online, and were very happy with our choice, and our charming innkeeper, Sharon Bontrager. She made us feel instantly welcome, and gave us plenty of information about the Amish.

Much to our surprise, the horse-and-buggy Amish are only part of the story in northern Indiana. We learned there are actually three different sects represented in "Amish" country. There are Mennonites, Hutterites, and of course, Amish. In

### If you go

- Market Street Guest House - [www.amishcountrybb.org](http://www.amishcountrybb.org)
- Dick Lehman, potter - [www.DickLehman.com](http://www.DickLehman.com)
- The Blue Gate Restaurant - [www.rlegsecker.com](http://www.rlegsecker.com)
- The Old Bag Factory - [www.oldbagfactory.com](http://www.oldbagfactory.com)
- Special Events Calendar: [www.backroads.org](http://www.backroads.org)
- July 2-4 - Three-day Flea Market
- Aug. 2-3 - Habitat for Humanity Benefit Auction
- Aug. 9-11 - Amishland and Lakes Bicycle Tour
- Sept. 21 - Honeyville Quilt Auction
- Oct. 11-12 - Fall Crafter's fair
- Nov. 1-2 - Holiday Collection

addition, within each sect there are differences in beliefs which create a wide variety of living standards within the community.

At Bontrager's suggestion, we took the Heritage Trail Driving Tour while listening to a CD she loaned us. The CD explained the history of the area, and interesting spots as we drove through Elkhart, Middlebury, Shipshewanna, Goshen and Nappanee. It takes about three hours, if you don't stop anywhere along the way; of course, that was not part of our plan.

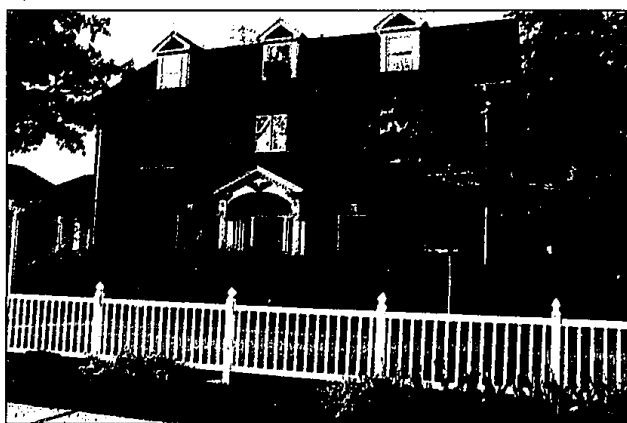
### First stop

We found all roads lead to Goshen, the center of Amish country. Our first stop was the Old Bag Factory. With a name like that, how could ThreeOlBags resist? Formerly a paper bag factory, the building has been transformed into a specialty mall with 19 shops and a café.

Potter Dick Lehman showed us how he made his wares on an old pottery wheel. He deftly sculpted wet clay while we chatted and soon produced an original stoneware bowl. Although most of his wheel-thrown stoneware and porcelain is sold locally, he accepts orders from out-of-towners. Lehman also pointed us toward other interesting activities in the area and shared his knowledge of Amish culture. One important etiquette tip we learned is to ask permission before taking pictures of the Amish.

Just across the trolley tracks from The Old Bag Factory is a restored 1837 log cabin perched on a hill. This is the home of Quilt Designs, owned and operated by Dave and Shirley A. Shenk. Shirley designs one-of-a-kind quilts, and then hires local Amish and Mennonite women to do the hand quilting. Shenk is one of the top five quilt designers in the country. It's definitely worth a stop to view her exquisite form of fabric art.

Our first stop on Saturday was Borkholder Dutch Village in Nappanee. It claims to be the "nation's largest antiques, collectibles and crafts mall." Each booth contains hand-crafted items made by area residents.



Lodging: The Market Street Bed and Breakfast in Nappanee, Ind. is in a beautiful historic home with a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

We spoke with one woman from Hazel Park, Mich. who said, "I come here about every two years. There are things here you cannot find anywhere else. It's the best craft mall I have ever seen."

### Museum

We drove on to Shipshewanna and found the Menno-hof, a Mennonite-Amish Visitors Center. Whether you are a history buff or just curious about learning the beginnings of the Mennonite and Amish people, this is the place to start. The tastefully done museum traces their church history back to the Reformation.

"Follow the trail of a people searching for peace" is the theme of their multi-image presentation. Here you will find answers to questions like: Why do the Amish drive horse and buggies instead of cars? What caused the Amish to break away from

the Mennonites in 1693? The tour takes a little over an hour to complete, and is well worth the \$5 donation.

We highly recommend the Blue Gate Restaurant in Shipshewanna for the best Amish cuisine at a reasonable price. At only \$12.95 per person we found it to be a bargain. The family style dinner concludes with a hearty portion of fresh baked fruit pie.

Our two-hour visit with in the home of an Amish family gave us a chance to learn that our cultures are more alike than different. Even though their choice of transportation and dress may seem foreign to us, the Amish hold dear the same family values cherished by most Americans.

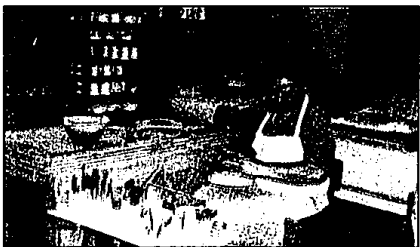
The family we visited was friendly and very much like our own families. Teenagers were popping in and out, leaving with gym bags packed for a sleepover.

Young boys enjoyed themselves behind the wheel of a small lawn tractor.

We began our visit a bit nervous that we might say or do something offensive to these people. We thought they lived with strange and restrictive boundaries. But, we left laughing at ourselves for being so presumptuous and deeply touched to have had the opportunity to share a little time with new friends.

We asked our hosts if it was polite to wave at the buggies that pass by. They looked at each other knowingly, and then the husband replied, "Smiles are universally understood."

ThreeOlBags are three creative Garden City women - Sandra Campbell, Sharon Hegwood, and Linda Sparkman, who collaborate on travel pieces. You can visit them at [www.threeolbags.com](http://www.threeolbags.com).



At work: Dick Lehman is the master potter at Old Bag Factory in Goshen, Ind.

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