

Durham in Top 20 Best Family Vacation Spots

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DURHAM — The town of the Durham is the place to be, according to one travel website.

On the blog of TripAdvisor's rental website, Durham was one of 20 towns across the United States ranked as the best family vacation ideas. The list recommended visitors check out the Zoom Flume and Hull-O-Farms.

This is the first time TripAdvisor has issued a list like this. The criteria for TripAdvisor's lists involve the website's data science team using an algorithm that crawls all rental reviews on its website and certain themes are assigned to destinations based on how the reviews represent the theme, Digital Public Relations Specialist Ashlee Centrella said.

"The 20 destinations on the family vacation ideas list have some of the strongest family-related reviews across the whole USA," Centrella said. "Our list is pulled from an algorithm which is based on key phrases within traveler reviews."

TripAdvisor employees find that more people than before are entertaining the idea of vacation rentals, particularly families, Centrella said. While there is no hardened proof that amusement parks or water parks are typical places families gravitate to, Centrella believes having those types of activities close to where they are staying is an added bonus for a vacation.

"It is likely that they are seeking out various attractions to keep their families busy while on vacation," Centrella said.

Durham Town Supervisor William Carr Jr. had not heard of the list before it was published but said it is fantastic news for the town.

"It's certainly one of many areas that can help build our tourism base," Carr said of the ranking. "Tourism is one of the crucial elements to our success."

Carr credits the area for having such attractions as Zoom Flume, resorts including Gavin's Irish Country Inn and various festivals like the Catskill Irish Arts Week and the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival that appeal to all demographics.

"There are lots of spots in Durham to have a happy time," Carr said. "There's something for everyone in my opinion."

Hull-O-Farm is an agricultural experience visitors can have, Carr said, and some visitors choose to stay overnight, Carr said.

"Some people become totally immersed," Carr said.

Durham is the only New York town to appear on the list and that makes it a special distinction, Carr said. Websites in the past have pointed out Durham's natural beauty and its attractions, and Carr said there are ongoing efforts to make the town more attractive to visitors.

"We're seeing benefits of those results," Carr said. "Durham is a beautiful spot between the stone bridges and all the little places to stay."

Durham is home to many annual events such as the East Durham Irish Arts Festival and Catskill Mountain Thunder. Greene County Tourism Marketing Manager Heather Bagshaw said resorts such as Gavin's have been attracting many different kinds of visitors who are celebrating family reunions or simply enjoying the company of friends.

“They’re really attracting a special kind of group, speciality groups,” Bagshaw said. “They’re even getting younger people in and they’re the people doing those reviews.”

Many vacationers use TripAdvisor to see reviews of places they plan to stay. Bagshaw credited the town’s attractions for promoting themselves well and seeing it pay off.

“Blackthorne, Gavin’s, Hull-O-Farms and Zoom Flume have really good marketing campaigns,” Bagshaw said.

Bagshaw said younger travelers are staying in Airbnbs more often, but stressed that this choice does not drive away traditional hotels.

“We are getting feedback that lodging is up,” Bagshaw said. “I really think the rentals enhance what we have here.”

When marketing the county, Bagshaw and the tourism office staff review what is happening in the travel market on a local, national and state level. Bagshaw encouraged all tourism business owners to take information from reviews, positive or negative, and use it to improve themselves in the future.

“Reviews do play a part,” Bagshaw said. “It’s important to make a comment to those who give you feedback.”

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