

Walking Peekskill

By Lili Glassman Kasdan



Photo by Lili Glassman Kasdan

From top: The Gazebo at Division Street, one of Peekskill's best-known landmarks;

Taking a walking tour of Peekskill and its funky boutiques, art galleries, coffee shops and bistros is a treat for all five senses

An afternoon of walking around Peekskill's funky shops and art galleries can easily turn into an evening of great food and music.

Get to the Paramount Center for the Arts before 3 p.m. to see the rotating art exhibit in the hallway upstairs. Check out the beautifully restored theater and its concert and movie schedule.

Across the street is Side Effects, a boutique reminiscent of NYC's East Village. It features affordable costume jewelry, embroidered bags and many gifts items. On Paramount show nights, it stays open late to accommodate early theater-goers.

On Saturdays, you'll be drawn to the canopied stands of the Bank Street Farmers Market. Take home farm fresh fruits and vegetables, baked goods, hand-milled soaps, plants, organic grains, syrups and more. Local musicians serenade the crowd. Sit outside at the Royal J Coffee Shop on the corner, or step into the classic Center Diner, circa 1938, with its original counter, 11 stools and eight booths.

Kathleen's Tea Room is a lovely place for lunch, just past Division on Main. This eccentric spot serves salads, sandwiches, fancy desserts and high tea on artfully miss-matched china.

"The atmosphere can't be beat," said Colleen Ostrowski, from Garrison, who was lunching with her 3-year-old daughter. She plans to make it a mother/daughter tradition.

Head south on Division Street, pass the gazebo, and enter The Fern Tree African Gift Shop on the corner of Park. The scent of incense greets you. Bold necklaces, unusual handbags and colorful fabrics are candy to the eye. Large bangle bracelets were \$10, and a beaded necklace with matching earrings was \$18. The shop only opens Saturday afternoons.

A beautiful melody may drift your way as you continue south. At Ford Piano, local musicians like John Aschenbrenner often stop by to tinker on the new and used pianos in this 100-plus year-old factory/repair shop.

At the Peekskill Treat Station, next door, old-time favorite candies, fresh chocolates, toys and pinball machines add to the excitement of seeing a massive model train display. The trains run through towns and working drawbridges. Look for the milkman, the loading of logs and the giraffe sticking his head out the train. You're never too young or too old for this place. Four-year-old Leland and his mother Candace Winter, of Peekskill, had fun choosing from large jars of candy. Bruno Feliciano, 73, came for a strawberry shake at the soda fountain. At Past and Present on Division Street, you may recognize owner Kar-in Longerghan. She's been seen twirling her baton at parades all over Westchester. Her shop is filled with new and antique jewelry, purses and decorative items. Many earrings are under \$5.

You can refresh yourself with baked goods and fresh roasted beans at the Peekskill Coffee House, at Division and Brown. It has an old country store atmosphere with kitschy kitchen-table furnishings. Community events are posted around the room. Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons feature live music. Clifford Rogers and daughter Hannah, from Cortlandt Manor, come every weekend for donuts and bagels. "We're big fans," the elder Rogers said.

Stop in at The Coop, Unique Artisan Antiques/Gifts, next door on Division. It's a colorful hodgepodge of jewelry, children's items, home furnishings and gifts. Their new Annex houses antique furniture.

Upstairs at the Flat Iron Gallery next door, paintings, photographs, sculptures and jewelry are available for purchase. Over 100 local artists are represented here. The gallery also houses studios and you may meet some of the artists.

"This is where the action is," said Bernice Pliskin, from White Plains, who comes to the gallery to paint on silk. She finds inspiration and new techniques from other artists in the community. Photographer/husband Bob Pliskin has his studio there as well.

Take the kids to the indoor playground at the BeanRunner Café on Division at Esther. Rejuvenate with an all natural fruit smoothy, soup and panini, and great coffee. The dining room serves as a gallery for local artists.

If you have time, walk or drive down Hudson to Riverfront Green Park along the Hudson. Sit outdoors and watch the trains go by at Kelly's Bar & Restaurant, under new management. Have a local beer at the Peekskill Brewery. Pick up a pie at Homestyle Bakery on Water Street. The list of things to discover in Peekskill seems endless.

"Peekskill is a safe, caring community, very diverse and accepting of others," said Patty Villanova, owner of Side Effects, a boutique reminiscent of NYC's East Village, who has lived in the area for decades. "You often see random acts of kindness."