

□ NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

# Guide to Small Town Escapes



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# Medford

Pine garlands and twinkling white lights provide a Victorian touch to tiny Medford in early December, when the whole township crowds Main Street for the annual Dickens celebration. A cool, northerly wind sends aloft the sweet aroma of steaming apple cider and cinnamon, as bundled-up revelers—carolers, characters from *A Christmas Carol*, and musicians alike—greet familiar faces, of which there are many. For that's the kind of place Medford is: a friendly, tight-knit community where everyone knows everyone.

But should you arrive during nonfestive time, you'll probably be struck by how quiet Medford is. Indeed, its lovingly restored residences—beautiful old federal and Victorian clapboards—are silent monuments to a time when the small town bristled with the goings-on of bog-iron furnaces, a busy gristmill, a glass factory, and cranberry bogs. Those industries are mostly gone now, leaving Medford a perfect place in which to seek a slower pace—a place where little girls feed kittens on begonia-splashed porches, new mothers push prams beneath centuries-old branches, and brides pose at the picturesque town gazebo.

Standing at the corner of Main and Union, you can peer a hundred years into the past, to a time when horse-drawn wagons loaded with strawberries, blueberries, cranberries, and other Medford produce trundled by a similar scene on their way to Philadelphia markets. Nearly all of the buildings that line Main Street were built during Medford's heyday, between the late 1700s and 1850. The township has erected informative plaques outside the most significant edifices, making for a pleasant and interesting stroll. Blossom-draped lamp posts and postage-stamp gardens add colorful flourishes to the quintessential small town scene.

At this same intersection sits the green-and-yellow Indian Chief Tavern, dating from 1810 and once providing weary travelers with supper and a place to sleep; it now houses a luncheonette and a couple of shops. Down the way, across the street, you can make out the old-style sign for Braddock's Tavern, a darkly lit, frame-and-clapboard eating establishment built in 1844, where dark, cozy rooms illuminated by flickering candles seem straight out of colonial times. Among Main Street's picture-perfect houses, once home to many of the town's most influential early families, be sure to seek out the Riley/Garwood House (53 S. Main St.), a classic 18th-century Georgian with a Flemish bond facade. Riley was the village cabinetmaker who, like all other cabinet-makers of the time, also was the village undertaker. The first floor of the William Dyer House (63-65 S. Main St.), built in the Greek Revival style in 1841, was once a general store run by William Dyer and William Braddock, who stocked everything from perfume and liquor to salt pork and cheese. The Stratton/Braddock House (70 S. Main St.), all white and gray, is another house with Flemish bond brick, built circa 1760.

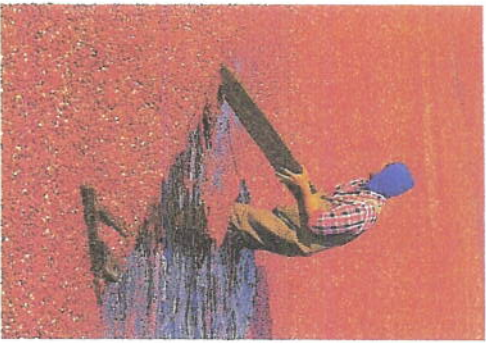


Medford's charming main street

While Medford is foremost a residential town, a spattering of antique shops and craft boutiques occupy Main Street's walls, purveying century-old dolls and country-style armchairs, handmade wooden toys and Victorian vases. In between these shops are a couple of establishments that whisper modern-day, providing an unexpected contemporary flair to the underlying old-time spirit. Health Haven II, which features natural foods, is run by a certified nutritional consultant and shiatsu specialist. And Cafe Noelle is a tiny, cheery bistro serving up some truly cosmopolitan fare—perhaps lobster-filled

ravioli with diced shrimp and crabmeat, or sautéed veal in veloute sauce.

But the past is what defines this town, so be sure to investigate its earliest years. Drive north on Main Street and turn left on N.J. 70, where development is just encroaching upon sprawling fields. A right on Jennings Road brings you down a tree-shaded, wildflower-scented lane and past the **Nail House**. This is where Mark Reeve, in the early 1800s, reputedly produced and sold the first machine-cut nails in America (sadly for him, he never patented his invention). Reeve is responsible for Medford's name—the successfully petitioned to change its former appellation (Upper Evesham) after an impressive trip to Medford, Massachusetts—and also for the town plot that remains little changed today. Nearby, the **John Haines House (26 Foster Town Rd.)** is the town's oldest extant house;



Harvesting Pine Barren cranberries

the Haines family built the area's first milling community, known as Haines Mill and later renamed Kirby's Mill. Picturesque Kirby's Mill still straddles the South Branch Rancocas River northeast of town, the scene of a spirited apple festival in autumn. With foundations dating from 1778, this water-powered mill once worked overtime as a sawmill, grist-mill, and cider mill, as well as a blacksmith and wheelwright shop. Currently being restored, it sits prettily among the trees and beckons for a picnic; or rent a punt and paddle on its dark, glassy pond.

