



Vanderbilt Mansion  
Hyde Park, NY

Just an hour from the Big Apple you'll find picture-perfect towns, pretty landscapes and historic monuments.

**T**he shopping, the shows, the perfectly manicured parks, the coffee shops and restaurants that stay open thrillingly late are what define New York.

That said, it's not called the city that never sleeps for nothing, and sometimes all that hubbub – from the taxis that view pedestrians as a minor inconvenience to the neon onslaught of Times Square – can be overwhelming.



So for a little calm, we went upstate to the Hudson Valley, which stretches from Manhattan's West Side to the state capital at Albany and beyond.

Crossing the George Washington Bridge (the view from here is amazing) we veered briefly into New Jersey, heading north, past the suburbs of Westchester, the West Point military academy and scattered locales with names recalling early Dutch settlers.

One of the earliest areas to be settled by Europeans in the 17th century, the Hudson Valley stood at the forefront of American trade and the advance westward. Today it's known as an area of genuine natural splendour; dense forest with looming mountains and clear water below.

Just an hour from Manhattan by car or train (the Metro North from Grand Central station follows this route) was the tiny riverside town of Cold Spring, immortalised by 19th Century landscape painters from the Hudson River School, and as picture perfect a pastoral scene as those canvases

make out. The town is all clapboard houses and coffee shops and antiques stores in which to while away the time. Hardly a hub of activity, but an ideal spot to take in the gorgeous landscape, which includes the Catskill Mountains – of Dirty Dancing fame – across the water.

This part of the Hudson is ideal for cyclists, hikers, watersports lovers and wildlife-spotters especially at Bear Mountain State Park. We headed further upstate, towards Hyde Park, a place, it transpired, on a par with its namesake in London.

### Hyde Park

Back in the day the Hudson was lined with grand estates home to the East Coast upper-classes. Among them were the Roosevelts, and Hyde Park – a grand colonial house set in seemingly infinite greenery – was the lifelong home of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Given its resemblance to the actual White House, it's easy to see how FDR's political ambitions fermented there. FDR, who took America out of the

Depression and into the Second World War, played and hunted at Hyde Park as a child, brought his indomitable wife Eleanor there and allegedly entertained his mistress in the same residence, later using it as a refuge from Washington DC.

Aside from the stunning views, it's a fascinating glimpse into how the early American upper classes took on European ways yet simultaneously differentiated themselves from European society, and also into the psyche of one of America's most formidable leaders. You see, for example, the lift he had built so he

with no expense spared – ceilings from Europe, indoor bathrooms and electricity – it is so well preserved that you can imagine being a guest at one of the intimate gatherings put on by the railroad tycoon Frederick Vanderbilt and his wife Louise.

They say that if they were alive today, the couple would be richer than Bill Gates and Warren Buffet combined. They were American royalty – their antics transfixing the country. The Mansion is a stone's throw from the Culinary Institute of America, the Cordon Bleu of the US and with several restaurants open to visitors.

painted a fictional place.

Stockbridge's crowning glory is the ludicrously quaint Red Lion Inn, one of those truly historic American buildings that dates back to before US independence and has been hosting guests ever since. Its decor is testament to its age; all florals, antique wooden desks and randomly scattered trinkets making the experience a bit like sleeping in a high-end dollhouse.

Some five presidents have spent the night there, as have John Wayne and Bob Dylan. Today it is a wonderful place to relax, well-kitted out with a hot tub, pool and bar and a fantastic restaurant serving a vast breakfast menu.

### The Berkshires

It's the perfect base to explore the Berkshires, a breathtakingly beautiful area and a hub for hiking. In Lenox, 20 minutes from Stockbridge, you can tour The Mount, which was the home of Edith Wharton, author of that very New York classic the Age of Innocence. A little further takes you to Williamstown, home every summer to the US equivalent of the Chichester Theatre season, and every bit as prestigious (a young Gwyneth Paltrow trod the boards there).

Both Stockbridge and the Hudson, are unimaginably removed from the bright lights of New York City, despite being mere hour away. Sure, nothing beats the Big Apple for thrills, but perhaps takes one to truly appreciate the other.

By Jennifer Lipman



Isaac Roosevelt House  
Hyde Park, NY

could maintain the pretence that he was able to walk, despite having been unable to do so since being stricken with polio.

Eleanor's retirement home Val Kil is on this estate and so is Roosevelt's Presidential Library which tells all from his early days in power to the secret meetings he had with Churchill before the War.

### Vanderbilt Mansion

A few miles south is the Vanderbilt Mansion, a Beaux-Arts era relic in a whopping 211 acres, with the walls still whispering of the luxury of the Gilded Age; "the time before income taxes came in," our guide explained wistfully. Built in the late 1890s

From there we went east, crossing the Massachusetts state line into the Berkshires, in search of the America immortalised by American painter Norman Rockwell.

### Stockbridge

Rockwell lived in Stockbridge for 25 years, the epitome of an-all-American town. It has a general store, white picket fences and clapboard houses and captured in his paintings.

In the Norman Rockwell Museum, just outside the town centre and also home to his studio, his painting of Main Street Stockbridge hangs in full glory, showing a scene so impossibly idyllic that had I not just come from there I would have thought he had



The Berkshires