

# SARATOGA 2026

*Donna's 25 Favorite Experiences in Saratoga*



Opening Day at the historic Saratoga Race Course is Friday, July 3, kicking off the Fourth of July Racing Festival (July 3–5) and the start of another unforgettable summer. Racing is held Thursday through Sunday for most of July before returning to Saratoga's traditional five-day-a-week schedule on July 29, continuing through Labor Day.

While millions know Saratoga for its world-class horse racing, that's only part of the story. During the summer meet, the city hums with energy as visitors fill the streets, restaurants, parks, and shops. The racing may bring people here, but it's everything else that keeps them coming back. That's what this Top 25 list is all about.

I've been sharing this list for several years, and after my husband and I bought a condo here in 2018, I've come to appreciate Saratoga not just as a visitor, but as a part-time local. We've been spending summers here for more than 25 years, discovering new favorites while returning to beloved traditions.

Some of these experiences revolve around the racetrack—from morning workouts to post-race dinners. Others have nothing to do with horse racing at all. Together, they capture what makes Saratoga Springs one of America's great summer destinations, or, as I like to call it, Adult Summer Camp. Let's get started.

# Spa City Entertainment (#s 1-7)

## 1. Saratoga Race Course

It started in 1863, and it's still going strong, so let's start there. Planning a day at the track should start with where you'll sit or hang out, and there are many seating options at Saratoga Race Course. When planning your trip, visit the "[tickets](#)" site first. Traditionally, Saratoga Race Course has not been a climate-controlled environment, but between the Paddock Suite and the 1863 Club, you now have a couple of fully air-conditioned options with great views of the paddock or track. That said, my favorite seating is in the [Turf Terrace](#), where you'll find open-air dining tables that can accommodate parties from 2 to 10. These tables are hard to get, so book well in advance. I hope to see you there!

## 2. Saratoga Performing Arts Center (SPAC)

Rock. Country. Jazz. Ballet. Comedy... [SPAC](#) presents performances from Guns N' Roses to the Philadelphia Orchestra in their open-air, outdoor amphitheater located just on the edge of town on the Saratoga Spa State Park grounds. Even before the meet started, my husband and I caught Jelly Roll there (he was **fantastic!**), and SPAC hosted their annual Saratoga Jazz Festival on June 27 & 28. Their summer line-up is so diverse that you just have to check the event schedule [here!](#) In fact, you may decide to plan your trip to the track around the SPAC schedule!

## 3. National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame (NMRHOF)

Located right across the street from the track, the [NMRHOF](#) consistently finds creative ways to bring the history of horse racing to life. You **have to** see their immersive theatrical presentation of "What It Takes: Journey to the Hall of Fame", a 16-minute film that brings visitors on a fantastic journey through the various aspects of Thoroughbred racing and examines the rare honor of reaching the game's pinnacle and earning a coveted spot in the Hall of Fame (HOF). The NMRHOF offers unique tours throughout the summer and hosts dozens of events. If you haven't joined them for their [Saturday Morning Social](#), you're missing out! It's offered every Saturday throughout the race meet and runs from 9 - 11:00 a.m. This summer, they are hosting five [special exhibits](#) that will be in residence for a limited time. You truly could spend an entire day at the Racing Museum and never run out of engaging content.

## 4. Lake George

If you have only one free afternoon, spend it on Lake George. The southern tip of Lake George is only 30 minutes from Saratoga Springs, but it can be quite busy. The northernmost point at Ticonderoga is an hour and 20 minutes away. Somewhere in between, you'll find [The Sagamore](#) (resort) at Bolton Landing, which is a beautiful place to stay or just to have lunch.

That said, you really need to get out on the water to take it all in. For more on how you can do just that—and there are many options—click [here](#).

## 5. Morning Training

I've watched countless sunrises over the Oklahoma Training Track, and it never gets old. If you've never watched Thoroughbreds train at sunrise, you're missing one of the best things about horse racing and upstate New York mornings. Even without a racing license, you can watch the horses train either from the Whitney Viewing Stand at the Oklahoma Training Track or the grandstand at Saratoga. You can upgrade this experience by doing “Breakfast at Saratoga” (every live racing day from 7:00 to 9:30 am, excluding Travers Day and Labor Day) or the “Breakfast & Breeding Farm Tour” (select days). There's also the Backstretch Golf Cart Tour, Paddock Tour, and Walking Tour. Start planning [here](#). You can thank me later.

