

# Travel

Comfort and seclusion  
aboard the Crescent. K4



The Inn at Brandywine Falls, located in a 1840s-era farmhouse, is surrounded by Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Courtesy Inn at Brandywine Falls

## REGIONAL TRAVEL

# Feeling at home at Brandywine Falls

The bucolic inn, surrounded by Cuyahoga Valley National Park, adapts and thrives during the pandemic

Susan Glaser [sglaser@cleveland.com](mailto:sglaser@cleveland.com)

SAGAMORE HILLS — There are no more communal breakfasts, no hugs for long-time guests.

Yet when I walked into the Inn at Brandywine Falls last month, it still felt like home.

The long-time bed and breakfast, surrounded by Cuyahoga Valley National Park, continues to survive — and thrive — despite a global health pandemic that has upended the hospitality industry.

At age 90, innkeeper Katie Hoy continues to welcome guests, despite the pandemic and the death in 2018 of her long-time husband and business partner, George.

There are changes, to be sure: The once-elaborate breakfast has been simplified, guests are no longer encouraged to mingle, and family photos are propped on the bookshelves to prevent too much touching. But much has not changed: the inn's homelike surroundings; Hoy's welcoming and warm hospitality; and the terrific scenery just outside the inn's front doors, including the gorgeous 65-foot cataract, Brandywine Falls, from which the inn takes its name.

### BRIGHT SPOT IN THE LODGING INDUSTRY

The hotel and lodging industry as a whole has been devastated by pandemic, but some specialty lodging sectors, including small inns and bed and breakfasts, have performed above average, due to their size and location, especially those outside city centers.

The Inn at Brandywine Falls, located in an 1840s-era farmhouse, has fared particularly well, due to its siting within Ohio's only national park.

The inn closed for two months in the spring, but by the fall was seeing near full occupancy.

SEE BRANDYWINE FALLS, K2



The Inn at Brandywine Falls takes its name from scenic Brandywine Falls, a short walk from the inn and a top sight within Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Lynn Ischay, *The Plain Dealer*



Marigold (or is it Buttercup?), one of two sheep on the grounds of the Inn. Susan Glaser, [cleveland.com](http://cleveland.com)



The Loft Suite at the Inn at Brandywine Falls in Sagamore Hills. Courtesy of Inn at Brandywine Falls



Hiking the Ledges Trail at Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Susan Glaser, [cleveland.com](http://cleveland.com)

# Feeling at home at Brandywine Falls

Continues from K1

“We had the busiest September and October that we’ve ever had,” said Hoy.

Hoy admitted her four adult children — all in their 60s — were concerned when she reopened the inn, due to her age and risk for COVID complications.

“My kids thought I was insane when I started taking guests again,” she said.

But she wouldn’t have it any other way.

She and George opened the inn in 1988, after signing a 50-year lease with the federal government for the property. That was 12 years before Cuyahoga Valley was officially designated a national park.

The inn offers four overnight guest rooms in the main building, a Greek Revival-style country house built in 1848 by James Wallace, a local mill owner. His imposing portrait hangs above the fireplace in the dining room.

In addition to the four rooms in the main house, the inn features two suites in the separate carriage barn, with exterior entrances and an abundance of privacy. These suites have always been the most popular rooms at the inn, and are even more so now, during the pandemic.

The barn’s Granary Suite, rustic chic and romantic, was listed as one of the “10 Best Park Rooms to Beg For” in National Geographic’s 2011 guide, “The 10 Best of Everything — National Parks.”

My husband and I stayed in its nearly identical cousin, the adjacent Loft Suite, with a small living room, dining area, wood-burning fireplace, fridge and microwave on the main floor, plus bathroom and king-sized bed in the loft. A wall of floor-to-ceiling windows offered a snow-covered view of the countryside.

It was a perfect pick-me-up during this dreary, pandemic-plagued winter.

Pandemic or not, occupancy at the inn typically falls during the winter, which makes it a good time to visit when you’re doing your best to avoid unnecessary human contact. My husband and I were one of two couples staying at the inn on a recent Friday.

And I love our national park in the winter, particularly with a fresh layer of snow on the ground (but watch your step — those rocks are slippery).

For an extra dose of COVID caution, we stayed in for dinner, picking up take-out shrimp and grits and roasted Brussels sprouts from nearby Russo’s Restaurant. Breakfast was served en suite the next morning.

Associate innkeeper Maggie Kaiser arrived at our door at 8:45 a.m. with a basket of goodies that she artfully arranged on our table: fruited oatmeal, fresh-baked bread, hard-boiled eggs and yogurt with fruit and housemade granola.

Hoy and Kaiser developed a simplified breakfast plan late last year, as a response to both the pandemic and a broken arm that Hoy suffered over the summer (ironically, while serving breakfast). Guests are provided a menu upon arrival, and asked to choose from among numerous offerings.

It was more than enough to fuel the two hikes we had planned for the day: The 1.4-mile Brandywine Gorge Loop, which begins just outside the inn’s front door and ends at the spectacular (and frozen) Brandywine Falls; and the 2.2-mile Ledges Trail, which winds through elaborate rock formations, the single best hike in the park, a short drive south from the inn.

