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## **Best of *Great Escapes* from New York City without Wheels**

**Y**OU CAN ESCAPE NEW YORK CITY'S URBAN JUNGLE ANY NUMBER OF entertaining and enlightening ways throughout the Northeast Region—and you won't need wheels to touch down at many of my favorites. Here is a sampling of some of the best places to get away from it all just an hour or two from the mean streets of the Big Apple.

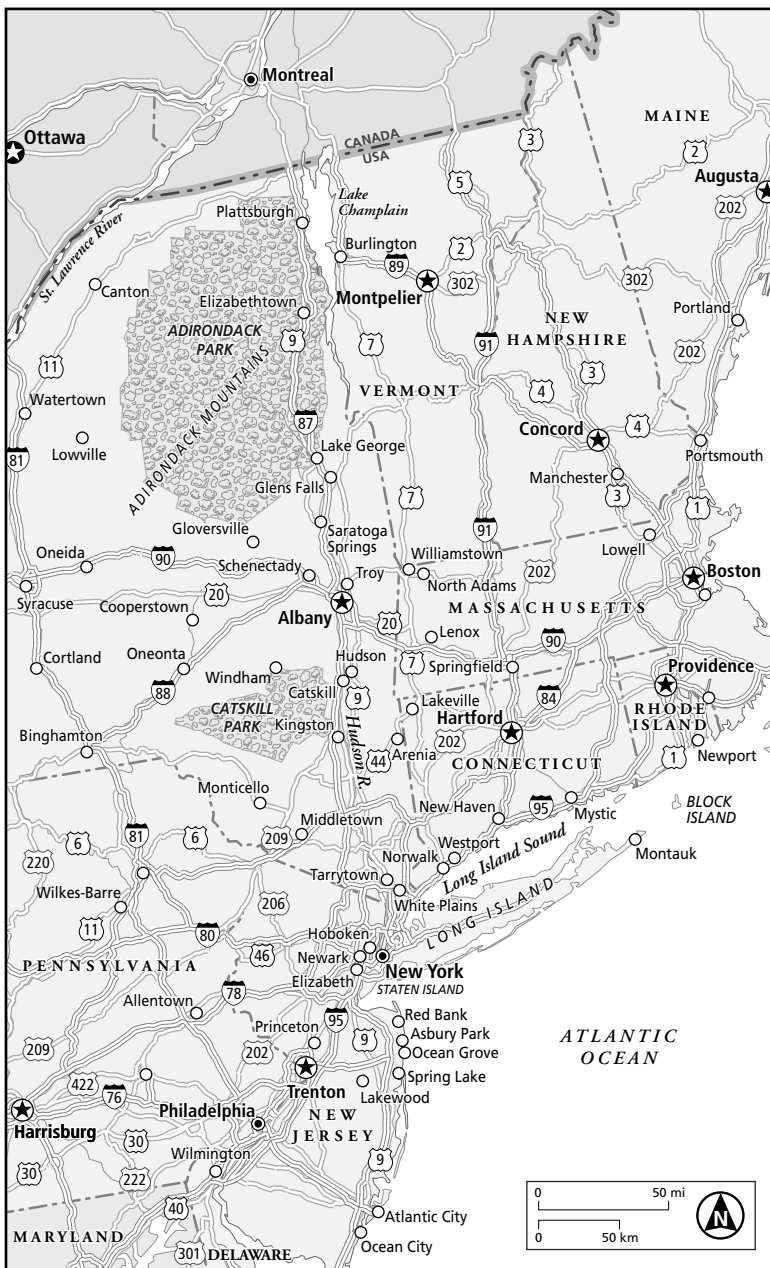
### **BEST PLACES TO SEE STARS**

- ◆ **Appalachian Trail:** After a hard day of hiking, spotting a shooting star makes it all worthwhile. See p. 22.
- ◆ **Hudson River Museum Planetarium** (Yonkers, NY): Starry shows are free on Friday evenings. Special shows are also tailored to younger kids. See p. 224.
- ◆ **Saugerties Lighthouse** (Saugerties, NY): A wide-open sky over the Hudson River at night yields scads of brilliant constellations. See p. 57.

### **BEST PLACES TO PLAY *FEAR FACTOR***

- ◆ **Skydive the Ranch** (Gardiner, NY): How does it feel to jump out of a plane at 13,000 feet? Find out here. See p. 33.
- ◆ **EMS Climbing School** (New Paltz, NY): Scale the Gunks with an expert guide and find out what it means to be a rock star. See p. 45.
- ◆ **Kingda Ka at Six Flags** (Jackson, NJ): The highest, fastest ride in the world is just a bus ride away. See p. 240.
- ◆ **Skip Barber Racing School** (Lakeville, CT): Hit the curves like a pro with courses that last from 3 hours to 3 days. See p. 43.

