Winter In New Hampshire

A season of country comforts in New London by John Sedgwick



ew London, New Hampshire, built on a high ridge, looks out in winter over a broad, snowy landscape of farms, frozen lakes and thickly wooded hills, which spreads to the far horizon like a rumpled patchwork quilt on a four-poster bed. Unlike the state's heavily industrialized southeast, or the rugged mountain ranges to the north, the Lake Sunapee region surrounding New London, in the foothills of the White Mountains in southwestern New Hampshire, is nature at its calmest and most peaceable—as gentle as the inclines of the low-slung hills. And the town itself is virtually unchanged since the pioneer Moses Trussell, who later lost an arm to a British cannonball at Bunker Hill, cleared New London's first farm more than two centuries ago. Consequently, a wonderful snug feeling prevails, making the town's many rustic inns ideal places to escape the cares of winter, to put your feet up by a fireplace or Franklin stove, to fall asleep under a mound of blankets, or to dig into a hearty New England breakfast of blueberry pancakes dripping with genuine New Hampshire maple syrup.

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New London is New Hampshire's outback. Modernity has made few inroads here, as you can tell during a stroll along Main Street, where sturdy and attractive white clapboard houses, almost all of them dating back to the early 19th century, line the road at respectful intervals. Horses are still used to work the fields and to pull hay wagons along some of the back roads. The largest buildings in the countryside are still barns.

Colby-Sawyer College, founded in 1837, takes up much of New London proper. Its high Georgian brick buildings form a semicircle off the main drive, but the real centers of attention are two stately inns-the New London and the Edgewood. With stylish restaurants and taverns (and, in the case of the Edgewood, small shops for artisans' wares and cooking supplies), as well as many guests, they provide most of the bustle in this otherwise slow-paced community.

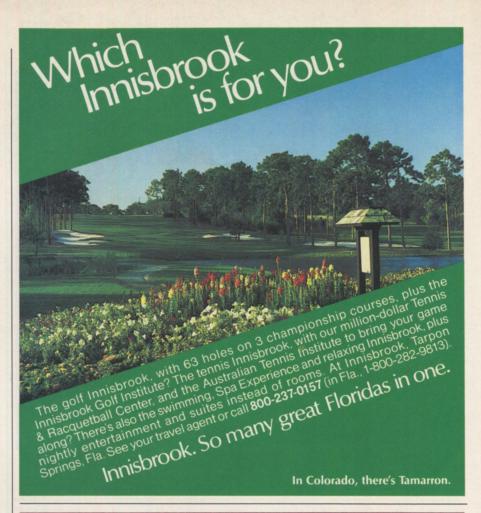
New London owed its popularity in the second half of the 19th century to the summer steamers that paddled across Lake Sunapee, a few miles to the south. Trains would arrive from Boston and New York, and then steamboats would ferry visitors across to their summer places in the many coves and harbors around the lake, or to Lakeside Landing on the far end to connect with horsedrawn buggies for the long climb up the ridge to New London.

The crowds thinned drastically with the advent of the automobile in the Thirties, yet many of the hotels and nearly all of the splendid Victorian vacation houses remain, now winterized for yearround use. Owing to a postwar revival, the region continues to thrive in summer. And it's nearly as busy in winter.

While many people come solely to relax, there are those who feel the need to earn their rest, even on weekends. For them, New London has all the usual forms of outdoor recreation, and then some. Mount Sunapee, which rises 2,700 feet over the far side of Lake Sunapee from New London, is the most challenging ski mountain in the area and one of the finest in the state. It has seven lifts and 20 trails, including one, the Beck Brook, that runs 11/2 miles. Nonskiers can ride the gondola to the top for the view from Summit Lodge, then ride back down. To reach Mount Sunapee Ski Area, drive south from New London on Route 103A, then west on Route 103. (Lift tickets cost \$15; for information, call 603-763-5868.)

King Ridge, in New London, is easier for skiers to handle. It has seven lifts and 16 runs, most of them pitched fairly gently for the intermediate skier. The facility is located on King Ridge Road, Exit 11 from Route 89. (Tickets cost \$15; 526-6966.)

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New London continued

cross-country skiing out the back doors of many of the area's inns. Because of the relaxed inclines of the valley walls, and the 360-degree views from the many saddleback ridges, New London's countryside is well suited to Nordic skiing. Dexter's Inn, overlooking Lake Sunapee from the south and located on Stagecoach Road in the nearby town of Sunapee, has trails that run by several beaver ponds on 600 acres of woodland. The Lake Sunapee Country Club and Inn operates the Norsk Ski Touring Center, which maintains 20 miles of groomed trails on the club's 18-hole golf course and deep in woods along logging trails. The Norsk Center stages races and special moonlight tours, and it has a recuperative sauna for après-ski. The Pleasant Lake Inn, which looks out, appropriately, on little Pleasant Lake, also has cross-country skiing.