## 6. Saratoga Lake

Nothing clears your head—or improves your luck at the track—like a day on the lake, and Saratoga Lake is a 5-minute drive from the track. Rent a kayak, try your hand at paddle boarding, or just hang out and enjoy the sunshine. A lovely spot for lunch can be found at [Lago by Druthers](#) (formerly, 550 Waterfront), where you can enjoy a meal on the water. Click [here](#) for “8 Must-Do Activities When You Visit Saratoga Lake”. Saratoga Lake also has a new [floating sauna](#)—you know, detox/retox/detox. I've got you.

## 7. Fasig-Tipton Saratoga Select Sale

The [Saratoga Select](#) yearling sale is unlike anything else in horse racing. You'll find yourself immersed in a mesmerizing bidding scene *and* a vibrant social setting all at once. This prestigious sale creates an unparalleled atmosphere where you'll indulge your senses amid a fashionable crowd, a bustling bar, and multi-million-dollar purchases. This sale follows Whitney Stakes weekend, so there's a lot on offer in a few short days. In 2026, this sale takes place on August 10 & 11. Let's go watch really rich people spend **a lot** of money!

# Lunch in Style (#s 8-11)

Assuming you're not eating lunch at the track *every* day, these are some other places to try. One of my favorite lunch spots from last year's list has since closed. Scallions restaurant was purchased by Ronnie Solevo, the owner of Solevo Kitchen & Social. It will not reopen until the fall, and the new name will be The Pearl. “The Pearl is a reference to my New England roots growing up in southern Connecticut on the shoreline,” Solevo said. The Pearl's interior and menu are still under development, but it will not be an option this summer. Stay tuned.

The list below includes *my* favorites and my husband's favorite spot for sandwiches and deli salads. But there are at least ten good spots to grab lunch along Broadway, so don't be afraid to pop into a restaurant that appeals to you. Saratoga is a tough crowd, and if they've been on Broadway for more than five to ten years, odds are even money or better that you'll have a fantastic experience.

### **8. 9 Miles East**

As a local, this is the place that I eat at most often—or grab carry-out from. Casual. Super casual. The pizza is the best I've ever had, made from organic wheat and a homemade sourdough starter. They make their sandwich rolls the same way. So your crusts and sandwiches taste divine. And the salads are made fresh daily. It's called 9 Miles East because they are a farm 9 miles east of Saratoga that outgrew its farm store space and moved to Saratoga. By the way, Wednesday night is Burger Night (grass-fed beef), and they deliver pizza, too! They also cover all 3 meals of the day—and snacks. They even serve beer and wine. I'll see you [there](#).

### **9. Sara's Kitchen**

Ideally located on Broadway in the heart of Saratoga Springs, Sara's Kitchen brings authentic Middle Eastern cooking and genuine hospitality to the community. Created by owners Sara Ali & Chef Michael Blake, Sara's serves authentic Middle Eastern food inspired by Sara Ali's cultural traditions, with plenty of gluten-free options (for people like me). Added bonus: indoor and outdoor dining (think sidewalk cafe). Trust me on this one.

### **10. Morrissey's Lounge & Bistro**

Right down the street from Sara's Kitchen, you'll find Morrissey's Lounge & Bistro, and if you love sidewalk cafe dining, this is the spot for you. They also have a very eclectic menu offering everything from salads to sandwiches to sushi. If it's too warm for outdoor dining, the lounge is lovely. Located in the newly refurbished and renovated Adelphi Hotel, this is a place where you will find something for everyone. You'll also find Morrissey's on my brunch list below. No, they did not pay me—but I'm happy to accept a free drink!

### **11. Cardona's**

This is the perfect spot to pick up lunch for the day; it is an old-school Italian deli that offers carryout. At Cardona's, you'll find genuine Italian food made fresh daily. Giant sandwiches. Authentic Italian Deli. Come hungry. Check out their menu [here](#).

