The Carousels: A Free, Unmissable Tradition

Binghamton sits at the confluence of the Susquehanna and Chenango Rivers in New York's Southern Tier, about three hours from New York City. Known as the "Carousel Capital of the World," this former manufacturing hub blends Gilded Age architecture, a surprisingly diverse food scene, and easy access to the outdoors. Here's what to prioritize on your visit.

The Carousels: A Free, Unmissable Tradition

Binghamton's six restored wooden carousels are the city's signature attraction—and they're completely free to ride. Built between 1919 and 1934, these carousels were donated by shoe manufacturer George F. Johnson on the condition that they remain free to the public forever. Each features hand-carved animals, including prancing ponies, dogs, and even a monkey-decorated chariot. They're scattered across city parks, so you can easily pair a ride with a walk or a picnic.



Museums and Gilded Age Mansions

The **Roberson Museum and Science Center** occupies a Gilded Age mansion on Front Street and combines art, history, and science exhibits with a planetarium. It also houses the Binghamton Visitor's Center.

For architecture lovers, the **Phelps Mansion Museum** offers a glimpse into 1870s opulence. Designed by Isaac Perry (who also worked on the New York State Capitol), this impeccably preserved home belonged to a successful local banker. The **Bundy Museum** is a quirkier stop—it chronicles the Bundy Manufacturing Company, whose time clocks eventually evolved into IBM, and includes a Rod Serling exhibit for *Twilight Zone* fans.

If you're in town on the first Friday of the month, the **Downtown Arts District** hosts gallery openings, live shows, and free trolley transportation.

Outdoor Spaces and Nature

Chenango Valley State Park is the standout for outdoor recreation, with hiking trails, an 18-hole golf course, campsites, and the Twin Kettle Lakes—glacial formations that welcome swimmers, birders, and anglers. For something closer to downtown, the **Two Rivers Greenway** is a biking and hiking trail that starts at Confluence

Park, where the Susquehanna and Chenango meet. **IBM Glen** offers 200 acres of well-maintained trails through oaks and maples, while **Wolfe Park** features dense woodlands, a waterfall, and picnic areas.

Family-Friendly Stops

Ross Park Zoo is the nation's fifth-oldest continuously operating zoo and houses snow leopards, red pandas, and other endangered species. Next door, the **Discovery Center of the Southern Tier** offers over 30 hands-on exhibits for kids. Both make for an easy half-day outing.

What to Eat

You can't leave without trying a **spiedie**—marinated chunks of lamb, chicken, beef, or pork stuffed into a fresh roll. The sandwich reflects Binghamton's Italian-American heritage, and locals have fierce opinions about who makes the best one; the Spiedie and Rib Pit in Chenango is a frequently cited favorite. For something different, **De Island Hut** serves Trinidadian curry chicken and shrimp packed with fragrant spices, while **Red Chili Restaurant** covers Szechuan favorites like mapo tofu in a garden-like setting.

If you're downtown and want a drink with atmosphere, **205 Dry** is a speakeasy-style bar hidden behind a bookcase, with a Prohibition-era theme and a menu of burgers and sandwiches.

A Note on Timing

Summer brings the **Spiedie Fest and Balloon Rally** at Otsiningo Park, drawing around 100,000 people for hot air balloons, food, and live music. Autumn is arguably the best season for the state parks, when the foliage peaks and the kettle lakes look their best. And read more if you're visiting between Memorial Day and Labor Day, make time to hit at least a couple of the carousels—they're a piece of living history that costs nothing but a few minutes of your time.