



Cherry Pickers on Morton Street in Shipshewana is a favorite place for antique collectors.

Amish Country is *Calling*

Escape to peaceful Shipshewana, Middlebury for the holidays

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
JULIE CAMPBELL

The moment you spot the buggies, you know right where you are.

Horses clip-clop along the edge of the road, pulling their modestly dressed owners in simple black carriages.

The second clue is the food. All the best things your grandma used to make, and then some, from mashed potatoes swirling with butter and steaming roast beef to fluffy meringue pies and berry-laden cobblers, piled high on plates at restaurants around town.

You've arrived in Indiana's Amish Country.

On the first weekend in December, my husband and I love to take a day trip to this idyllic area, do some shopping, see the lights and stock up on staples for holiday baking and get-togethers.

After two-and-a-half hours in the car, our first stop is Das Dutchman Essenhaus in Middlebury, famous for its expansive breakfast, lunch and dinner buffets. Pro-tip: If you can't decide between breakfast and lunch, plan to arrive around 10:30 a.m. while breakfast is still being served and then you can sample the lunch offerings at 11 a.m. as well! The restaurant is closed on Sundays, so be sure to plan accordingly.

Once our bellies are full, it's time to walk off some calories. Das Dutchman Essenhaus campus is like a small city, including a charming inn, conference center, shops, indoor pickleball courts, carriage rides and more.

After browsing the Essenhaus shops for one-of-a-kind gifts, we head over to downtown Shipshewana, a short 15-minute drive away, for even more shopping. We begin at Davis Mercantile, a four-story complex that includes 21 shops filled with everything from puzzles and musical instruments to fabric and furniture.

Stopping on the fourth floor to see the restored antique carousel and shop in the



Das Dutchman Essenhaus in Middlebury is well known around the state for its Amish-style food.



The Kitchen Cupboard is a popular stop for a caffeinated pick-me-up while shopping at Davis Mercantile.

Das Dutchman Essenhaus specialties, broasted chicken and homemade noodles, take center stage on a lunchtime plate.





ABOVE: Christmas decorations in downtown Shipshewana include a nod to the Amish culture. RIGHT: Vintage ornaments make a beautiful display at one of Shipshewana's antique shops. BOTTOM RIGHT: Amish buggies lined up outside E & S Sales, which is popular for its Amish baked goods and cheese.

toy store is always on the agenda.

By the time we finish browsing, we're in need of a caffeine jolt from the Kitchen Cupboard coffee shop and a snack from JoJo's Pretzels on the first floor of the mercantile.

Then we bundle up to browse the rest of the outdoor shops just steps away from Davis' in downtown Shipshewana. Vintage and antique lovers will find plenty of treasures in the stores up and down the adjacent streets.

Once we've stuffed our shopping bags full of gifts, it's time to stock up on Amish cheese, meats, baked goods, spices and more at E&S Sales Bulk Foods. Be sure to bring a cooler for the ride home!

This place is like a candy store for bakers and charcuterie lovers. Pro-tip: E&S accepts only cash, check or food stamps – no credit/debit cards – so be prepared. And don't forget to stop in at Yoder's Meat & Cheese and Yoder's Popcorn while you're in town, too.

By the time evening falls, the Blue Gate's Walkway of Lights illuminates downtown Shipshewana, turning it into a magical winter wonderland. We love strolling down the mile-long walkway, featuring 295 illuminated arches and tens of thousands of lights, while many visitors take in dinner and a show at the famous Blue Gate Theatre.

Lights of Joy is another Christmas light experience in downtown Shipshewana. The two-mile drive-through experience features colorful displays with more than 2 million LED lights.

If you don't want to cut your trip short, choose from among plenty of places to stay the night, from charming bed-and-breakfasts to the sprawling Blue Gate Garden Inn. Just be sure to make reservations in advance.

During the hustle and bustle of the holidays, a trip to Indiana's Amish Country offers a rare change in perspective, a chance to slow down and savor the sights, smells and tastes of the season. ■

