

## On the Quebec border, a getaway to Vermont, a surprise summer destination

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**W**hat best characterizes Vermont and its people? “*We are Vermonters before we are Americans, lovers of country life and our community with a strong sense of mutual aid. As an anecdote, Vermont has more cows than people !*” answers chef Sas Steward. She launched The Adventure Dinner, a concept of locavore dinners in unusual places like the one we attended in the middle of the Shelburne vineyards. *Blind date style*, the guests, who do not know each other, sit around a table d’hôtes. The director of innovation of a start-up sits next to a young entrepreneur at the head of a sheep’s milk ice cream company. Over the course of the meal, the mayonnaise takes, bonds are formed and everyone ends up exchanging their Instagram accounts and promising to stay in touch. A tasteful conviviality in this state, the smallest in the country, whose microcapital Montpelier (three thousand souls) is also the only one without any McDonald’s.

Coming from [Montreal](#), the northern route passes small islands on the lake to which the explorer Samuel Champlain, discovering the region in 1609, will bequeath his name while France seizes this Algonquin territory. It then integrates New France which extends from Labrador to Louisiana, until the end of the Seven Years' War marking in 1763, the victory of the English.

Lake Champlain is a hundred miles long and serves as a natural border between New York and Vermont. It's hard to believe that the sea reached this far at the end of the Ice Age and that whales were having a field day. While it's not the largest lake in the country, it's about thirty

meters deep and more than three hundred and fifty wrecks sunk during the Civil Revolution line its bottom.

## An exceptional quality of life



Cruise on Lake Champlain. Antrim Bargecoast for "Le Figaro Magazine"

Also a victim of global warming, Lake Champlain rarely freezes completely as it used to. On the other hand, its cleanliness is impeccable. It provides more than 145,000 people with drinking water and allows safe swimming from around fifty developed beaches.

Located on its banks, **Burlington** (population 35,000) likes to boast of being the smallest of the big cities in the [United States](#). A nerve center, many startups have preferred to settle here rather than in Silicon Valley, like Kyle Clark, a local boy and president of the company Beta, which manufactures electric aircraft engines. *"I'm a local guy, I went to school here and met my wife. After graduation, I was told that I wouldn't find a job here. So, I decided to create a high-tech company to allow talented Vermonters to come back home after their studies and enjoy an exceptional quality of life while practicing a cutting-edge profession."* Beta is only five years old but is already valued at more than a billion dollars without having sold a single plane yet. Two prototypes are currently being tested in the air and should be delivered to Amazon and UPS shortly. More glamorous, Tata Harper is experiencing a real success story with her brand of green cosmetics, which she continues to produce on her farm as on the first day. *"I found in Vermont the ideal place to grow my business internationally while offering an unrivaled quality of life to my children."*

Along Route 7, the Shelburne Museum spreads over several hectares. This eco-museum reveals a reconstructed old village dating from the

19th<sup>century</sup> with beautiful folk art exhibits. A few kilometers further, the shores of Lake Champlain come closer. A driveway lined with manicured lawns leads to Basin Harbor, a hotel that reminds us of the film *Dirty Dancing* with its large house and wooden cottages set on the water's edge. "We are not the most modern resort, but our guests come to us to rediscover the atmosphere of family vacations of yesteryear where we still play Bingo, where treasure hunts keep young and old on the edge of their seats and evenings in the barn leave lasting memories," says Bob Beach Jr., the director, fourth generation of owners. Flanked by his two golden retrievers, Bob heads to the wooden pontoon where his speedboat, a 1950s Chris Craft, is located for a sunset ride. An old-fashioned postcard image that does not leave you indifferent.

## The best maple syrup

We leave the lake to head deep into the countryside and go to Jericho to taste the best *creemees* in all of Vermont, according to the local newspaper, the *Seven Days*, which has just awarded first<sup>prize</sup> to Palmer Lane. It is a very creamy ice cream flavored with maple syrup. On the road, the typical wooden barns painted red follow one another, the metal grain silos rise up towards the sky, fields of poppies dance in the wind, we turn up the volume of the local radio which offers its best playlists from the 1970s and we let ourselves slide along the winding road that takes us to George and Barbara Salg, organic maple syrup producers. The region is known for producing the best syrup, which has the gift of annoying the Quebecers. Aboard his Chevrolet Silverado Z truck, whose 500 horsepower hidden under the hood he likes to rev, George gives us a tour of the property.

