

As featured in

The Washington Post

Inn at Little Washington Shops

439 Main St., Washington, VA 22747 | 540-675-5215



We can think of few outings more suitable for promoting the holiday spirit than taking the 90-minute drive west to Washington, Va., the Brigadoon-like town in Rappahannock County where chef Patrick O’Connell’s Inn at Little Washington stands at the corner of Middle and Main streets.

In 2003, O’Connell added to his fiefdom by transforming a 1740 structure across the street into whimsically designed Inn Shops that sell inn-related edibles and wares.

Browse the Dining Room, Old Tavern Room, Art Gallery and Jewelry Room for cookbooks, Virginia wines, corkscrews, furniture, handbags, scarves, pewter, silver, glassware, Laguiole steak knives (\$36 to \$48 each) and china, including Anna Weatherley’s breathtaking handpainted pieces.

Then head to the Old Kitchen (the Logo Shop) and stock up on homemade jams (apple butter, plum, raspberry, strawberry, orange marmalade, fig marmalade; four ounces, \$6.95); O’Connell’s granola (one-pound tin, \$15), the inn’s spicy bar nuts (one-pound tin, \$16); salted currant rye bread (\$5); large salted oatmeal, ginger and double chocolate macadamia cookies (\$1.50 each); truffle oil (1.8-ounce bottle, \$18); tins of spices that often appear in recipes in O’Connell’s cookbooks, such as whole nutmeg, lavender, fleur de sel, tea-smoked salt, juniper berries and creole seasoning (\$5 and up).

If you’re a fan of the inn’s delectable truffled popcorn, a popcorn gift basket (a bottle of truffle oil, small bag of popcorn, Microplane grater and the inn’s custom popcorn boxes; \$45) is right up your alley. If you are sartorially oriented, O’Connell’s signature dalmatian pants (\$80) or bib aprons (\$42) might pique your interest.

Our suggestion: Order one of the holiday pies (classic pumpkin, apple-thyme, bourbon chocolate pecan tart) presented in pretty wooden boxes. The nine-inch pies cost \$25 and are available all during December; order 48 hours in advance. From Friday till Christmas Day, the inn shops will stock pies that can be bought on the spot.

While you're at it, grab some hand-dipped chocolate truffles, such as rosemary dark chocolate, maple milk chocolate, hazelnut crunch and vanilla grapefruit white chocolate (available on holidays or all year by special order; \$2 each or \$30 minimum order).

For your drive home, pick up a box lunch (\$15; available on weekends with a day's notice) that includes Virginia country ham biscuits with mascarpone pepper jelly, potato salad, coleslaw, chips and a cookie. Throughout the year, the inn hosts parties, private functions and art exhibits at the Inn Shops, where invitees might toast marshmallows over a bonfire and make their own s'mores while taking in a spectacular view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The inn's latest exhibit, "Our Heritage, Our Park," celebrates the 75th anniversary of Shenandoah National Park and features 27 works by local painter Kevin H. Adams, through February.

Legend has it that when George Washington surveyed (Little) Washington in 1749, he danced in the house that the Inn Shops occupy. Now, the goodies that are available there give everyone a reason to dance a jig.

—David Hagedorn (Good to Go, Dec. 15, 2010)