(Visit the Boston Mill Visitor Center, 6947 Riverview Road, for recommenda-



Associate innkeeper Maggie Kaiser, left, and innkeeper Katie Hoy, under the watchful eye of James Wallace, who built the farmhouse in 1848 that would become the Inn at Brandywine Falls in 1988. Susan Glaser, cleveland.com

tions and trail maps, or to pick up complimentary snowshoes when there is enough snow.)

Pre-pandemic, the inn offered an elaborate, three-course breakfast, served around the inn’s expansive dining room table. These meals frequently lasted for 90 minutes or more, with George Hoy curating the conversation, introducing guests to each other, reciting poetry, promoting discussion.

“He was not afraid to bring up controversial topics,” said his wife. “He wanted this communal experience, where everyone would talk and we’d get into interesting conversations. He always made sure everyone was involved. He’d draw them in.”

Much of that sense of community is gone from the inn now, due to the pandemic. Instead of a large communal table at breakfast, guests are seated apart from each other — around small tables in the dining room, living room, library and porch, when the weather is nice.

Guests still socialize some, but it’s not the way it used to be, said Hoy.

Indeed, during my brief stay, I saw our fellow guests, a couple from Bellefontaine, just once, as I was arriving and they were returning from a hike. We chatted briefly about the park — it was their first visit — and went our separate ways.

Hoy said she believes the sense of community that the inn once embodied will return as the pandemic wanes. But it may take some time.

She misses that sense of camaraderie. “People stay in their rooms. You hardly see anybody,” she said. “It will take a while for people to adjust to being social again.”

But if any place can do it, this place can. And I expect I’ll make a trip back in a year or so to make sure.



Breakfasts are no longer communal affairs at the Inn at Brandywine Falls in Sagamore Hills. Courtesy of Inn at Brandywine Falls

## If you go

The Inn at Brandywine Falls

### Where

8230 Brandywine Road, Sagamore Hills Township

### How much

Room rates vary, depending on the location and day of stay, ranging from \$160 to \$350 per night.

### More information

innatbrandywinefalls.com, 330-467-1812

### The park

For information on Cuyahoga Valley National Park, see [nps.gov/cuva](http://nps.gov/cuva) or call 440-717-3890, or visit the Boston Mill Visitor Center, 6947 Riverview Road, open during the winter 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday through Monday.

### More bed and breakfasts

For a partial list of other small inns in Ohio, see [ohio.org/wps/portal/gov/tourism/where-to-stay/bed-breakfast](http://ohio.org/wps/portal/gov/tourism/where-to-stay/bed-breakfast)

## Yosemite’s glowing ‘firefall’ reservations are open now

### Each year thousands are drawn to see the light phenomenon

Mary Forgiione *Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — A chance to see the natural “firefall” glow in Yosemite National Park in mid-February requires patience, clear skies, water, the right weather conditions — and now a day-use reservation.

For at least the month of February, the park is requiring all day visitors to make advance reservations. The park started taking reservations at 8 a.m. Monday, and passes are expected to go quickly.

Each year thousands are drawn to see the light phenomenon that looks like orange lava flowing down the 1,575-foot Horsetail Fall on the east side of El Capitan. It only lasts a few weeks.

Anyone planning to visit the park between now and Feb. 28 needs to make a reservation at [recreation.gov](http://recreation.gov). You won’t be allowed into the park without one; this applies to pass holders too. Reservations are free, but there’s a \$2 handling fee. You still pay \$35 per carload to enter for seven days. Travelers with reservations at a campground or lodge don’t need to make a day-use permit.

What if you miss out on getting a reservation today? The park has set aside 80% of the reservations and will release another 20% day by day, 48 hours ahead of time. So mark your calendar if you want to visit during the best sunset times to see the firefall.

Photographer Aaron Meyers has shot the natural phe-

nomena many times. Every year he predicts when conditions will be best.

According to [aaronmphotography.com](http://aaronmphotography.com)’s forecast, the best time to see the light glow on Horsetail Fall is 5:28 to 5:40 p.m. on Feb. 21. Times around sunset between Feb. 18 and Feb. 23 are good too.

There are no guarantees when it comes to seeing the sunset light that looks like orange lava flowing down Horsetail Fall. Conditions have to be just right. For starters, there has to be water flowing in the fall. Then skies must be crystal clear, even a slight haze or passing cloud can ruin the effect. But in a good year, just before and after sunset, the waterfall’s rock faces can glow like they’re on fire.

Firefall became popular after photographer Galen Rowell snapped a shot of the glowing image in 1973. It was nicknamed firefall.

The name is a throwback to an old Yosemite tradition in which park concessionaire employees would tip glowing embers off Glacier Point to entertain visitors. The man-made firefall ended in 1968, but the natural one continues to fascinate visitors, especially photographers looking for the perfect shot.

Here are tips on how to have a good firefall experience, from when to set up to how to photograph the phenomenon.

Yosemite reopened last week after windstorms and snowstorms caused damage in the park. Fifteen giant sequoias in the Wawona area were toppled in high winds.

The park brought back the day-use reservation system to help limit crowds during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and during cleanup of roadways.



If the conditions are just right, Horsetail waterfall in California’s Yosemite National Park lights up from the setting sun, making it appear as though it’s on fire. David Pruter, *Dreamstime/TNS*