# Shop 'Til You Drop (#s 12-14)

For the past couple of years, I've included only **one** favorite shopping venue in my Top 25 list: Woodbury Common Premium Outlets in Central Valley, NY. And while I still love shopping at Woodbury (think Burberry, Christian Louboutin, Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Prada, Theory, Valentino, Yves St. Lauren, Zadig & Voltaire, Zegna, Zimmerman, etc. all in one place!), it **is** a 2-hour drive from Saratoga Springs, and I feel like this list should be limited to stores **in** Saratoga Springs. These are my favorites, and they can all be found in Saratoga's vibrant downtown.

## **12. Encounter**

If I could only send you to one boutique in Saratoga, this would be it. Owner Beth Harr has worked in fashion and retail for more than 25 years, and, since she lives in Saratoga, she knows her clientele well and has curated a collection of designers and high-end fashions unique to her store. At Encounter, you can expect the kind of knowledge and service you'd find at the most luxurious boutiques, but with a hometown feel. Encounter is also the exclusive Saratoga retailer of Christine Moore's Millinery collection. One caveat: while Encounter is my favorite boutique in Saratoga Springs, it's not cheap. You'll need to save a shopping day here for **after** you've hit a big score at the track!

## **13. Gilded/Miss Scarlett**

While Gilded and Miss Scarlett share a website, they are two distinctly different stores and are both owned by Jen Marcellus. They offer fun and fashionable raceday dresses and accessories. Miss Scarlett is Jen's original Saratoga boutique, and Gilded is her higher-end sister store. They both carry a few name brands that you'll recognize, but they also offer exclusive in-house designs, many of those designs with an equestrian theme. My favorite part? Affordable! A gal can go through **many** dresses during a summer in Saratoga, and it's nice to have some flattering options that don't break the bank.

## **14. Mark Thomas**

Come on, guys, you didn't *really* believe I forgot about you, did you? While it is not a big store, the chances are, if you need it, they've got it. They have an exceptional selection of ready-to-wear pants, shirts, blazers, belts, etc. But they also offer same-day alterations and made-to-measure suits from Canali and Jack Victor. Owner Kerry Fagan is part of the Saratoga Springs Mark Thomas staff, so you'll receive an extraordinarily high level of customer service.

# Exercise—Or Not (#s 15 - 17)

No one comes to Saratoga Springs in the summer for *exercise*, so I'm not going to get too carried away here. Saratoga Springs has several fitness studios (yoga, pilates, barre) and lots of gyms and personal trainer/fitness options. However, if you're into that sort of thing, you're probably doing it at home and would like something different and, perhaps, unique to the region. Follow me.

## **15. Saratoga Spa State Park (SPAC)**

The lithium emitted from Saratoga's natural springs is alive and well, and you'll just feel better after spending some time there. Walk the loop of the Avenue of the Pines or, better yet, walk the 5-mile trail loop. The asphalt-paved path around the golf course is 1.8 miles. You can park in the parking lot between the Gideon Putnam Hotel and the Roosevelt Baths. Bonus: Tucked away in the park, you'll find the Victoria Pool, a beautiful public pool. It opens at 10:00 a.m., but the line to get in may start forming as early as 6:00 a.m. While they do have some lounge chairs, many people bring their own because they fill up quickly. You can follow Saratoga Spa State Park on Facebook for more details and updates. Victoria Pool has food and beverage services, showers, locker rooms, and restrooms. You can learn more about Saratoga Spa State Park here.

## **16. Hiking**

My favorite outdoor activity is hiking, and since Saratoga Springs is located about 30 minutes south of the Adirondacks, you can see why I call this "adult summer camp." You can find great inspiration for a day trip to the Adirondacks here. There are plenty of hiking options within a 45-minute drive of Saratoga Springs, but my favorite is Buck Mountain from Pilot Knob. This trail is rated "hard" on AllTrails because the ascent in a couple of sections has a fairly steep pitch. Don't worry, you won't need rappelling gear! But you'd be smart to bring water and maybe even a snack (or lunch) to enjoy once you reach the summit. The summit offers unparalleled views of Lake George and the surrounding wilderness. The climb is 3.3 miles with an elevation gain of 1,984 feet (6.6 miles round trip). Give yourself plenty of time because you'll want to reach the summit for the view, which will take you about 90-120 minutes. It's worth it! If this sounds too aggressive, there are shorter hikes that also offer a fantastic view of Lake George, such as Sleeping Beauty from Dacy Clearing (3.6 miles round trip with a less intense ascent/descent).

