

ESCAPES

Dry times (sort of) in this N.J. town

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

There is one bar in Haddonfield, N.J. It looks like a wooden ticket booth, and if you peer through the window, you see barrels for storing alcohol and pewter mugs of various sizes for measuring it. A menu lists drink prices: a “gill of brandy,” 6 pence; a “quart of egg punch,” 8 pence; and a “quart of cyder royal,” 1 shilling.

But you’d have a hard time using your cents or pence to buy a drink here at the Indian King Tavern — or anywhere in town, for that matter. The Borough of Haddonfield — like 36 other Jersey towns — is dry. The Indian King was one of the last places to sell alcohol before the town banned liquor. Since 1873, residents of this South Jersey town have bought their spirits in the next burg over and consumed it at home or, more recently, at BYOB restaurants.

Though proposals to change the law come up every few years, “the last time it was voted on was 25 years ago, and it went down 4 to 1,” says Mayor Letitia Colombi. “Our forefathers made a decision, and after all these years, our constituents are not hot to change it.”

The town’s alcohol laws neither attract nor deter me. I go to Haddonfield a couple of times a year to see my friend Rachel, and a typical visit includes raiding her bookshelf for good reads, buying shoes at Benjamin Lovell, grabbing smoothies at Animo Juice and dining somewhere yummy on Kings Highway, the town’s main street. But this time I firmly avert my gaze from the fabulous retail strip (which Philadelphia magazine named Best Main Street shopping this year). In return, I get a history lesson, see a dinosaur and find out that this town of 11,600 still loves its alcohol.

Doug Rauschenberger, the town historian and former director of the Haddonfield Library, takes me on a tour of the 2.8-square-mile borough. Haddonfield, he tells me, was settled by Quakers, starting with 21-year-old Elizabeth Haddon, who arrived from England in 1701 to manage the real estate holdings of her father, John Haddon. (The town was named for him, but he never made it over to see his land.) We drive to the spot where the world’s first nearly complete

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Haddonfield, home to New Jersey’s second-oldest historic district, is dotted with large old homes and stately trees. If you want a drink, bring your own.

dinosaur skeleton was found. Hadrosaurus Foulkii was discovered in 1858, and today, a 12-foot replica of “Haddy” stands in the center of town.

Haddonfield has the second-oldest historic district in the state (behind Cape May), and grand old houses seem to line every street. But Rauschenberger tells me it’s not necessarily the houses that make the neighborhoods. “It’s the trees,” he says. “There’s been a Shade Commission in Haddonfield since about 1911.”

We stop by the fire station, which houses a little museum and is home to the country’s second-oldest continuously operating volunteer fire department, founded in 1764. The Griffith family has volunteered at Haddon Fire Company 1 for five generations. Parker Griffith, 83, joined in 1947. Both his grandfathers had volunteered, as had his father, and now his son and his grandson do so. One of his grandfathers had a butcher’s shop on Kings Highway. Griffith remembers turkeys and deer hanging outside the shop when he was a kid; today it’s a stationery store. Things have changed a lot since

the 1930s, he says.

In the evening, Rachel and I walk into town with a bottle of white wine. At the Little Tuna, the server pours the wine and sets the bottle on the ice. We split several crab and shrimp appetizers and are stuffed by the time our entree arrives.

The next morning, I tour the Indian King Tavern, now a museum, with a history far more significant than simply being home to the last bar in town. Opened in 1750, the tavern served as a community meeting place. During the Revolutionary War, the New Jersey legislature — on the run from the British — met here, and 1777 was a big year at the tavern: New Jersey officially dropped the designation “colony,” declaring itself an independent state, and adopted the state seal. After an 1873 referendum outlawed alcohol in Haddonfield, the tavern became a “temperance hotel” and ice cream saloon. New Jersey bought the property in 1903, the first historic site the state acquired.

For lunch, I hit another BYOB in neighboring Collingswood, which is also dry. At Blackbird, I meet Dave Sulock, who runs a local BYOB Web site,



LARIS KARKLIS/THE WASHINGTON POST

www.byobguide.com.

“In these economic times, people are finding BYOB attractive, because restaurants mark up wine 100 to 300 percent,” says Sulock, who grew up in Haddonfield and buys wine by the case.

We sit in the converted hardware store and sample the chef’s favorites in a Lazy Susan bento box: handmade gnocchi, Thai spring rolls, couscous with crabmeat, spinach salad. I ask him how people know what drinks to bring when they don’t yet know what they’ll order. Sulock suggests looking at the menu online first or, better yet, bringing a bottle of red and a bottle of white and seeing which goes with your meal that night. “At BYOBs,” he says, “you have to be your own liquor store.” He suggests a few local spots to pick up beer or wine: Kress Wine, Wine Legend and Buy-Rite Liquor, all in Cherry Hill.

After all this talk about alcohol, I need a shot. I head back to Haddonfield and treat myself to a shot of wheatgrass at Animo, followed by a couple of dangerous hours on the retail strip with Rachel. Kings Highway retailers are largely independent boutiques — from Mitch’s violin shop to a precious kids’ clothing store called Pipsqueak. Rachel tries on leggings at Maxwell James and Georgie Girl, and we eventually make our way down the street to Benjamin Lovell, where I succumb to a great pair of leopard-print, patent-leather Danskos.

Feeling smug about my ability to mix history and shopping in one quick trip, I walk out to a busy intersection of this delightful dry town with Rachel. A man at the light honks his horn and asks her a question. She leans in and gives him directions to a bar in Cherry Hill.

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Getting there

Haddonfield, N.J., is about 130 miles from the Beltway. Take Interstate 95 north, merging onto I-295 north toward the Delaware Memorial Bridge, crossing into New Jersey. Take Exit 1B toward Trenton. Take Exit 29B toward Barrington/Haddon Heights/Collingswood. Turn right onto Highland Avenue and follow NJ 41. Turn right onto Kings Highway, which takes you into downtown Haddonfield.

Staying there

Haddonfield Inn

44 West End Ave., 800-269-0014
www.haddonfieldinn.com

Nine rooms, all with private bath, fireplace and WiFi. Wraparound porch, pet-friendly. Rooms start at \$209, including breakfast.

Crowne Plaza Hotel

2349 W. Marlton Pike, Cherry Hill;
856-665-6666
www.ichotelsgroup.com

Rooms start at \$92 a night.

Eating there

Animo Juice

113 Kings Hwy. E., 856-427-9070
www.animojuicecafe.com

Wraps, soups, salads from \$2.50 to \$9.50. Energizing smoothies and juices from \$4.50 to \$6.50.

Little Tuna

141 Kings Hwy. E., 856-795-0888
www.thelittletuna.com

BYOB inside or alfresco. Raw bar, lobster and seven tuna dishes. Dinner entrees start at \$19.

Blackbird

619 Collings Ave., Collingswood;
856-854-3444
www.blackbirdnj.com

Classy BYOB in an old hardware store. Handmade pasta, seasonal dishes; dinner entrees \$10 to \$28.

Playing there

Indian King Tavern

233 Kings Hwy. E., 856-429-6792
Open Saturdays 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Closed Nov. 7 and 28. Free.

Candlelight Shopping on Kings Highway

Begins the Friday after Thanksgiving and runs through the holidays. Live seasonal entertainment, Santa, carriage rides. Friday 6 to 9 p.m., Saturday and Sunday noon to 5 p.m.

Information

www.haddonfieldnj.org

— M.D.G.K.