



Farm Visits: A Way to Spend Travel Time

Farm visits offers a unique and educational way to spend time off.

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LocalHarvest's Erin Barnett reminisces about the joy of visiting farms while traveling, and offers some resources for you to do the same.

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Over spring break when I was a senior in college, some friends and I drove from Minnesota to the West Coast.

Along the way we stopped and spent two days with one of the guy's relatives on a farm in Idaho. They had been dairy farmers, his people, but at the time of our visit they were retired and the cows had been sold. Still, the place was a real farm, and we got to work a little, walk a lot, and eat great food. We brushed two huge dusty draft horses until our arms were sore.

We helped fix some fences and climbed into the hayloft and generally had a good time. The snowcapped mountains in the distance and the wildflowers in the yard made the place feel nothing short of magical after five months of Midwestern winter. I liked the life there.

I had already been bitten by the farming bug, but if I hadn't been, those days in Idaho might have done it. Though I did not grow up to be a farmer, I still make a point of spending as much time on other people's farms as I can.

For me, it beats a Holiday Inn hands down. Next to the scenery and the food, the work itself is always the best part. It makes me feel whole.

If your summer isn't yet booked up, maybe it is a good year to spend some time on a farm! Many farmers open their doors to travelers, who can expect all sorts of different accommodations and experiences.

If you are looking for something to give you the flavor of farm life but feel mostly like a vacation, you could spend a weekend at a farm offering 'farm vacations' (think: simple B&B meets working farm).

If you are up for a farm-stay that might be more intensive in terms of either time or work, you could look into arranging a farm internship, which can vary in length from a week to a year.

The Internet is a good place to start researching what is available near home or somewhere you have been wanting to visit. You can start with a Google search on 'farm vacation.' Several states and Canadian provinces also have websites listing such opportunities. Here are three to get you started: Pennsylvania, California and Maine. This time next year, look for an "agritourism" search feature on LocalHarvest itself!

If you are interested in something a little less vacation-oriented, check out the WWOOF - USA website. WWOOF (World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) is an international organization connecting travelers with organic farms. You might also look into Organic Volunteers, a WWOOF-offshoot.

One day back at that farm in Idaho so many years ago, my friend and I planted saplings in the yard. The spirit of the place inspired us to make up a little song to sing to each tree as we put it in its hole. No awe-inspiring lyrics here, but somehow it fit the sentiment of the afternoon perfectly. To the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat", it went like this:

Grow, grow, grow little tree
Tall and strong and green
Plant your roots deep in the earth
and have a happy life.

Fifteen years later that funny song still comes to me when I am planting seedlings in my garden. Farm vacations can make a deep impression.



~ Erin Barnett

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