

guide to pennsylvania s tourist railroads

By Ezra Kutch on February 8th, 2026

Guide to Pennsylvania's Tourist Railroads

Pennsylvania, often celebrated for its rich history and scenic landscapes, is also home to some of the most captivating tourist railroads in the United States. Whether you're a train enthusiast, history buff, or simply seeking a unique way to explore the Keystone State, its historic railroads offer memorable experiences that combine scenic beauty, vintage locomotives, and compelling stories of the past. This comprehensive guide will introduce you to Pennsylvania's top tourist railroads, highlight what makes each special, and provide practical tips to help you plan your ideal railway adventure.

OVERVIEW OF PENNSYLVANIA'S TOURIST RAILROADS

Pennsylvania's diverse landscape — from rolling hills and lush forests to historic towns and industrial sites — serves as the perfect backdrop for a variety of scenic train excursions. The state boasts more than a dozen tourist railroads, each with its own unique history and offerings. These railroads often operate vintage steam and diesel locomotives, provide themed rides, and host special events throughout the year, making them a favorite for visitors of all ages.

POPULAR TOURIST RAILROADS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Below is a curated list of some of the most popular and historically significant tourist railroads across Pennsylvania:

1. STRASBURG RAIL ROAD

- * Location: Lancaster County
- * Highlights: Operating since 1854, this is one of the oldest short-line railroads in the U.S. It offers scenic rides through Amish countryside, a vintage steam locomotive experience, and a popular train ride to the Strasburg Rail Road Museum.
- * Special Events: Holiday trains, themed rides, and educational programs about railroad history.

2. CASS RAILROAD STATE PARK

- * Location: West Virginia border, but easily accessible from Pennsylvania
- * Highlights: Features the historic Mount Washington Cog Railway, which offers breathtaking views of the Allegheny Mountains and connects to Pennsylvania's scenic routes.

3. THE READING & NORTHERN RAILROAD

- * Location: Northeastern Pennsylvania
- * Highlights: Offers themed excursions such as wine tasting trains, fall foliage rides, and historical trips. They also operate vintage steam locomotives for special occasions.

4. LEHIGH GORGE SCENIC RAILWAY

- * Location: Jim Thorpe
- * Highlights: Provides spectacular views of the Lehigh Gorge State Park, with trips that include a ride along the historic Lehigh Valley Railroad line. Seasonal excursions include fall foliage and holiday-themed rides.

5. EAST BROAD TOP RAILROAD

- * Location: Orbisonia, PA
- * Highlights: A National Historic Landmark, this narrow-gauge railroad offers authentic vintage train rides and is renowned for its well-preserved equipment and scenic mountain routes.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON A PENNSYLVANIA TOURIST RAILROAD

When planning your journey on a Pennsylvania tourist railroad, it's helpful to understand what to anticipate:

VINTAGE LOCOMOTIVES AND CARS

Many railroads operate historic steam or diesel engines, often dating back to the early 20th

century. Passenger cars are typically restored vintage coaches, providing an authentic experience.

SCENIC VIEWS AND THEMED RIDES

Most excursions highlight Pennsylvania's natural beauty, including forests, farmland, and mountain vistas. Themed rides—such as holiday specials, dinner trains, or murder mystery events—add extra excitement.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

Many railroads host educational programs, demonstrations, and children's activities, making them perfect for families or school groups.

SEASONAL AND SPECIAL EVENT RIDES

Throughout the year, expect special rides for holidays like Christmas (Santa trains), Halloween, or fall foliage seasons, enhancing the overall experience.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP TO PENNSYLVANIA'S TOURIST RAILROADS

To ensure a smooth and enjoyable experience, consider the following tips:

CHECK SCHEDULES AND BOOK IN ADVANCE

Many excursions sell out quickly, especially during peak seasons or holiday events. Visit the railroad's official website to confirm schedules and reserve your tickets early.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

While some rides are outdoors and may be cool, others are enclosed. Dress for the weather, and consider bringing layers, especially if riding during fall or winter.

ARRIVE EARLY

Arriving at least 30 minutes before your scheduled departure allows time for parking, ticketing, and orientation.

BRING CAMERAS AND APPRECIATIVE EYES

The scenic vistas, vintage machinery, and historic stations make for excellent photo opportunities. Remember to be respectful of the historic sites and other passengers.

SPECIAL EXPERIENCES AND UNIQUE RIDES

Some Pennsylvania tourist railroads offer one-of-a-kind experiences beyond regular excursions:

1. Night Trains: Experience a different atmosphere on evening rides, often with themed lighting or storytelling.
2. Dining Trains: Enjoy a meal served onboard during the scenic journey, often featuring local cuisine.
3. Charter and Private Events: Rent a vintage train for weddings, corporate events, or family reunions.
4. Historical Tours: Some railroads provide in-depth historical narration and access to locomotive workshops or museums.

PRESERVATION AND EDUCATION: SUPPORTING PENNSYLVANIA'S RAILWAY HERITAGE

Tourist railroads play a vital role in preserving Pennsylvania's rich railroad history. They often collaborate with museums and historical societies, ensuring that future generations appreciate the importance of rail transportation in shaping the region.