# New York City & the Northeast Region



### Top 5 Biggest Surprises about Regional Travel outside NYC

Even seasoned travelers may find some surprises in the regional landscape outside New York City. Here are a few of my own general finds and observations.

1. **Many restaurants outside NYC inflate their prices just as much as those here do.** Whether you're in a backyard garden restaurant in Lenox, Massachusetts, or dining along the pastoral Delaware River in Lambertville, New Jersey, don't be shocked to find that dinner is priced for upscale palates. This is especially true at popular weekend-escape spots that cater to tourists. If a bus or train makes a stop in town, chances are, so do weekending urbanites—and restaurants price their menus accordingly. Even restaurants sporting a casual look may charge double figures for a fettuccine dish and \$26 or more for a steak.
2. **Most people don't walk in other towns.** Know that sidewalks are a quaint but dying phenomenon and not everyone out in the hinterlands can give you walking directions. They may in fact tell you that you need to call a cab when you are actually within comfortable walking distance of your destination. And they may stare at you like you're an alien if you're walking along the side of a road (alas, no sidewalks!) that sees relatively few pedestrians. But we New Yorkers walk in our town, and with or without a car at our disposal, we'll continue to walk in others. It's not just a point of pride, it's a perfectly practical means of getting around.
3. **Luxury condos are everywhere.** In the city, we see them all over the place. But I hadn't expected to find BUY NOW!" signs and construction equipment tearing up dirt lots in roughly 75% of the towns in this book. From Asbury Park, New Jersey, to Cooperstown, New York, and New Hope, Pennsylvania, condominiums are going up, up, up. For those

### BEST DESTINATION FOR A SPA-THEMED BACHELORETTE PARTY

- ◆ **Gurney's Inn** (Montauk, NY): Pedicures with an ocean view, cottages on the beach, and a few bars along the main street in Montauk. See p. 132.

### BEST PLACES FOR A BEER

- ◆ **Guinan's Irish Pub** (Garrison, NY): Just 10 steps from the train platform sits this riverside bar with lots of local color. See p. 118.
- ◆ **Bohemian Hall & Beer Garden** (Queens, NY): Possibly the largest bar in the city, this European-style beer garden has a seasonal garden for bratwurst and Czech beers. See p. 107.

in the market for a getaway condo, it's like Christmas in every town. Same for the eager real estate agents whose tourist-friendly offices sit right in the middle of the quaint downtown shops along Main Street, USA. For everyone else who lives there, the condo can single-handedly threaten to jack up the price of living, mar a view of the mountains, and swiftly redo a town's long-standing demographics. Or not. It remains to be seen what impact these luxury condos will have in the long run. My advice: Visit these spectacular towns before condo-ization goes too far.

**4. Nearly every town in this book has "resort maps" to help visitors get around.** They're free for the taking at local businesses, the visitor centers, and the chambers of commerce. These maps can be a real blessing when you're trying to get oriented in a jiffy. Many are large, kind of cartoonish hand-drawn maps with a border of ads around the outside. Every business that places an ad with the map company will have their business highlighted on the map. That's why only some, but not all, of a town's restaurants, inns, and landmark attractions are pointed out on the map. But the maps are an excellent resource regardless ([www.resortmaps.com](http://www.resortmaps.com))—particularly for those on foot.

**5. Hitchhikers don't get rides.** Plus, it's illegal in many places, including, for instance, New Jersey. (Not that I've tried it . . . and definitely not in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, when we were about to miss the last bus home for the night. No one picked us up, but we made the bus via a marathon run through town and a bus driver who was running behind schedule that night.) So plan your return home carefully—make sure you have the latest bus and train schedules on hand—and always carry the numbers of local cab companies with you in case you miss the last bus or train home. A 3-hour cab ride back to New York won't be cheap. But it *will* be a cab ride back to New York.

- ◆ **Harp & Hound** (Mystic, CT): A warm, atmospheric pub for a pint and an Irish session. See p. 166.

### **BEST PLACE TO DITCH YOUR DIET**

- ◆ **Blue Hill at Stone Barns** (Pocantico Hills, NY): From the farm to your table, this amazing American fare prompts New Yorkers to reserve a table several months in advance. See p. 105.

