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COURTESY STOWEFLAKE MOUNTAIN RESORT & SPA

The Sled and Bed package at the Stoweflake Mountain Resort & Spa includes a 30-minute dogsled ride.

Up for a ‘real’ getaway?

New England resorts are offering unique winter packages

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright

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During the pandemic, New Englanders have made the best of close-to-home staycations, heading outdoors for fresh air, for exercise, for sanity. Our desire for outdoor activities continues to grow, along with a craving for a “real” getaway, and the region’s resorts are responding with a variety of unique programs and packages.

“Today’s guests are hungry for vacations that feel normal,” says Deborah Burns, executive director of the New England Inns & Resorts Associa-

Foodie, Fire and Ice

Portland, Maine, is known for its red-hot culinary scene, and one of the best ways to discover (and sample!) it is on a tour with Maine Foodie Tours. The company has partnered with the luxe and splurge-worthy Inn by the Sea in nearby Cape Elizabeth to offer this special winter package. Don your parka and boots to walk the streets of the most historic section of Portland. You’ll hear about Port City’s history and culinary revolution, meet chefs and artisan purveyors, and taste their creations along the way.

Next up: ice skating at pretty riverfront Thompson’s Point in Portland. End your day back at the

Inn in Camden, Maine. “It caters to small groups or private climbs and the scenery is breathtaking.”

Bentzinger is talking about ice climbing in Camden Hills State Park. The inn has teamed up with Equinox Guiding Service to offer guests a four-hour beginner ice climbing lesson (also rock climbing in the summer and fall.) Guests meet up with Noah Kleiner, Equinox owner and guide, to learn the ropes and climb the routes in the park. Bonus: Bird’s-eye views of Megunticook Lake and Penobscot Bay. Add-on package includes a climbing lesson for two for \$185; room rates vary. new-englandinnsandresorts.com/inns-resorts/maine/camden/the-captain-swift-inn/offers/ice-climbing

tion, which represents more than 300 New England resorts, inns, bed and breakfasts, hotels, and motor inns across the six states. "Properties are answering that need with a ton of outdoor programming and other activities that make vacations feel as full and textured as they did pre-pandemic, while still being safe."

Resorts are partnering with local operators, making it a win-win for travelers and the local communities. Here are a few of our favorite packages, offering fun ways to explore the outdoors this winter, and, perhaps, an opportunity to learn a new skill.

Sled and Bed

Hike Carano, Arson, and Flame! Go Astrid, Hiccup, and Carrick! Onward Kateri and Pio! And they're off, a team of eight dogs dashing through the forests and fields. Bundle up under a thick blanket as you dogsled your way across 5 kilometers of snowy trails at the Stoweflake Mountain Resort & Spa in Stowe, Vt.

The resort has partnered with Umiak Outdoor Outfitters and a professional musher from Huskies in the Kingdom to offer a 30-minute evening ride, under moon- and starlit skies. The adventure ends at a bonfire where you can enjoy hot cocoa and s'mores. The package, including overnight accommodations, and a dogsled excursion for two, is \$324, available Thursday and Saturday through February, Saturday only in March. The resort also offers snowshoe and cross-country ski packages. newenglandinnsandresorts.com/inns-resorts/vermont/stowe/stoweflake-mountain-resort-spa/offers/sled-and-bed

Inn by the Sea, to enjoy hot toddies on one of the outdoor decks, overlooking the ocean and warmed by a sleek, gas fireplace. The package, available through Feb. 21, includes three midweek overnight accommodations for two in a fireplace suite, two Portland Walking Foodie Tour tickets, skating for two at Thompson's Point, hot toddies at seaside fire tables, and two nightly dinner specials for two, starting at \$449 per night. innbythesea.com/packages-specials

Icelandic Trail Riding

They're ancestors of the Vikings' horses, a breed that's been purely bred for more than 1,000 years. They're friendly and easy-going, and comfortable to ride. They're cute, too. Those are some of the things you'll learn on this 90-minute adventure package offered by the award-winning Hartstone Inn & Hideaway in Camden, Maine.

You'll meet the horses at Pepper Hill Farm, located about 15 minutes from the inn in South Thomaston, and then ride the picturesque, groomed trails. Riding is offered year-round (the indoor arena is used during inclement weather) and no experience is needed. The package also includes a two-night stay in a room of your choice, and a chef's multi-course dinner for two on one night, from \$480-\$918. The inn's cooking class and snowshoe packages are also popular. hartstoneinn.com/maine-getaways#packages

Ice Climbing

"Now more than ever, our guests want to spend time outdoors and this package is perfect," says Carolyn Bentzinger, innkeeper for Captain Swift

Skate on a Rink and Clink a Clink

This package offered by the Inn at Manchester in Vermont was inspired by the area's abundance of arts and surrounding Green Mountain scenery. You'll join a glass blowing class at the Manchester Hot Glass studio and create your own champagne flutes; a bottle of Prosecco will be provided by the inn. You'll get a private two-hour photo session with a local professional photographer who will take photos of you around the inn's property. Finally, you'll have the ice to yourself at nearby Riley Rink for a few swirls and twirls. This package for two also includes two nights in the Inn's luxe Bass Suite for \$1,200. newenglandinnsandresorts.com/inns-resorts/vermont/manchester/inn-at-manchester/offers/skate-on-a-rink-and-clink-a-clink

And others...

There's outdoor dining in an igloo at the Ocean Edge Resort & Golf Club in Brewster, horse-drawn carriage rides at the Centennial Hotel in Concord, N.H., snowshoeing at the Snowvillage Inn in Eaton Center, N.H., and snowmobiling at the Wolfeboro Inn in Wolfeboro, N.H. Plus, more, found on the New England Inns and Resorts Association website. Also available from the association are gift cards, which never expire and can be redeemed at any NEIRA property. newenglandinnsandresorts.com/offers/winter-beyond-skiing

Prices subject to change; be sure to check out each state's most recent travel guidelines.

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