From here you can plunge into the **Pine Barrens**, a dark, mysterious swath of pitch pines and oaks crossed with slow-moving creeks and sandy, aimless roads. This 1.1-million-acre realm, designated an international biosphere reserve by the United Nations in 1983, was long the domain of the Pineys, reclusive folk who eked a living from the land—some of whom are said to still reside in the backwoods. You probably won't see them; instead, the greatest glimpse you'll get of the old times are probably the cranberry bogs that still produce abundant fruit (during harvest time in October, don't be surprised if every conversation you hear in Medford concerns cranberries), and an old glass and iron company town that is open for tours.

Perhaps it's this association with the past that gives the barrens its disconcerting restlessness. Strike out into the wilderness, perhaps to hike a sandy trail or paddle one of the tea-colored streams, and you'll note right away the utter silence. An uneasy silence punctuated by puzzling rustlings in the underbrush that give credence to wild tales, the most frightening of which concerns a monster called the Jersey devil. It isn't out to hurt anybody—so it's said—but it has been blamed for a good deal of destruction nonetheless. At the end of the day, you will be content to return to Medford and curl up in the comfort of a safe, warm B&B.

Barbara A. Noy

## Travelwise

### GETTING THERE

Medford is in southern New Jersey, 18 miles east of Philadelphia. From the New Jersey Turnpike, follow N.J. 70 east, then go south on County Rd. 541 (Main Street). The nearest major airport is in Philadelphia.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Heat and humidity prevail in summertime, while spring and fall are pleasant. Blueberries are picked July to mid-August, and October brings the cranberry harvest. For more information, contact the **Historic Medford Village Business Association** (P.O. Box 1363, Medford 08055, 609-714-8811) or the **Medford Historical Society** (P.O. Box 362, Medford 08055, 609-654-2608). The **New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism** (609-292-2470) can provide information on the surrounding area.

### THINGS TO SEE AND DO

**Blueberry Picking** For a list of farms where you can pick fresh fruits, call 609-625-0056.

**Canoing** Popular rivers include the Oswego, Wading, Batsto, and Mullica. Contact the **New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism** for rental and guided trip information.

**Cranberry Harvesting** During the harvest you can watch commercial companies at work from roadsides along County Rd. 563 near Chatsworth or in **Double Trouble State Park** (Toms River exit off Garden State Pkwy. 732-341-6662).

**Hiking** (Lebanon SF 609-726-1191, Wharton SF 609-561-3262, Bass River SF 609-296-1114) The most popular trail is the **Batsons Trail**, a 50-mile sandy, level pathway through the heart of the Pine Barrens, connecting the Lebanon, Wharton, and Bass River State Forests. Contact the **New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism** for other trail possibilities.

**Kirby's Mill** (275 Church Rd. off Cy. Rd. 541, 609-654-0768, Sun, June-Aug, by appt, rest of year) Artifacts relating to carpentry, farming, and cranberry harvesting are on display.

**Lebanon State Forest** (Near the jct. of N.J. 70 and N.J. 72, 609-726-1191) Palin Pond was once a reservoir for cranberry bogs. The forest offers cabins and campsites.



**Wharton State Forest** (Cy. Rd. 542 in Batso or US 206 in Aiston, 609-561-3262, Adm. fee to some sites and some parking fees) New Jersey's largest state forest (120,000 acres) boasts an extensive network of sandy trails, including the **Batsto Pond Nature Trail**, which explores a microcosm of several pinelands habitats. Here, too, is **Historic Batsto Village**, an 1880s glass and iron company town, and the ghost town of **Action Village**, a former iron forge. The state forest offers swimming, canoeing, cabins, and campsites.

**Woodford Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge** (6 Sommill Rd. 856-983-0326, Closed Mondays; donation) Dedicated to preserving the Pine Barrens and educating people about its wildlife, the refuge offers hands-on exhibits for children, small live animals to see and touch, and a 1-mile trail around Cedar Run Lake. Ask about scheduled outdoor programs in the Pine Barrens.

### WHERE TO EAT

**Braddock's Tavern** (39 S. Main St. 609-654-1604, \$\$) Fine dining in a colonial setting. Hearty fare includes seafood, veal, and poultry.

**Cafe Noelle** (20 S. Main St. 609-953-1155, \$\$) Creative pastas, fish, and more.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Main Stay B&B** (45 S. Main St. 609-654-7528, \$\$) Queen Anne Victorian with nine cozy rooms.