### **BEST PLACES FOR A COZY WINTER WEEKEND**

- ◆ **Troutbeck** (Amenia, NY): A country estate with logs on the fire, shelves of books for browsing, and a small bar for a cold evening's nightcap. See p. 85.

- ◆ **Inn at National Hall** (Westport, CT): Hole up in dramatic rooms with sitting areas and enormous bathtubs or head to the drawing room and watch the snow fall outside. See p. 70.
- ◆ **Lodge at Emerson Place** (Woodstock, NY): Ski the day at Belleayre, then come back to log-cabin charm with hotel amenities—and a room with a fireplace, plush robes, a sleeping loft, and a balcony overlooking the creek. See p. 30.
- ◆ **Silvermine Tavern** (Norwalk, CT): Live jazz and hearty New England fare warm up the tavern, where you can retire upstairs for a long winter's nap. See p. 109.

### BEST PLACES TO STEP BACK IN TIME

- ◆ **Rye Playland** (Rye, NY): This seaside summer park hasn't changed much in 70 years, with its beach, a boardwalk, and old-fashioned rides. See p. 220.
- ◆ **Mystic Seaport** (Mystic, CT): Trace the origins of whaling and shipbuilding at this living re-creation of a 19th-century coastal community. See p. 166.
- ◆ **Williams Lake** (Rosendale, NY): Think there's no such thing as those *Dirty Dancing*-style lake resorts? Think again. Retro is the word at this family-friendly all-inclusive. See p. 226.

### BEST PLACES TO GET IN THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

- ◆ **Festival of Light** (Hartford, CT): Starting Thanksgiving weekend, Hartford's Constitution Plaza twinkles with more than 250,000 little white lights. See p. 258.
- ◆ **Mystic Seaport** (Mystic, CT): It's Christmas 1876 during the lantern-light tours through this harbor-side museum set up like a colonial village. See p. 166.

### BEST PLACES TO PROPOSE

- ◆ **Saugerties Lighthouse** (Saugerties, NY): Looking out over the Hudson River from the balcony of the light tower, you'll both be seeing stars. See p. 57.
- ◆ **Mohonk Mountain House** (New Paltz, NY): This old-fashioned resort is full of romantic nooks and crannies. See p. 88.
- ◆ **Castle on the Hudson** (Tarrytown, NY): The regal rooms here are worthy of an engagement *and* a honeymoon. See p. 54.

### BEST GAY-FRIENDLY WEEKENDS

- ◆ **Lefèvre House** (New Paltz, NY): The beds wear Versace at this modern B&B, set in a town that proudly waves the rainbow flag. See p. 73.

### Why I Love Adirondack Trailways

When you spend every weekend for 8 months on buses and trains, you become pretty sensitive to the details. Sometimes they're subtle—like the Adirondack Trailways buses that have net bags on the back of the seat in front of you so you can keep a magazine or bottle of water handy. At other times subtlety goes out the window, like when a driver for a competing bus company spent a good half-hour on the microphone explaining to our entire busload of Pennsylvania-bound travelers everything that's wrong with the company. New Yorkers are fortunate to have a bus line like Adirondack Trailways, a line that knows each experience you have on board will determine whether you ever buy another ticket. Trailways starts with a terrific website that lists all schedules and fares for their major destinations. Most destinations have a long list of arrivals and departures each day, and their fares are the same reasonable price no matter what day or time you ride. Their buses are clean, quiet, and on time. Their drivers are capable, safe, and willing to help. Not only that, but they travel to those Hudson Valley and Catskills towns with the best things to see and do. Trailways is the only bus line that consistently offers a trip so quiet and so pleasant that I've seen people fall asleep before the bus even pulls out of Port Authority. To plan your trip, go to [www.trailwaysny.com](http://www.trailwaysny.com).

- ◆ **Sky Lake Lodge Shambhala** (Rosendale, NY): Weekend workshops at this welcoming retreat incorporate yoga, meditation, and the tenets of Buddhism. See p. 146.

### BEST PLACES FOR BIG SPENDERS

- ◆ **Skip Barber Racing School** (Lakeville, CT): The 3-day racing school puts you on track to your new favorite hobby. See p. 43.
- ◆ **Make Your Own Wine** (Elmsford, NY): Bottle a whole barrel of your own custom blend. See p. 112.
- ◆ **Long Island Wine Country's Wine Camp** (Southold, NY): Four days of living like you own a vineyard. See p. 121.
- ◆ **Inn at National Hall** (Westport, CT): A two-story suite with a winding staircase makes for a very nice break from your cramped city apartment. See p. 70.
- ◆ **Atlantic City, NJ**: Play the high-stakes tables, order two carts of room service, and reserve the couple's suite for treatments at the Borgata spa. See p. 60.

