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Hidden Vermont

Enjoy an insider's guide to the sights, food and drink, art, and history that make the state unique.



David Martinez

By Susan Farewell

Though Vermont has one of the smallest populations in the country, you wouldn't know it when visiting its popular ski resorts. But not everyone comes here for the slopes. There's much more to explore—especially in the northern part of the state where the lively city of Burlington meets some of the country's most pristine wilderness. Scattered throughout the mountains and valleys are historic towns, abundant art, and delicious neighborhood eateries where locally produced products are highlighted.

Burlington and Beyond

Burlington bustles with art centers and students (it's home to three colleges plus the University of Vermont). It has a busy lakefront and a pedestrian mall, Church Street Marketplace, lined with shops and restaurants. Artwork and crafts line the walls of inns and restaurants and are for sale in gift shops, galleries, and museums. To sample the best, visit Frog Hollow Vermont State Craft Center (802-863-6458, www.froghollow.org), home to more than 200 juried, local artisans.

For breakfast and lunch, look for the crowd outside of Penny Cluse (802-651-8834, www.pennycluse.com). The dishes here are original, including home-baked biscuits served with an herb-cream gravy made with spinach, basil, and parsley. After lunch, stop for a sip at the Magic Hat Brewing Company (802-658-2739, www.magichat.net) for a pint of handcrafted ale, including Blind Faith, an India pale ale with a malty finish and a hoppy bite.

Just 20 minutes south of Burlington on Route 7 is Shelburne Farms (802-985-8442, www.shelburnefarms.org), a 1,400-acre farm that dates to the 1800s. Climb aboard a sleigh pulled by a team of draft horses, and traverse a portion of the snowy grounds. Sleigh rides run every half hour in January, conditions permitting, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily, and then weekends only



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through February. Consider driving another 20 minutes south to Route 22A for a meal at the Black Sheep Bistro in Vergennes (802-877-9991), where a heaping bowl of garlic mashed potatoes is brought to every table.

A few miles farther off Route 7 is the Middlebury College Snow Bowl (802-388-4356), a historic ski area founded in 1939. The Middlebury College ski team uses it for practice, but it's also open to the public, and lift tickets are half the price of other ski areas. Two miles west is Rikert Touring Center (802-443-2744), with its 42 kilometers of snowshoeing and cross-country trails.

Where to stay: Within walking distance of the waterfront and other downtown Burlington attractions is Lang House (rates from \$145; 877-919-9799, www.langhouse.com), a renovated 19th-century bed-and-breakfast with 11 guest rooms.

The Mad River Valley

Follow Route 89 east of Burlington (about half an hour's drive), and take Exit 10 to explore the Mad River Valley. Before heading south into the valley, travel north a few miles to your first stop: Cold Hollow Cider Mill in Waterbury Center (800-327-7537, www.coldhollow.com). Justifiably known for its cider, it also houses the tasting and retail shop for the Grand View Winery (802-456-7012, www.grandviewwinery.com), which specializes in unusual fruit wines. (The actual winery is in East Calais, about 40 minutes away.) Favorite sips include an organically raised rhubarb wine, a pear selection, and a trio of sweet after-dinner wines—blackberry, blueberry, and elderberry.

Head south on Route 100, and you will find Waitsfield and Warren, a pair of pastoral towns with covered bridges, pottery shops, and general stores. Near Waitsfield, you'll also discover Mad River Glen (802-496-3551, www.madriverglen.com), a nonprofit ski area cooperatively owned by 1,700 shareholders who aim to protect the terrain for which the mountain is so revered. It has a long-established reputation as home to the best expert Nordic trails in New England.

For dinner, expect a worthwhile wait at American Flatbread in Waitsfield (802-496-8856, www.americanflatbread.com). A bakery during the week, it becomes a restaurant showcasing locally raised fare on weekend nights.

At the center of town is the Warren Store, (802-496-3864, www.warrenstore.com), which is always abuzz with locals. This is a great place to stock up on picnic goods, including local Cabot cheese, wine, and a good deli sandwich. At the Schoolhouse Market (802-496-4559, www.rootswork.org), a variety of handcrafted, artisanal cheeses are aged in an unusual straw bale-aging cellar on the premises. A family business, the farm prides itself on having one of the youngest cheesemakers in America. Jackie Faillace, now 18, is a nine-year veteran to the business. With the help of her father, she's developed recipes of her own, including a King Louis cheese, a pungent, washed rind cow's milk cheese.

Where to stay:

In Waitsfield, the Inn at the Round Barn Farm (rates from \$160; 802-496-2276, www.theroundbarn.com) is a 19th-century farmhouse bed-and-breakfast with an attached carriage shed that has been converted to guest rooms. It's situated on 245 acres that are ideal for snowshoeing.

The Northeast Kingdom

Experience northern Vermont with a four- or five-day visit to some of the state's most remarkable areas. Fly into Burlington, on the shore of Lake Champlain in the northwestern corner of the state, then rent a car for a ride through spectacular scenery.

Follow Route 100 north through Stowe and Morrisville, then east on Route 15 toward Craftsbury Common, a classic Vermont town complete with a green surrounded by stately white houses. Craftsbury is right in the heart of the Northeast Kingdom, the largest stretch of magnificent scenery in the whole state. Untamed evergreen forests, alpine ridges, snow-covered lakes, and icy rivers abound with a rare scattering of tiny rural hubs. Among them is Greensboro, which is home to Willey's Store (802-533-2621), an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink kind of country shop.

The hub of the kingdom is St. Johnsbury, which is home to the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum Public Library and Art Gallery (802-748-8291, www.stjathenaeum.org). Built in 1871, the athenaeum's collection of paintings has remained unaltered since it opened in 1873, making it the oldest unchanged art gallery in the nation. The collection includes more than 100 paintings by famed Hudson River School artists.

Switch gears by heading to the Craftsbury Outdoor Center (802-586-7767, www.craftsbury.com). It sprawls across 320 rural acres of interconnecting trails that you can explore on your own or with a guide.

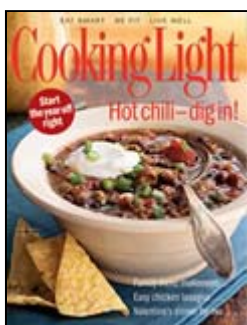
Where to stay: Just outside St. Johnsbury in Lower Waterford is the romantic Rabbit Hill Inn (rates from \$195; 800-762-8669, www.rabbithillinn.com), which provides simple, sensual amenities, including hot tubs, gas-burning fireplaces, and carefully selected music that sets the mood in each room.

Back to Burlington

Explore more of the kingdom driving the many small roads that meander through the region (a good map is a must). En route to Burlington, consider detouring to Montgomery, an old lumber and trading center near Jay Peak Resort in the north. Home to six covered bridges, it's considered the covered bridge capital of Vermont. After taking a look around, warm yourself with a hearty bowl of chili—made extra spicy with a dash of Dave's, a local barbecue sauce—at Trout River Traders (802-326-3058, www.troutrivertraders.com).

Susan Farewell is the author of Quick Escapes from New York City and Hidden New England.

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