Visitors contribute to this mission through ticket sales and donations, helping fund restoration projects and educational programs.

CONCLUSION

Pennsylvania's tourist railroads offer an enchanting blend of history, scenic beauty, and entertainment. From the historic

Strasburg Rail Road to the scenic Lehigh Gorge trips, each provides a unique window into the state's rich railroad legacy. Whether you're seeking a family adventure, a romantic getaway, or a nostalgic journey into the past, these railroads deliver memorable experiences that celebrate Pennsylvania's vibrant railway heritage. Plan ahead, dress comfortably, and prepare to embark on a journey through time and beautiful landscapes—your Pennsylvania railroad adventure awaits!

Guide to Pennsylvania's Tourist Railroads

Pennsylvania, often celebrated for its rich history, lush landscapes, and vibrant culture, also boasts one of the most impressive networks of tourist railroads in the United States. These railroads offer travelers a unique opportunity to step back in time, experience scenic journeys, and learn about the state's railroad heritage. Whether you're a history enthusiast, a train aficionado, or simply seeking a memorable family adventure, Pennsylvania's tourist railroads provide a diverse array of experiences that cater to all interests. This comprehensive guide explores the most popular and noteworthy tourist railroads across Pennsylvania, highlighting their features, attractions, and what makes each one special.

OVERVIEW OF PENNSYLVANIA'S TOURIST RAILROADS

Pennsylvania's landscape—ranging from the rolling hills of the Pocono Mountains to the historic industrial zones of Pittsburgh—serves as a perfect backdrop for scenic train rides. The state's tourist railroads are spread throughout, each offering unique routes, historic locomotives, and themed excursions. Many of these railroads operate on restored historic lines, giving visitors a glimpse into the golden age of rail travel and the vital role trains played in shaping Pennsylvania's development.

Some of the key benefits of exploring Pennsylvania's tourist railroads include:

- * Immersive historical experiences
- * Stunning scenic vistas
- * Family-friendly activities
- * Educational opportunities
- * Special event and seasonal rides

--

POPULAR TOURIST RAILROADS IN PENNSYLVANIA

1. STRASBURG RAIL ROAD

Overview: Established in 1857, the Strasburg Rail Road is one of the oldest operating short-line railroads in the United States.

Located in Lancaster County, it offers authentic steam locomotive experiences and scenic rides through Amish country.

Features:

- * Operates vintage steam and diesel locomotives
- * Offers scheduled passenger excursions
- * Provides themed rides such as the Pumpkin Train and Polar Express
- * Includes a Railroad Museum with historic artifacts

Pros:

- * Authentic steam train experience
- * Family-friendly with themed seasonal rides
- * Beautiful rural scenery
- * Interactive exhibits and a well-maintained museum

Cons:

- * Can be crowded during peak seasons
- * Short rides (about 45 minutes)
- * Ticket prices can be higher compared to other short rides

Highlights:

- * The "Steam in the Valley" excursions
- * Special event trains for holidays and festivals

--

2. CASS RAILROAD (WEST VIRGINIA & PENNSYLVANIA LINE)

(Note: While primarily based in West Virginia, the Cass Scenic Railroad operates tours originating from Pennsylvania and offers spectacular mountain scenery.)

Overview: Known as one of the most scenic mountain railroads, the Cass Scenic Railroad provides an authentic logging railroad experience in the Appalachian Mountains, with some routes accessible from Pennsylvania.

Features:

- * Historic steam locomotives, including the famous Shay locomotives
- * Tall timber scenery and mountain vistas
- * Educational interpretive programs about logging history

Pros:

- * Spectacular mountain views
- * Historic locomotives and logging equipment
- * Educational experience about Appalachian logging history

Cons:

- * Longer travel times (rides can last several hours)
- * Limited service windows
- * Requires some planning for access from Pennsylvania

--

3. DELAWARE & LEHIGH NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Overview: This heritage corridor preserves the historic Lehigh & Delaware Canal and the associated railroad lines, offering scenic train rides along the Lehigh River.

Features:

- * Operates seasonal excursions along the historic route
- * Offers themed trips such as the "Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway"
- * Includes cultural and historical exhibits at stations

Pros:

- * Scenic gorge views
- * Combines rail and canal history
- * Family-friendly outings

Cons:

- * Seasonal operation
- * Limited departures
- * Rides are relatively short

--

4. STRASBURG RAIL ROAD'S STRASBURG EXPRESS & THE POLAR EXPRESS

Overview: The Strasburg Rail Road is renowned for its themed excursions, notably the Polar Express, which has become a holiday tradition for many families.

Features:

- * Themed holiday rides with actors and music
- * Interactive storytelling and activities
- * Opportunities for photos with Santa

Pros:

- * Highly immersive holiday experience
- * Suitable for children and families
- * Consistently rated highly for entertainment quality

Cons:

- * Tickets often sell out early
- * Seasonal only (winter holidays)
- * Extra charges for extras like photos

--

SPECIALTY AND UNIQUE PENNSYLVANIA TOURIST RAILROADS

1. THE EVERETT RAILROAD

Overview: A small but historic operation, the Everett Railroad offers scenic rides with vintage equipment, including caboose and freight car tours.

