

All Aboard For Scranton, PA

By Barbara McGovern

Scranton is easily a two day drive from the Tampa Bay area. There are terrific things to see and do in the area, plus it's close to other must see attractions such as New York City, the Jersey Shore and Washington D.C.

One of the first things to see in Scranton is the Steamtown National Historic Site, which is operated by the National Park Service. People have a love affair with trains — you hear that whistle blowing and you can imagine far off places. Trains provide adventure. How many of you loved to go for a train ride or just liked to watch the trains go by? I loved to ride the train to the Jersey Shore when I was a kid. How many of our kids and grandkids have had the experience of riding a train? A visit to Steamtown is like a trip into the past. Here you can relive the era of steam railroading. Feel the heat from the firebox; hear the clang of the bells and the howling of the whistle. Hear the conductor call ALL ABOARD and know that you were off on a real thrill ride, not something out of Disneyland. There are several excursions available that you can go on. Labor Day is a big time at Steamtown with Rail Fest 2009, but anytime is a good time to go. Call 570-340-5200 for more information.

Next to Steamtown is the Trolley Museum. This is located in a beautifully restored 19th century mill building that features interactive exhibits and displays. You can even ride a vintage trolley car.

In the Scranton area there is something to do for all ages. Visit Nay Aug Park for swimming and waterslides, hiking trails and picnic grounds. Go to a Yankee baseball game to see the Scranton-Wilkes-Barre Yankees; check out the concerts at the Toyota Pavilion, play golf; go to some great festivals, score bargains at the outlet malls, and have some "Valley Pizza" (it's not what we get in FL). Catch the Scranton Jazz Festival and visit some of the casinos and resorts in the area. All of this and more is available in the Pocono Mountain area of Scranton.

Since it is an area rich with history, why not stay at the premier historical property in the region? The Radisson Lackawanna Station Hotel has always played an important part in the history of Scranton. From the late 1850's the area was the hub of iron mills and coal mines



and that meant that the railroad was a vital part of the region. After several railroad stations were built, the president of the DL&W Railroad decided to rebuild the entire eastern end of the rail system, which meant rebuilding many of the stations along the line. After the Hoboken N.J. stations were redone, he started a new station in Scranton. Since the building would reflect the city's booming economy, a prominent N.Y. city architect won the competition to build it. No expense was spared and the new station cost \$500,000. This was an amazing price in 1906. Every amenity that could be put into the building was put in. It was fantastic, and when it opened in 1908 an open house was held for the thousands of locals who wanted to see it. Over the years the station was one of Scranton's proudest symbols. The next several decades saw a decline to the area's prosperity. After World War II things declined even farther. I remember talking the train from Newark to Scranton in the mid 1950's. The station was still beautiful but it was definitely on its downward slide. By 1970 the station saw its last passenger. An era had ended. In 1972 Con Rail took over the station but it remained closed. During the next 10 years it suffered the usual decay because of vandalism, the elements and general neglect. Fast forward to 1982, after much hard work a group of local people were able to close a \$13 million project to transform the station into a luxury hotel complex. The Hilton Hotel Corp. signed a license agreement to use the name, and it became The Hilton at Lackawanna Station. After extensive renovations it reopened on New Years Eve, 1983. The hotel emerged with all the grandeur of the original station plus so much more. The care that was taken with the restoration is evidenced throughout. The 36 murals that surround the marble wall of the original waiting area depict scenes that you would have seen during the train ride from Scranton through the Delaware Water Gap then down to Hoboken and other points in N.J. and up to Niagara Falls. Above the dining room wall are a dozen matching stained glass lamps, all but one is original to the old station. It's not surprising that the hotel is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hand laid tiles comprise the mosaic that surrounds the center fountain. With 100,000 tiles you can imagine the work that went that into laying them. The lower level ceiling is vaulted stained glass and is magnificent.

Staying at the Radisson Lackawanna Station Hotel like being in an elegant manor house where you will enjoy outstanding service with every amenity that you can ask for.

Check with the hotel to find out about specials such as their Romance package. Call 570-342-8300 or www.radisson.com/scrantononpa.