## **17. Kayak & Paddle Board**

At the Kayak Shack on Saratoga Lake, you can rent a single or double-seater kayak or stand-up paddle (SUP) board for anywhere from 3 to 6 hours, and it's relatively inexpensive. The Kayak Shack also offers SUP Yoga classes every Saturday and Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m.,

with all levels of yogis welcome. If you have a group and you're feeling a bit more adventurous, but maybe a little lazy, their "Hammocroft" is for you! You and up to 4 people can relax in a hammock while floating on the water. The Kayak Shack is located on Fish Creek, an outlet of Saratoga Lake, so the water is generally quieter and calmer than the lake's open waters. Don't overthink it—just go.

## **The Dish On Dinner (#s 18 - 22)**

Eventually, even the most dedicated horse player needs to eat dinner, and in Saratoga you have a wide variety of culinary and ethnic options, ranging from Southern Cuisine to Italian, and from Egyptian to Indian. One of the many things that makes Saratoga Springs unique is that people eat, live, work, and play here. So when you go out to dinner, you're very likely to run into people you know from the track or the neighborhood. And only in Saratoga are you likely to run into more than one Hall of Fame jockey or trainer in the same restaurant on the same evening. Reminder: you're at Adult Summer Camp.

### **18. Solevo Kitchen & Social**

Solevo opened in 2018 and has quickly become a Top 5 restaurant for Saratoga residents. The proprietor chef is Ronald (Ronnie) Solevo, a fourth-generation Italian restaurateur from Connecticut. Ronnie brought his family recipes and mad chef skills to Saratoga Springs because he loved Saratoga. Saratoga loves him back. What do I recommend? Literally, everything. If it sounds good to you, I can assure you, it will be delicious. Solevo allows you to book (on Resy) seats at the bar, an inside table, or an outside table. But plan ahead—like, well, ahead. I booked my summer reservations in March.

### **19. Seneca**

We first fell in love with Seneca for their hamburgers, but it is so much more than a burger joint. Owned by the husband-and-wife team of Mike and Michelle Spain, Seneca features an open kitchen with a wood-fired grill, around which many of their original recipes are centered. Mike combines his fine-dining background and his love for fresh, local ingredients, creating cuisine for diners who love and appreciate creatively rustic meals. Seneca also offers lots of small plates ideal for sharing. We love their Wood-Grilled Oysters, Coal-Roasted Beet Salad, and Fried Chicken Deviled Eggs. You can book a reservation on Resy, but if you'd like to dine in their outdoor courtyard, it's first come, first seated.

### **20. Familiar Creature**

Familiar Creature serves the best chicken I've ever eaten in a restaurant. They first opened in February 2025, but they're new to the list this year, and there's a good reason for that. The restaurant started out as a Montreal- and French-inspired wine bar, with light bites and a very

limited selection of entrees. In fact, they really only offered a whole roasted chicken if you wanted something larger than a “small plate.” Familiar Creature still offers an exceptional selection of wines and small plates, but their entrees have expanded to include a pork chop, ocean trout, and a half- or whole-roasted chicken, among other options. As for that chicken, Chef Michele Hunter uses a slow-roasting French technique, resulting in a melt-in-your-mouth meal that you just *have to* try. Book on Resy.

### **21. Noah’s Italian**

Chef Noah Frese has been the Executive Chef at sister restaurant Siro’s for the past several years, and in Noah’s Italian, he’s been able to lean into his Italian-American heritage. He’s also getting a valuable assist from Chef Danny Petrosino\*, former owner and Executive Chef at the eponymous Osteria Danny. Chef Danny makes all the pasta, including a delicious gluten-free option. You can book a table at Noah’s on OpenTable—maybe. They’re pretty booked through the summer already. However, you can eat at the bar, and they do not book seats there, so you have a good chance of getting a seat or two if you go early. One caveat: they’re still getting their sea legs, so be patient if the service or kitchen is a little slow. Owning and operating a restaurant is hard, and it takes time to turn it into a well-oiled machine.

