

America's love affair with quilting

Quilting used to be something grandmas did, and quilt exhibits were sleeper events that rarely drew mention even in the calendar section of a community newspaper. But no more. Quilting is making a comeback in a big way. Entire stores are devoted to quilt fabrics and designs. You can download patterns on your iPhone, share tips and ideas with other quilters on blogs, and this summer, you can take quilt tours that showcase not only the fabric version of the beloved quilts liked grandma used to make, but quilt murals, barn quilts and even quilt gardens.

People are looking for ways to reconnect, and quilting is helping them do that, explains Mary Ann Lienhart-Cross of the Elkhart County Extension Office.

Quilt Gardens along the Heritage Trail

Just outside her office door, she can see the quilt garden, a heart-shaped design she helped create as part of the annual Quilt Gardens along the Heritage TrailSM, which includes 19 large gardens all planted in patchwork quilt designs.

The Quilt Gardens along the Heritage Trail is a free, self-guided tour that takes visitors to 19 locations throughout Elkhart County in Northern Indiana. Gardens range in size from about eight feet-by-eight feet to one that's about 2,400 square feet, and include more than 1,000,000+ blooms. Along the way, you'll find 19 large-format murals painted in patch-work quilt designs. Visitors bring lawn chairs and cameras, while others tote easels and paint the vibrant patchwork colors and designs. Get more information on the Quilt Gardens, including directions and maps at www.quiltgardens.com

Quilting bees, classes and festivals

This part of Northern Indiana is known as Amish Country and is home to about 20,000 Amish families. Many invite visitors into their homes for old-fashion quilting bees. In nearby LaGrange County, a four-day Quilt Festival will take place June 20 to 23 in Shipshewana, which will include quilting classes in an old school house, demonstrations, a quilt show and quilt shop hop, where visitors can collect unique quilt blocks from local stores. www.shipshewanaquiltfest.com

Barn quilt paintings

Don't miss the Barn Quilt Trails in Marshall and LaGrange Counties. The self-guided tours takes visitors through the picturesque countryside and through quaint downtowns where you'll find paintings of quilt patterns installed on area barns and in some of the downtown areas, The Barn Quilt Trails contribute to telling stories, bringing color and interest to our already beautiful landscape. For more information and a map of locations, go to www.visitmarshallcounty.org or www.visitshpshewana.org.

The quilt tours and festival are free, and local inns and hotels are making it more affordable than ever to getaway this summer by offering special packages and discounts.