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## New Harmony's serenity

### Aptly named Indiana town, once home to two utopian groups, retains its quiet ambience

BY DANNY LEE | NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN

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Make the nearly four-hour drive from Cincinnati to New Harmony, Ind., and you'll find art, history and a culture of quiet that is tailor-made for relaxation and inner communion.

But the village is much more than a calm place to collect your thoughts. Antiques shops, art galleries, international-quality musical and cultural offerings, and relics of an intellectual and spiritual past make it a unique Midwestern destination.

New Harmony is the former home of not one but two 19th-century utopian communities, the little town once known as the Athens of the West. A quiet tradition of community remains.

**ADVERTISEMENT** Travelers in search of spiritual renewal won't be the first with that in mind. In 1814, Lutheran separatist George Rapp and his Harmonist movement made an attempt at communal minimalism here. They sold out 10 years later to Welsh social reformer Robert Owen, who led an experiment in group living dedicated to learning and science.

Owen's effort drew worldwide attention with the journey of a group of famous thinkers down the Ohio River and up the Wabash to New Harmony, an assemblage known as the "boatload of knowledge."



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NEW HARMONY INN

The New Harmony Inn and Conference Center's campus feature: an enclosed, heated pool (above) and 90 fully appointed rooms. There's also a spa.

#### IF YOU GO

Getting there: New Harmony is in southwest Indiana about 230 miles and 3 hours and 43 minutes from Cincinnati.

New Harmony Inn, 504 N. St. Rooms, standard, deluxe, premium and suite, range from \$97 to \$155 weekdays, \$108 to \$175 Friday and Saturday. 812-682-4431; [www.newharmonyinn.com](http://www.newharmonyinn.com).



More than 40 structures dating from both efforts form the backbone of tours that set out from the Atheneum Visitors Center. The modernistic building designed by famous architect Richard Meier sits alongside the Wabash River.

### WALK TRANQUIL PATH IN NEW HARMONY

Take a spiritual journey on foot in New Harmony, Ind.

Almost everything in New Harmony - antique shops, art galleries, coffee shops, historic and cultural sites - is reachable on foot.

Red Geranium, a fine-dining restaurant at the inn offers nighttime horse-drawn carriage rides. \$25 for two, \$5 each additional person.

Under the Beams Concert Series, The Rapp-Owen Granary, 413 Granary St. 812-682-3128.

New Harmony Gallery of Contemporary Art, 506 Main St. 812-682-3156; [www.nhgallery.com](http://www.nhgallery.com).

Atheneum/Visitors Center, North and Arthur streets. 800-231-2168; Tour season: March 15-Dec. 30. \$10, \$5 ages 7-17.

New Harmony Theatre, Murphy Auditorium, 419 Tavern St. Season is from June through August. 812-682-3115.

Harmonie State Park, Indiana 269. It features camping and outdoor activities. 812-622-6746.

Information: New Harmony attractions, 800-231-2168; [www.newharmony.org](http://www.newharmony.org).

New Harmony Project: It continues through June. Theater professionals mentor a select group of young playwrights. 317-464-1103; [www.newharmonyproject.org](http://www.newharmonyproject.org).

"It's great because you can park your car and you don't have to get back in it until you leave," said Judy Stallings, spokeswoman for the New Harmony Inn.

Free bikes also are available at the New Harmony Inn and Conference Center, which also rents ultra-quiet electric golf carts. Nighttime horse-drawn carriage rides also are available.

Visitors can examine log homes predating the Harmonists, early 1800s group residences and cultural sites such as Thrall's Opera House, an early group home converted for musical performances. Also nearby are the sites of early Harmonist churches and the 1818 Rapp-Owen Granary, a rustic timbered and sandstone structure that hosts the acclaimed Under the Beams concert series.

To equal the near-matchless setting, says concert coordinator Liz Mumford, "We bring in world-class musicians."

But music is not the only cultural offering. Try the New Harmony Gallery of Contemporary Art to catch up on recent work by Midwest artists. Or view newer work by taking a stroll through town. In good weather, artists work along the wooded streets.

Also view the various sculptures around town, many in contemporary style and celebrating spiritual concepts. And while you're on foot, try the Harmonist Labyrinth, symbolizing the Harmonists' view of the difficult path to virtue. Another take on the theme is the Cathedral Labyrinth. Here the emphasis is less on finding a hidden path than on maintaining a contemplative spirit during the journey.

Nearby is the acclaimed Roofless Church, designed by famed architect Philip Johnson.



Surrounded by a 12-foot wall, the nondenominational church creates a preserve of quiet centered on a 50-foot-tall lobed dome finished with cedar shingles.

## RELAX AT THE INN

Find prime lodging at the renovated New Harmony Inn and Conference Center, at the north end of town just east of the Roofless Church. This cozy but well-appointed 90-room retreat offers an atmosphere that seems slightly monastic, but only until you notice the upgraded bathrooms, granite counters, work desks, Shaker-style four-poster beds and walk-out balconies and patios.

Anything but monkish are the flat-screen high-definition televisions and the complimentary high-speed Internet access.

Reserve early to be assured one of the 18 rooms with gas fireplaces or one of four with loft sleeping areas.

The inn's campus features scenic walking trails, an enclosed, heated pool and sports courts. Schedule a relaxing spa treatment at the inn's In Harmony Day Spa featuring massage, facial treatments and Indian Ayurveda techniques reportedly so relaxing the inn recommends that you "leave extra time after your treatment to be certain you are fully alert before leaving our studio."

Find fine food, friendly service

The inn also hosts a variety of entertaining and stimulating events, from an annual writer's conference to antique shows to lectures. And it's not all purely intellectual. Recently there was a bourbon-tasting event at one of the four 19th-century cottages owned - and available for rent - by the inn.

Delicious dinners (think: black angus steak and potato-crust red snapper) are served at the inn's Red Geranium Restaurant, where for 40 years fine food, modern art and the hand-hewn antique beams of a former 19th-century carpentry workshop have combined to provide a unique dining experience.

Service is bend-over-backward friendly, with crackling fireplaces, pleasant views and roomy, comfortable tables in the three different dining rooms. Kids are welcome as well.

Check out the just redone Grapevine Room, where you can sample top single-malt bourbons, specialty ales or something from the well-stocked wine cellar as you take in the hand-painted foliage twining all around the room's walls and ceiling.



New Harmony has retained remnants from its utopian past. These 19th century cottages can be rented.

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