There's usually good skating on the clear black ice of Lake Sunapee, so pack your skates just in case. Iceboating is another, perhaps more dramatic possibility, involving catamaranlike craft outfitted with twin runners.

To view the Victorian summer houses hidden away in the trees, drive by Blodgett Landing on Lake Sunapee, or in a loop on Lake Avenue and Burkehaven Road by Sunapee Harbor. However, New London is best suited for a quiet sojourn in the gentlest wilderness imaginable. Find the nearest fireplace, pull up a rocking chair, and, as they say in the country, take a load off your feet—and off your mind.

How and Where

WHERE TO STAY: There is a surprising number of attractive, comfortable inns in New London and its environs. Three are particularly recommended.

The Pleasant Lake Inn (603-526-6271) is about two miles north of New London's center on Pleasant Street. A former farmhouse with its shingled barn still standing, the inn is a snug hideaway in a lovely spot on the shore of Lake Pleasant, with a fine view of towering Mount Kearsarge behind. From its sharply peaked gables to the modern chromeand-wicker chairs of the dining room on the glassed-in sun porch, the inn offers the usual country comforts with a touch of class. The 13 guest rooms are cheery, with Colonial antiques and old-style flowery wallpaper. The price for a double room is \$37.

There's a well-stocked bar, and the food served in the dining room is ambitious and successful, ranging from veal piccata, sautéed in lemon-wine sauce, to a house special, chicken Pleasant Lake, a boneless breast of chicken stuffed with scallops and asparagus. The wine list is good, too. Dinner for two costs about \$40.

The Lake Sunapee Country Club and

Inn (526-6040), off King Ridge Road on New London's eastern flank, recently has been remodeled into a spiffy resort that, with the Norsk Ski Touring Center, is particularly appealing to cross-country skiers. The rooms (\$42 for a double) are clean and modern, and the Velvet Green restaurant is well appointed, with a few stylish wicker chairs fit for royalty. Dinners are standard fare—New York sirloin, broiled lamb chops, veal Marsala—but prepared with some care. Dinner for two costs \$35.

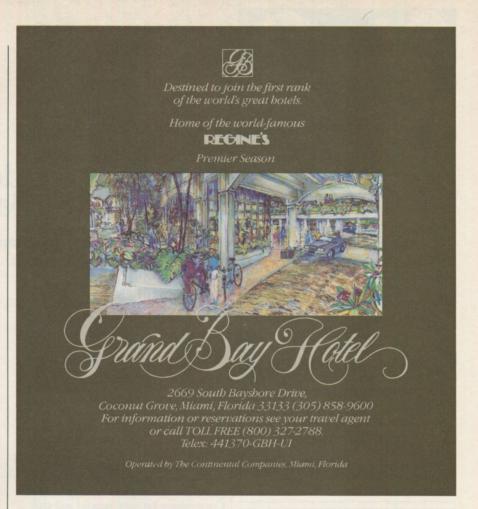
The New London Inn (526-2791) is very much an old-style hostelry. Built in 1792 and much added-to since, it has 24 varied rooms (\$30-\$40 for a double) off long hallways on the upper two floors. Each is decorated with period wallpapers and at least a few pieces of antique furniture. The sitting room and front parlor are comfortable in the manner of an old friend's house. There is a lounge called Nelson's Tavern and a charming dining room that serves such dishes as veal Gruyère and tournedos of beef—with a modest wine list. Dinner costs about \$40 for two.

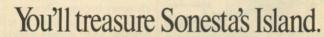
WHERE TO EAT: The dining rooms of the inns mentioned above are certainly worth sampling, but for an unusual meal, head west on Main Street and fork left onto Newport Road to the Millstone Restaurant (526-4201), an elegant establishment housed in a modern frame house. A millstone serves as the front doorstep. Inside, however, an understated Bauhaus style predominates, its spare surfaces and clean lines setting off the handsome, shining potbelly stove that stands rather imperiously at the room's center. The restaurant usually lists nearly a dozen specials on top of an extensive regular menu that contains such dishes as fillet of sole amandine, baked stuffed quail, and pork tenderloin Orientale, which is served with apricot-plum sauce. The wine list is impressive, and the desserts are varied. The price for two is \$35 to \$40.

For pleasant dining in a more rustic atmosphere, try the **Gray House** (526-6603) at the opposite end of town, on King Ridge Road to the left off Main Street. With a spacious, high-ceilinged interior and picture windows all around giving excellent views of Mount Kearsarge, the restaurant dabbles in a wide variety of international cuisines to produce tasty meals at reasonable prices. Among the entrees are shrimp Cointreau, paella and barbecued ribs—something, in other words, for everyone. There's a modest wine list. Dinner will add up to \$35 for two.

HOW TO GET THERE: From Boston, take Interstate 93 past Concord, then turn off at Exit 12 for Interstate 89. New London is reached from Exit 11; follow the signs for the town. The trip takes

about two hours.







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