A hundred kilometers of pipes run along the maple trees to collect the sap in the spring, which will be brought directly into vats, before being heated for several hours in the evaporator to turn into syrup. It takes about forty liters of maple sap to make one liter of syrup. We learn that the syrup harvest is very dependent on the weather. Some years are better than others depending on the harshness of the winter. In the heart of the forest, George and Barbara own log cabins that they rent to tourists looking for an experience in the great outdoors. In the evening, we settle into the Adirondack chairs under the patio to listen to the croaking of frogs but also the hoarse cry of the moose coming to quench their thirst in the lake below. If Jack London's novels kept you

in suspense in your youth, George will tell you about his hunting adventures in the Canadian Far North and the great plains of the American West.

## **The other Woodstock**

Scenic Byway No. 100 stretches nearly 220 miles along the Mad River from Newport to Wilmington in the south. Along the way, Stowe, the posh ski resort of the American East, juts out into the sky with its white church steeple amid manicured gardens. On weekends, the restaurant terraces and fashion boutiques are packed. A chairlift takes you up to the summit of Mount Mansfield, the highest point at 4,500 feet. The panoramic views of Lake Champlain and the surrounding mountains are breathtaking. If the hike has worked up an appetite, a stop at the Ben & Jerry's Factory in Waterbury is a must. The route continues south, skirting the Green Mountain National Forest and its *Long Trail*, the oldest hiking trail in the United States, opened in 1930.

In West Bridgewater, we leave Route 100 for a moment to reach Woodstock. Not to be confused with the Woodstock of New York State, which hosted the famous festival. Woodstock has the charm of these New England towns with its covered wooden bridge, its family hotel and its general store. Founded in 1886, FH Gillingham and Sons offers everything a shopping fan dreams of: cosmetics, children's toys, clothing, jam jars, tools, etc. This huge old-fashioned drugstore is also a meeting place where locals stop by to get their mail, have a coffee and chat with each other. There are nearly seventy-five of them throughout the state, the most authentic being in the small villages of the center.

## **New York's Chic Countryside**

Far south, Sunderland is a small piece of countryside that delights trendy New Yorkers looking for authenticity. Hill Farm, an 18th century farmhouse, has recently been renovated. Austin Poulin, one of the country's most renowned chefs, has taken over the barn, which has been transformed into a trendy restaurant serving gourmet locavore cuisine. *"I try to educate people to eat more vegetables, we show them behind the scenes by showing them the vegetable garden and encouraging them to visit nearby farms like Studio Hill, a regenerative farm run by Jesse McDougall."* The farm he took over had been depleted by the intensive use of pesticides and fertilizers. *"The grass would no longer*

grow. For several weeks, I brought in hay, fed the animals. With the trampling of the animals and the frequent rains, little by little the wildlife took over. All the green fields you see around here have been regenerated this way," Jesse says. "We are working to welcome a new type of tourism that I call hope tourism to show city dwellers that the earth has incredible resources if we know how to respect it."

Heading north, we leave the paved road to go to Greensboro Bend, in the heart of the Northeast Kingdom, a region known for its mountain bike trails, its turquoise Lake Willoughby and its Hill Farmstead Brewery, the most famous of the fifty-eight in Vermont. Since Shaun Hill took over the family farm transformed into a brewery, he has continued to produce beers of exceptional quality. "I work certain beers like great wines, which I let age for several years in oak barrels." A masterful work that has earned him to have been voted the best brewer in the world several years in a row and to make Vermont shine beyond its borders.

## Travel diary



The Figaro. The Figaro

### Useful

Check with [Vermont tourist offices](#) in French, and the city of [Burlington](#).

Formalities: in addition to the [Esta](#) to enter the United States

(US\$21/€20), remember to apply for your AVE (electronic travel authorization), the Canadian equivalent of the Esta on [the official website of the Canadian government](#) . It costs CAD\$7 (€4.80).

### **Go there**

The fastest and most advantageous is to land in Montreal. [Air France](#) , [Corsair](#) , [Air Canada](#) and [Air Transat](#) serve the Quebec city from Paris and some provincial cities. From €470 round trip. From Montreal, it then takes two hours to reach [Burlington](#) by road.

### **Our selection of accommodation**

In [Burlington](#), the [Hotel Vermont](#) (00.1.855.650.0080). Ideally located in the city center and a few steps from the bike path, this zero-carbon hotel seduces with its young and modern atmosphere. In the rooms, we like the little original details like the essential oil diffuser to help you sleep, the locally sourced products such as the flannel bathrobe or the plaid plaid woven in Vermont. The bar is famous for its beer menu. We love the Edward, a beer from the Hill Farmstead brewery. A fleet of bicycles are available to tour Lake Champlain. From €205 per night in a double room.

