Downtown State College pulses with life in the summer, especially during the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts. This celebrated event transforms the streets into a festive mosaic of artist booths, live music, and colorful street performances. Visitors can wander among outdoor art displays, enjoy impromptu concerts, and admire a massive sand sculpture crafted right in the heart of town. As the sun sets, the energy shifts to the bars and pubs near Penn State's campus. Popular spots like Happy Valley Brewing Company and Otto's offer locally brewed pints, hearty fare, and a lively scene perfect for ending the day with conversation and live tunes.

Fun lovers will find plenty of adventure just outside town, where mountain trails and wooded lakes offer a refreshing escape from the summer heat. A hike up Mount Nittany rewards trekkers with panoramic views of the valley and university grounds. At the same time, nearby state parks, such as Whipple Dam and Bald Eagle, offer shaded forests, swimming beaches, and kayak-friendly waters. For a more playful afternoon, Tussey Mountain's summer attractions include go-karts, mini-golf, and the popular WingFest, where local restaurants serve up their best wings alongside live outdoor music. And baseball fans won't want to miss a State College Spikes game—Medlar Field hosts affordable, fun, themed nights and post-game fireworks that light up the warm night sky.

A short drive from State College brings you to historic Boalsburg, where you can stroll through a small-town square steeped in tradition and tour the Pennsylvania Military Museum or the eclectic Boal Mansion. The latter houses European relics and the Columbus Chapel, said to contain actual artifacts linked to Christopher Columbus. Just down the road, Bellefonte offers a walkable downtown filled with Victorian architecture, boutique shops, and a scenic waterfront park. After exploring the heritage, unwind with a visit to Big Spring Spirits, a local distillery renowned for its craft cocktails and laid-back community atmosphere. Together, these towns offer a slower pace and a deeper dive into the region's rich culture and local pride.

BEYOND THE CITY

GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
Step back in time with a journey to Gettysburg, a town steeped in Civil War history and dramatic landscapes. Located about two and a half hours south of State College, it offers powerful insight into America's past through its expansive battlefield, historic monuments, and engaging museum exhibits. Explore iconic spots like Little Round Top and the National Cemetery, then stroll the charming downtown filled with antique stores, cozy cafés, and haunted history tours. Grab a colonial-style meal at Dobbin House Tavern, a restored 18th-century inn, and unwind with a drink at Garryowen Irish Pub, a lively gathering spot known for its traditional atmosphere and well-stocked whiskey selection.

HERSHEY, PENNSYLVANIA
Roughly a two-hour drive southeast, Hershey blends amusement and culture into a sweet escape. Thrill-seekers can dive into roller coasters and water rides at Hersheypark, while chocolate lovers will enjoy interactive experiences at Hershey's Chocolate World and The Hershey Story Museum. Beyond the cocoa-themed fun, the town offers botanical gardens and scenic walking trails. For lunch or dinner, visit The Mill, where rustic decor and fresh ingredients shine in a beautifully converted feed mill. Then, raise a glass at Tröegs Independent Brewing, a beloved local brewery serving creative craft beers in a vibrant industrial-chic setting.

LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA
Set within Pennsylvania Dutch Country, Lancaster is a pastoral and cultural getaway about two and a half hours southeast of State College. Visitors can enjoy peaceful countryside drives past Amish farms, tour covered bridges, or hop on a scenic steam train through Strasburg. The city center features a revitalized art scene, historic theaters, and the bustling Central Market – one of the oldest in the country. Savor classic Pennsylvania dishes at Miller's Smorgasbord, a legendary all-you-can-eat restaurant that captures local flavor. Later, catch live music and rooftop views at Tellus360, a multi-level venue blending Irish pub charm with modern entertainment.

CORNING, NEW YORK
Head north for about two hours and twenty minutes to reach Corning, a Finger Lakes gem known for its glass artistry and small-town appeal. The Corning Museum of Glass dazzles with live demonstrations and exhibits that let visitors experience the beauty and science of glassmaking. The walkable downtown, lined with 19th-century architecture and boutique shops, is perfect for a leisurely afternoon. Dine at The Cellar, a contemporary restaurant with a creative menu and warm ambiance. Then sip craft cocktails or rare beers at Hand + Foot, a stylish spot favored by locals for its inventive dishes and relaxed vibe.

CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND
Tucked into the Appalachian foothills about two hours southwest, Cumberland is a historic railroad town surrounded by mountain views and outdoor opportunities. Ride the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad for a memorable trip through lush valleys, or bike along the C&O Canal towpath. The downtown area features preserved 19th-century buildings, galleries, and historic landmarks that tell the story of its canal and railroad legacy. Enjoy wood-fired pizza and house-made specialties at Puccini Restaurant, a former Civil War-era hospital-turned cozy eatery. End your visit with a cold brew at Dig Deep Brewing Co., housed in a refurbished industrial building near the canal trail.

WELLSBORO, PENNSYLVANIA
Approximately a two-hour drive north, Wellsboro offers a blend of natural wonder and timeless charm. Known as the gateway to the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon, this small town invites visitors to explore dramatic canyon overlooks, bike scenic rail trails, and hike along forested ridges. Victorian gaslights and brick-lined streets give Wellsboro an inviting, nostalgic feel. Grab a hearty meal at the historic Wellsboro Diner, where homemade favorites are served in a vintage railcar setting. After a day outdoors, relax with a craft pint at Wellsboro House Brewery, a laid-back pub inside a restored train station featuring a rotating lineup of local beers.

JIM THORPE, PENNSYLVANIA
Nestled in the Pocono Mountains roughly two and a half hours east, Jim Thorpe is a scenic town where adventure and old-world architecture meet. Explore the cobblestone streets lined with Gothic Revival buildings or tour landmarks like the Asa Packer Mansion and the old Carbon County Jail. Outdoor lovers can hike, bike, or raft through Lehigh Gorge State Park. Refuel at Stone Row Pub & Eatery, a warm and welcoming spot with a plant-forward menu served in a historic setting. Cap off your visit at Marion Hose Bar, a former firehouse-turned-cozy bar that pairs craft brews with local character.

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