\* Side note: Osteria Danny was sold last year, but the new owner, Nicholas Byrne, has vowed to keep all of the Osteria Danny staples and fan-favorite dishes.

### **22. The Wishing Well**

The Wishing Well is a local stalwart, serving meals to guests since 1936 and owned and operated by the Lee Family since 1968. With a nightly Happy Hour (from 4 - 6:00 p.m.) featuring half-price beer and wine, a special bar menu, and live piano music in an iconic bar setting, it’s worth a visit for that alone. In their dining room, you’ll find heirloom tomatoes and corn on the cob, served family-style (and always fresh during the summer season) along with your choice of entree. They are known for their steaks, chops, and butter-poached lobster... Read that again. Yes, **butter-poached** lobster. Need I say more? You can book on Resy or give them a call at (518) 584-7640.

## **Recharge Like A Local (#s 23 - 25)**

### **23. Roosevelt Baths & Spa**

If I could recommend just one way to recover after a day at the races, this would be it. There’s a good reason this site makes my list every year. It’s only natural that a spa that has served generations with healing experiences would evolve in such a peaceful place as Saratoga Springs. Established in 1935, the Roosevelt Baths & Spa resort opened thanks to President

Franklin Roosevelt's visionary act to preserve the natural springs in Saratoga. Authentic and historic today, the Roosevelt Baths & Spa offers a variety of spa services, but none would be complete without soaking in the healing waters. Make your reservations well in advance of your visit—they book up fast! And don't worry about the rust color in the bathtub. It's clean, I promise! It's just the residual evidence of all the healing minerals in your soaking water.

#### **24. Complexions Spa**

IV Therapy and a week in Saratoga go together like peanut butter & jelly. That's where Complexions Spa comes in—ideally situated right next to Congress Park, within walking distance of anywhere in downtown Saratoga Springs. Owner Denise Debois is an esthetician who holds several advanced certifications in skin care and other modalities. She and her staff offer everything from massages and facials to IV therapy, spray tans, body wraps, sauna, and cold-water therapy among many other options. Even better, they sell membership packages, and if you're going to be in Saratoga Springs for the summer (or a week) and plan to partake in many of the 23 “experiences” above, a membership will feel like a bargain!

#### **25. KOS Sauna**

A new wellness option has come to Saratoga Springs, and you'll find it conveniently located on Saratoga Lake. Their website describes it as: “Inspired by Norway's stunning fjord saunas and amplified by the rich, healing mineral waters of Saratoga Springs, KOS brings an authentic Nordic wellness experience...” to the Spa City. KOS Sauna can accommodate up to 15 people and includes a roof terrace, lake plunge platform, and changing rooms. Reserve a private or group session [here](#).

### **Also Eligible List: Brunch**

I know—we already hit “25” experiences, and I'm still going. But Saratoga Springs sports an inordinately strong brunch scene, especially in the summer months. During the racing season, the Friday-Sunday demand for a table at brunch is real, so in places that accept reservations, book as soon as possible! A few years ago I decided to make this its own category because otherwise this would be a “Top 15 Experiences” + “10 great brunch spots” list. But here's the thing: I rarely go out for brunch, so I messaged ten of my close friends, all Saratoga Springs residents, and these are their consensus recommendations.

**Sweet Mimi's Café & Bakery** is a perennial favorite since it first opened in 2013, and was #1 on everyone's list with two caveats: they don't serve alcohol, and you'll have to wait to get in. Don't let that deter you. Chef and Owner Jeannette Liebers learned to cook from her Italian grandmother, then studied the craft at culinary school before bringing her culinary magic and

passion for cooking to Saratoga Springs. Everything on the menu is made from scratch. Start with their signature Lemon Ricotta Pancakes and Housemade Cinnamon Rolls, but if you'd prefer something savory, their omelets are also amazing! Sweet Mimi's is open Thursday—Monday from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. They do not accept reservations, and there is almost always a wait, but they know how to help you wait without waiting. You can put your name in and then go walk around town for a bit. They'll text you once your table is ready, and you have 10 minutes to get there. Almost everything in downtown Saratoga is within a 10-minute walk, so this is a very good option.