In Jeffersonville, the [Sterling Ridge Resort](#) (00.1.802.644.8265) . In the heart of a beautiful maple forest, Barbara and George offer log cabins. Pretty decor in a cozy mountain spirit, with wood stoves, wool blankets and decks equipped with barbecues for a picnic by the lake. Available: kayaks in the summer and snowshoes for long walks in the snowy forest in the winter. Also producers of maple syrup, the owners offer tours of their sugar factory in the spring, when the sap is harvested. From €187 per night.

In East Burke, [The Village Inn](#) (00.1.802.626.3161) . Four thirty-something mountain bike tour organizers took over this hotel two years ago. Mountain bikers will find the comfort they dream of (including a jacuzzi to relax in after their workout) but also all the facilities they need (secure garage to store their bikes and repair shop) and much more (barbecue and kitchen available). Around ten comfortable rooms, some very large like number 6 which can accommodate families or groups of up to six people. Excellent coffee shop opposite for breakfast and a bar on the river. From €112.

In Vergennes, [Basin Harbor](#) (00.1.802.475.2311) . Fans of the film *Dirty Dancing* will love it. It has everything that made the film a

success: a resort on the edge of a lake where you can go for a walk along the banks. A barn, The Red Mill, to eat and dance in the evening. Wooden bungalows (a little old, but with a crazy charm). An establishment from another time that, we hope, will remain that way for a long time. From €173.

In Sunderland, **Hill Farm Inn** (00.1.802.375.2269) . This former farmhouse has just been transformed into a boutique hotel with a few beautifully decorated rooms. Facing the mountains, a beautiful wooden deck for yoga classes. In the evening, guests gather around the outdoor wood fire. For breakfast, don't miss the homemade pancakes. From €206.

### **Our good tables**

**The Hen of The Wood** (802.540.0534) . Right next to the Hotel Vermont, this restaurant is an institution. A different menu every day and high-quality products make this establishment a success. It's hard to get a table! It is advisable to book several weeks before your stay. Between €26 and €33 per dish.

**The Restaurant at Hill Farm** (802.474.2508) . This new address is located in a tastefully renovated barn. The concept of "from farm to plate" takes on its full meaning here. The vegetables come from the adjoining vegetable garden and the meat from the nearby farm. Between €28 and €39 per dish.

**Mystic** (802.768.8086) . Don't be surprised to see a reinforced door at the back of the restaurant, you are in the vault of a former bank. One of the best restaurants in Vermont, the Mystic offers Italian cuisine with some New England specialties. We feast on Maine lobster or oysters washed down with Prosecco and pink peppers. Between €32 and €39 per dish.

**Adventure Dinner** . Dinners in the vineyards or art galleries, aperitifs on farms, picnics in unusual places... every time it's a surprise. Reservations to be made two months in advance on the site. €180 for dinner with wines.

### **Shopping**

**General Store** (802.457.2100) . A huge old-fashioned drugstore (cosmetics, toys, clothing, tools, etc.)

**Palmer Lane Maple** (802.899.8199). The best *creemee*, a very creamy ice cream flavored with maple syrup.

**Hill Farmstead** (802.533.7450) . It's a journey worth taking, but once you're there, you'll enjoy some of the world's best beers.

**The Soda Plant** . Alternative venue with art galleries, coffee shops, jewelry designers, stylists...

**Shelburne Farmers Market** . Local small producers market, every Saturday morning from 9am to 1pm from May to October.

### **To see, to do**

**Shelburne Museum** (802.985.3346). The Vanderbilt family, who initiated this project, assembled old homes and recreated a 19th-century Vermont village. A steam cruise ship is among the museum's centerpieces. So is a mansion whose rooms are a replica of Mrs. Vanderbilt's New York apartment, filled with many paintings by Monet and Pissarro. Admission is \$23.

**Lake Champlain Cruise** (802.862.8300) . Champagne brunch or sunset version. From €41.

### **To read**

*Bernie's Mitten Maker* , by Jen Ellis (Green Writers Press). The autobiography of a teacher who became famous for making the mittens that Senator Bernie Sanders wore to Joe Biden's inauguration.

*The Master of Illusions*, by Donna Tartt (Éditions Pocket): a novel describing the crazy life of a group of American students at Hampden University.

Guide: *Explore Vermont and Lake Champlain* (Éditions Ulysse).