

HAVENS; Weekender New Paltz, N.Y.

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By BONNIE TSUI

IN 1677 Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France settled New Paltz, N.Y. Today Manhattanites fleeing the city flock there to climb the Gunks — the rocks of the nearby Shawangunk Ridge — and enjoy the youthful energy of a small college town. “I rented a property with some friends, and we called it the climbing house,” said Christopher Lawrence, a photographer in Manhattan, one of the many New Paltz weekenders who come for the Gunks. After driving up every weekend for several years and often camping or staying in a motel, he bought his own New Paltz house — a Cape Cod on four wooded acres.

“I’m such an outdoor person, and being up in the mountains is perfect for me,” he said. “I like the contrast of adrenalines — of being in the city and of being outside on the lakes and trails.” Much of the Gunks is in the lush Mohonk Preserve, owned by a private land trust. With more than 100 miles of carriage roads and trails, the preserve is a top destination for trail runners, hikers and bikers as well as rock climbers. It is just a 10-minute drive from downtown New Paltz, where Main Street is a lively two-lane thoroughfare dotted with restaurants, cafes, shops and bed-and-breakfasts. Just off Main Street, within walking distance on Route 32, is the New Paltz campus of the State University of New York, which gives the town arts performances, gallery exhibitions, lectures and the energizing presence of more than 7,000 students. A few blocks from Main Street is the Huguenot Street National Historic Landmark District. Much of the street’s original architecture, including a collection of Colonial and early national period stone houses, is preserved with museum-quality diligence by the local historical society. Outside the Village of New Paltz, the town of the same name is still a productive farming area, where farm stands and markets sell fruit from the local orchards. Area vineyards have become destinations in themselves: the 60-mile Shawangunk Wine Trail has its terminus at Rivendell Winery in New Paltz.

The Scene

On any given weekend, well-known climbers like Ivan Greene, the first to ascend many routes in the Gunks, can be spotted heading out to the ridge or hanging out at Rock and Snow, the outdoor store in town. But according to Marty Molitoris, the founder of a climbing guide service called Alpine Endeavors, New Paltz is not just for climbing. “It’s fishing, hiking, mountain biking, ca-

noeing, camping,” he said. “If you’re an outdoors enthusiast, you can do anything here.” Hikers who tire of the Mohonk Preserve can go to its southern border, where the Minnewaska State Park offers public access to 12,000 more acres of pristine hardwood forest as well as waterfalls and two lakes where visitors can swim and paddle. But you do not have to be an athlete to enjoy New Paltz. The town’s cultural energy is palpable. “The vibe is similar to the West Coast hippie counterculture,” said Scott Jolley, an editor at Travel and Leisure magazine who has a studio apartment in Manhattan and spends weekends in the New Paltz area. He said he loves the diversity of a place that has three independent bookstores downtown, yet feels worlds away from any city. “My partner went to SUNY New Paltz years ago, and when we looked around the Hudson Valley, we kept coming back here,” he said. “It’s just an hour and a half away, but at night it’s crickets and geese instead of sirens, which is really restorative.” To Mr. Lawrence, the photographer, New Paltz is the perfect size. “There are lots of restaurants very close by if you want that,” he said. “And there’s a huge artist community; the Hudson Valley is very friendly to that.”

Pros

New Paltz has a wealth of cafes and restaurants, many of them vegetarian- and vegan-friendly, including Cookies and Cream on Main Street, which has a smoothie bar and serves wraps, salads, organic coffee and homemade ice cream. On weekends on North Front Street, the Bakery has a line of people patiently waiting for fresh-baked scones, croissants, rugelach, super-size cookies and custom-made sandwiches. There are plenty of bars and pubs, many of them sites for live music on weekend nights. When school is in session, certain places, like P&G’s and McGillicuddy’s, are packed with the college crowd. The Gilded Otter microbrewery and Bacchus bar and restaurant attract an older, more relaxed clientele. The Water Street Antique and Art Village at Water and Main Streets houses a series of eclectic galleries and workshops selling wares like jewelry and clothing, antiques and artisanal cheese. There are convenient places to rent bicycles and climbing gear if you do not bring your own.