**Max London's** on Broadway is perfect if you're looking for a lively brunch with cocktails. It's upscale yet relaxed, with outdoor seating (perfect for people-watching), and the best part? They serve brunch *daily* from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.! They offer everything from a Strawberry Rhubarb Waffle to Lobster Pizza. Yes, there are also some lighter, healthier options, such as Mrs. London's Granola Bowl, a Smoked Salmon Plate, and Avocado Toast. Maybe go with one of these latter options so you can justify one of their signature Bloody Marys or a Mimosa. Book reservations on Resy.

**The Merc**, like Max London's above, also respects brunch enough to serve it every day that they are open (Wednesday - Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.). This is a great spot for larger groups. Both The Merc and Max London's are on Broadway with lots of indoor seating and a few sidewalk tables. The Merc menu features Avocado Toast, Truffle Fries, Chicken & Waffles, creative Salads, and all of the traditional breakfast/brunch fare. They also offer a variety of spritz cocktails and mimosas with brunch. Book a table on Resy.

**Three Daughters** at the Saratoga Arms Hotel. While this is more of a straight-up breakfast spot, they do offer several savory dishes, such as Crab Benedict and the Toga Bowl. The restaurant is named for founder Kathleen Smith's three daughters, each of whom has played a role in the family business over the years—lending a “bed and breakfast” feel to your dining experience. The restaurant is located within the hotel, but it is open to the public. Breakfast is served from 7:30 - 10:30 a.m. Monday - Friday and 7:30 - 11:30 a.m. Saturday & Sunday. Reservations can be made through Toast or by using this [link](#).

**Morrissey's Lounge & Bistro** only serves brunch on Saturday & Sunday (10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.), but they serve breakfast daily from 7:00 - 11:00 a.m. The breakfast menu features the items one would expect, while the brunch menu offers a much wider variety, ranging from a Sticky Bun to a Lobster Roll or a “Hangover Smash Burger.” And if it's the hair of the dog you're after, yes, you can order a cocktail with that Sticky Bun. They have indoor and outdoor dining. You can make reservations through OpenTable or just call them at (518) 350-7945.

**Kindred** takes a savory-over-sweet approach to brunch, offering a couple of salad, omelet, and breakfast sandwich options, as well as several breakfast classics. This restaurant was on my “favorites” list for dinner last year, and while it’s still one of my favorite dinner spots, I had to make room for a couple of new favs. That said, their new(ish) brunch menu looks amazing, and it’s been recommended by several of my brunch-loving friends. They also serve breakfast cocktails, including a Toasted Coconut Espresso Martini. Yes, please. Hours: 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Saturday & Sunday. Book reservations on Resy.

The **Triangle Diner** posts its menu daily to their [Facebook page](#), and each day’s menu includes that day’s special omelet, pancakes, French toast, sandwich, and chef’s special. For instance, they may offer Brown Sugar Walnut Pancakes on Tuesday, but you can only get Peanut Butter Chip Pancakes another day. Triangle Diner is an old-school breakfast-and-lunch diner and a Saratoga institution, frequented more by locals than by seasonal guests. They open at 7:00 a.m., seven days a week. They do not serve alcohol. Their portions are massive, so bring your appetite. Call ahead to check availability: (518) 583-6368.

**Hattie’s** is your spot if you’re in the mood for some straight-up Southern cooking! We’re talking Biscuits & Gravy, Buttermilk Pancakes, a Cajun Omelet, Chicken Fried Steak & Eggs, and of course, Fried Chicken & Waffles. Their only “lighter fare” option is a Southern Cobb Salad with candied bacon and buttermilk pecan bleu cheese, so this is not the place to go if you’re trying to stick to a diet. But with brunch cocktail options like Back Porch Lemonade (with vodka), Strawberry Basil Spritz, Hattie’s Reserve Peach Margarita, and Southern Spiked Peach Tea, it’s hard to resist the urge to slip into this southern comfort. Open for brunch 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Book ahead with OpenTable.