Features:

- * Focus on historical preservation
- * Rides through rural farmland
- * Opportunities for railroad photography

Pros:

- * Intimate and less crowded
- * Good for rail enthusiasts
- * Historic rolling stock

Cons:

- * Limited schedule
- * Shorter rides
- * Less focused on scenic grandeur

2. THE OIL CREEK & TITUSVILLE RAILROAD

Overview: Located in northwestern Pennsylvania, this railroad offers themed rides that highlight the oil industry's history in the

region.

Features:

- * Vintage train rides through oil country sites
- * Themed events like the "Pump Jack Express"
- * Educational programs about Pennsylvania's oil boom

Pros:

- * Unique historical perspective
- * Scenic rural landscape
- * Educational for all ages

Cons:

- * Limited operation times
- * Rides may be seasonal
- * Not as scenic as mountain railroads

3. THE WEST CHESTER RAILROAD

Overview: Operating in southeastern Pennsylvania, this line offers themed seasonal trains, including the popular Halloween and Christmas excursions.

Features:

- * Classic steam and diesel trains
- * Themed events with costumed characters
- * Scenic rides through Chester County

Pros:

- * Family-friendly themed rides
- * Well-maintained vintage equipment
- * Seasonal events add extra fun

Cons:

- * Limited to certain holidays
- * Rides are relatively short

* Can be crowded during special events

PLANNING YOUR VISIT TO PENNSYLVANIA'S TOURIST RAILROADS

To maximize your experience, consider the following tips:

- * Book in advance: Many popular excursions sell out quickly, especially during holidays and peak seasons.
 - * Check schedules and seasons: Some railroads operate seasonally or only on weekends.
 - * Dress appropriately: Rides are outdoors; dress for weather conditions.
 - * Arrive early: For boarding and to explore museum and gift shop areas.
 - * Combine with other attractions: Many railroads are near historic sites, parks, or other cultural venues.
-

CONCLUSION

Pennsylvania's tourist railroads offer a rich tapestry of experiences that highlight the state's diverse landscapes and storied history. Whether you're riding a vintage steam engine through the mountains, celebrating the holiday season with festive trains, or exploring the industrial heritage of the oil boom era, these railroads provide an engaging and educational adventure. Their preserved historic equipment, scenic routes, and themed excursions ensure that every visitor leaves with memorable stories and a deeper appreciation for Pennsylvania's railroad legacy. Planning ahead and choosing the right railroad based on your interests will help ensure a truly enjoyable journey through Pennsylvania's vibrant rail history.

> QuestionAnswer

>

> What are some of the most popular tourist railroads to visit in Pennsylvania?

> Popular tourist railroads in Pennsylvania include the Strasburg Rail Road, Reading &

Northern Railroad, Pine Creek Rail Trail,

> and the Strasburg Railroad, each offering scenic rides and historical experiences.

>

>

> When is the best time to visit Pennsylvania's tourist railroads?

> The best time to visit is typically during spring and fall when the weather is mild and the scenery is especially beautiful with

> blooming flowers or colorful foliage.

>

>

> Are tourist railroads in Pennsylvania suitable for families with children?

> Yes, most Pennsylvania tourist railroads are family-friendly, offering special events, themed rides, and kid-friendly activities

> designed to entertain visitors of all ages.

>

>

> Do Pennsylvania tourist railroads offer themed or seasonal rides?

> Absolutely, many railroads host themed rides for holidays like Halloween, Christmas, and Halloween, as well as special events

> such as dinner trains and historic reenactments.

>

>

> How can I purchase tickets for Pennsylvania's tourist railroads?

> Tickets can typically be purchased online through the official websites of each railroad, at the station on the day of the ride,

> or via authorized ticket vendors.

>

>

> Are there any scenic routes or routes with unique historical significance in Pennsylvania's tourist railroads?

> Yes, routes like the Strasburg Rail Road offer scenic views of Amish country, while others highlight historic sites, including

> old coal regions and preserved railroad towns.

>

>

> What should I bring when visiting Pennsylvania's tourist railroads?

> Bring comfortable clothing, especially if riding during cooler months, cameras for photos, and any necessary tickets or

> reservations. Check the specific railroad's website for additional recommendations.

>

>

> Are there any special events or festivals hosted by Pennsylvania's tourist railroads?

> Many railroads host seasonal events such as pumpkin trains, holiday light tours, vintage train

festivals, and community

> celebrations throughout the year.

>

>

> How can I find the most up-to-date information about schedules and events for Pennsylvania's tourist railroads?

> Visit the official websites of the railroads or follow their social media pages for the latest schedules, event announcements,

> and safety guidelines.

Related keywords: Pennsylvania tourist railroads, scenic train rides Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania railroad tours, heritage railroads

PA, historic train excursions PA, Pennsylvania railroad museums, Pennsylvania train travel, scenic rail routes Pennsylvania,

Pennsylvania railway attractions, tourist train experiences PA