

Winter wonderland

Think of the US and you'll think of yellow taxis, the Statue of Liberty and the Hollywood Hills – but nestled in the nation's north-east is the seasoned traveller's best-kept secret: the picture-perfect haven of New England. Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Canada and the state of New York, the region is made up of six of America's oldest states – Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

The scenery is never dull, with its craggy mountains, misty rivers and villages with 18th century churches and brightly painted houses. Its beauty and leisurely pace will encourage even the busiest visitor to exhale deeply, relax and unwind.

Accepted wisdom dictates that the best time to visit is during autumn, when the leaves change from green to a kaleidoscope of shimmering yellows, fiery reds and delicate purples. But winter, when crisp sunlight glistens on a blanket of

Stunning scenery, superb shopping and sensational snow adventures – **KARA BYERS** discovers why New England is a perfect winter holiday for the family

brilliant white snow, is also a particularly magical time to visit.

And whatever time of year you go, shopping has to be on the agenda. As these states have very low sales tax – in fact New Hampshire has none at all – several outlet centres have evolved, with some towns almost entirely dedicated to selling branded goods at reduced prices. Freeport in Maine is one of the best examples. Birthplace of famous

outdoor superstore LL Bean, you'll also find scores of other stores as varied as Abercrombie & Fitch, The North Face and Burberry. Whether you grab Levi's jeans for \$35 (£23) or snap up a few sets of Calvin Klein underwear for \$10 (£6.50), you can buy a whole wardrobe for a fraction of the price it'd cost back home.

If, however, 'doing stuff' is more your thing, you're still in the right

place; New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, which stand side-by-side, offer the best blend of activities and entertainment for the whole family. Alongside fishing gear and hiking boots, LL Bean also offers taster experiences as well as day and weekend trips for almost any outdoor pursuit, from canoeing to shooting, for as little as \$20 (£13).

For outdoor types there's skiing and snowboarding, snow tubing, ice-skating and husky sledging too, while city slickers will enjoy the region's abundance of shops, art galleries, theatres and museums.

A great place to stop and refuel is Gritty McDuff's, a brewpub – which sells beer brewed on the premises – found at the end of Freeport's main high street. It offers fine, handcrafted ales and traditional pub fare, but with an all-American twist. You don't need to worry about going easy on Gritty's fries either, as you'll soon burn them off on the slopes. An hour away from Freeport is Sunday River

Ski Resort. Boasting an excellent range of beginner to advanced slopes, it also has a ski school and nursery slope. Wildcat Ski Resort, just an hour's drive away in New Hampshire's White Mountains National Forest, is another skiers' dream. Though its trails are better suited to adult skiers with experience, its Lion's Den Children's Centre, which offers competitively priced ski and snowboarding lessons, is second to none. In fact, the whole area is a paradise for snow lovers.

In the heart of the White Mountains is the Bretton Woods Canopy Tour, part of the Mount Washington Hotel resort. One of the last surviving grand hotels in the region, its architecture and interior are breathtaking and, from here it's just a five-minute trip, followed by a hop on to a ski lift, to the first of nine different zip wires that will take you zooming over the heads of skiers as they make their way down the mountain. The tour also takes in two

sky bridges, both suspended 50ft above ground level, as well as a few hanging ropes used to lower yourself on to different zip line platforms. It's a must for all visitors to the area and guaranteed fun for all ages.

From Bretton Woods, a few hours' drive will take you to the mountains of Vermont – birthplace of Ben & Jerry's ice cream and home to a wealth of attractions. The beautiful town of Stowe, known as the ski capital of Eastern America due to its 485 acres of skiing terrain, is an ideal base for exploring this state.

Almost all accommodation is mere minutes away from the mountain and, at the brand new luxurious Stowe Mountain Lodge, built at the base of two separate mountains – Mount Mansfield, the tallest mountain in Vermont, and Spruce Peak – you can walk straight out of the hotel door and on to a ski lift. Although it's pricier than some of the other hotels in the area, it



Famed for its plethora of mountains and ski runs, New England is a snow-lover's dream



From scenic views to shopping for a bargain, you get the best of both worlds here



offers the easiest family ski experience as the hotel's Alpine Concierge service can arrange lift tickets for the entire family, lessons and equipment rental. They'll even go out and buy groceries for you to keep in your room so that the kids can have snacks to eat on the slopes.

And, if you're craving some quiet solitude, there's a spa, as well as steaming outdoor pools, perfect for unwinding in after a day blowing the cobwebs away on the slopes.

January is a particularly great time for families and beginners to visit Vermont as it's 'Learn A Snow Sport Month', during which resorts across the state offer free beginner lift

tickets, rental equipment and a lesson for adults and children. But whenever you go, being in New England is all about getting out in the great outdoors during the day, taking in the vast landscape, amazing views and clean air, then relaxing in the evening with a good meal. And in an area that prides itself on its wholesome cuisine made from locally sourced ingredients, it's perhaps little surprise that there's an

abundance of fantastic restaurants and eateries to suit every palate, pocket and whim.

With a relaxed charm that will make you feel instantly welcome, New England in winter is perfect for an exhilarating family holiday that's packed with adventure. ✨



The area's huge range of outdoor activities are ideal for the whole family

Don't leave without...

Visiting a sugar shack. Each New England state regards its maple syrup as the best, so take a tour of the area's sugar houses and leave smelling good enough to eat



Photographing a covered bridge – small gems of 19th century genius that get covered with a magical dusting of snow and icicles

Popping by the home of Ben & Jerry's in Vermont, where you can take a tour of the factory and even visit the Flavour Graveyard



FACT FILE

CURRENCY: US Dollar (\$)

TIME DIFFERENCE: GMT - 5

CLIMATE: Freezing temperatures arrive in northern New England in November and in the south in early to mid-December. January and February are cold and snowy, with well-below-freezing temperatures

VISA: British citizens no longer require a US visa but do need to apply for an Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) under the Visa Waiver Programme. See usembassy.org.uk

GETTING THERE: Virgin Atlantic flies daily to Boston. Returns from Heathrow start at £385 on virginatlantic.com

FURTHER INFORMATION: Visit discovernewengland.org or call 0208 237 7977