Cons

Like every other town, New Paltz is being invaded by a homogeneous wider culture. Starbucks has moved

next door to Ariel Booksellers, a 31-year-old independent shop. The town has become less rural, and a proposed 349-home and golf course development on 2,660 acres in the Gunks in Gardiner, an adjoining town many consider an extension of New Paltz, has drawn criticism from many residents. At the same time, the nearest shopping mall remains at least 30 minutes away, in Poughkeepsie or Newburgh. "It's mostly mom and pop shops here," said Marina Kokkinias, a computer training manager in Manhattan who has a colonial-style house 15 minutes from the center of New Paltz. "You're not going to find the convenience of a big Kmart." Concerns arise during the winter about adequate road clearance after big snowfalls, particularly for weekenders who live on country properties and need to leave early to take the train or bus back to work in Manhattan. Also keep in mind that the only public sewage system is right in the village; most houses must have septic tanks. If you do not enjoy mingling with a lot of liberal young students, you will not like New Paltz. "It's very laid-back here," Ms. Kokkinias said.

The Real Estate Market

"Attractions such as the state park preserves have generated a big growth in the area as weekenders look for a better quality of life," said Terri Colucci Shand, the owner of Colucci Shand Realty (2356 Route 44/55, Gardiner, 845-255-3455; www.coluccishandrealty.com). "A lot of them eventually hope to turn their weekend home into a place where they'll actually live full time." Most property seekers shopping the area look for privacy away from the town center and the college, whether secluded in the woods or on at least an acre of surrounding meadow. Earlier this week 83 residential dwellings were for sale in the New Paltz vicinity (27 of which were pending sales), ranging from an 850-square-foot one-bedroom condominium in an attached row house, with no land, for \$147,000 to a 1940 three-bedroom Cape Cod on a 71.8-acre horse farm, complete with a pond and a stream, bordering the popular hiking and biking Rail Trail, for \$1.2 million. In the median range, there was a five-bedroom, three-bathroom raised ranch with an indoor pool on 1.1 acres, near the center of town, for \$285,000. At the foothills of the Mohonk Mountain House, a custom-built, three-bedroom split-level contemporary home with a great room, fireplace and cedar siding was priced at \$375,000. "It's located at the end of a cul-de-sac and has a view of Mohonk's Skytop Tower, which is very desirable," said André Venables, the owner and principal broker of Century 21 Venables Realty (203 Main Street, 845-255-6163; [\[century21venables.com\]\(http://www.century21venables.com\)\). The median house price has jumped considerably in the last two years as many residences have sold off, leaving few available. Some weekenders have taken to buying land and custom-building their houses, but few tracts are left. Zoning is strict: for example, businesses must secure local approval before they put up signs. "The market has been tight for the last two years, and feeling progressively so because people are feeling secure being here," Ms. Colucci Shand said. "There's not a lot of movement, but it's a sign of the times."](http://www.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

LAY OF THE LAND — An Outdoors Town, With Plenty of Books

POPULATION — 12,830 full-time residents.

SIZE — 34 square miles (including the Village of New Paltz)

MEDIAN HOUSE PRICE — \$299,000

RECENT SALES — A 1978 four-bedroom raised ranch on four acres, with ceramic floors, a fireplace and a storage barn, for \$242,900; a four-bedroom ranch with hardwood floors and a one-car garage within walking distance of the town center, for \$285,000; a four-bedroom custom-built contemporary house with exposed beams and a two-story living room on a country road, for \$352,500.

DISTANCE FROM NEW YORK — 88 miles.

TRAVEL TIME — An hour and a half to two hours from Manhattan in light traffic. By train, from Grand Central Terminal, it is an hour and 40 minutes to Poughkeepsie, 12 miles east of New Paltz. Enterprise Rent-a-Car (724 Main Street, Poughkeepsie; 845-485-2222) will pick up customers at the station. It is a great way to beat the traffic in and out of Manhattan; cars start around \$20 a day on weekends.

GETTING THERE — Take the New York State Thruway to Exit 18.

WHILE YOU'RE LOOKING — The Inn at Orchard Heights (20 Church Street, New Paltz; 845-255-6792) is a five-room bed-and-breakfast in the center of town, housed in an 1888 Queen Anne Victorian. Rates start at \$100. The 26 rooms at the Minnewaska Lodge (3116 Route 44/55, Gardiner; 845-255-1110) are within sight of the Shawangunks and the Mohonk Preserve, 10 minutes from the Village of New Paltz. Depending on room and season, prices are \$155 to \$209 and include breakfast.