- ◆ **Castle on the Hudson** (Tarrytown, NY): Spacious rooms, multi-course dinners with fabulous wine, Bulgari bath products—but at a price tag fit for a king. See p. 54.

### BEST PLACE TO TAKE A BATH (OR SWIM WHILE IT SNOWS)

- ◆ **The Porches Inn** (North Adams, MA): Claw-foot and whirlpool tubs sit deep and wide. Out back, next to the hot tub, the outdoor pool is kept warm enough for year-round swimming. See p. 208.

### BEST PLACES FOR SHUTTERBUGS OR PAINTERS

- ◆ **Mohonk Mountain House** (New Paltz, NY): White cliffs, the Shawangunk Mountains, a half-mile-long lake—all beyond scenic and ready for your lens. See p. 88.
- ◆ **Stone Barns Center for Food & Agriculture** (Pocantico Hills, NY): Set up an easel and paint the rolling farms or old stone barns. See p. 103.
- ◆ **Sailing the *Cirrus*** (Kingston, NY): Sailing-and-painting excursions offer perspectives that harken back to the Hudson River School set. See p. 26.

### BEST PLACES TO SWIM IN A LAKE

- ◆ **Interlaken Inn** (Lakeville, CT): No one can resist a jump in the lake so pretty they named the town for it. See p. 43.
- ◆ **Williams Lake** (Rosendale, NY): Kids love the cool lake here for swimming and canoeing; families find it an easy place to get together for family reunions. See p. 226.
- ◆ **Mohonk Mountain House** (New Paltz, NY): The lake here is abuzz with summer activity—swimming, boating, and fishing—in a dazzling mountain setting. See p. 88.

### BEST GETAWAYS WITH YOUR DOG

- ◆ **Interlaken Inn** (Lakeville, CT): At the foothills of the Berkshires in the Litchfield Hills, dogs can run on the lawn, explore the woods, or swim in the lake at this inn with pet-friendly rooms. See p. 43.
- ◆ **Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture** (Pocantico Hills, NY): After roaming the fields and farms, walk the dog along the adjacent trails of Rockefeller State Park. See p. 103.

### BEST TOWNS WITH A SEASONAL TROLLEY

- ◆ **Kingston, NY**: The three districts of the town include the harbor, museums, and historic stone houses—all along one route. See p. 28.
- ◆ **Beacon, NY**: The town trolley easily whisks you from the art at Dia: Beacon to the downtown restaurants, shops, and galleries. See p. 203.

### Why I Love TripAdvisor.com

I don't remember how I finalized my hotel decisions before TripAdvisor.com. The website is filled with hotel reviews from regular, everyday people who have stayed the night and, afterward, wanted to—for better or worse—share their experiences with others. The website takes you behind the scenes and into the lobbies, restaurants, rooms, and service aspects of hotels around the globe. I learned that a hotel I was considering for the holidays in Jamaica has a seedy carryout store across the street that's a prime meeting place for local dealers. I read from many guests that an otherwise promising-looking hotel on the water in Upstate New York smells completely moldy, and that an innkeeper in Philadelphia has a long-standing reputation for rushing her guests through breakfast. Humph! On the flip side, I've read rave reviews of many hotels I have then booked and absolutely enjoyed. I don't want to imply that one bitter review of an otherwise shining property should be enough to turn you away. But I can say that I don't know of a better source for confirming that a hotel you've heard so many good things about is actually known for delivering on its promises. Here's to a good night's sleep wherever you go!

### BEST BEACH ESCAPES

- ◆ **Block Island, RI:** Bike around the island, lie on the beach, check out the lighthouses, and go shopping in town. See p. 78.
- ◆ **Atlantic City, NJ:** Not just casinos anymore. The beach clubs are hopping 'til all hours of the morning. See p. 60.
- ◆ **Spring Lake, NJ:** This beach also features a lake, lovely Victorian B&Bs, and a good dose of peace and quiet. See p. 49.

### BEST SPOOKY PLACE

- ◆ **New Hope, PA:** Brave souls can take a lantern-lit ghost tour and stay in a haunted hotel. See p. 190.

### BEST GETAWAYS CLOSE TO THE CITY

- ◆ **Chinese Scholar's Garden** (Staten Island, NY): Built in China and transported here, this serene and uncrowded garden is just a quick bus ride from the Staten Island Ferry. See p. 128.
- ◆ **Noguchi Museum** (Long Island City, NY): An indoor-outdoor sculpture space with a spiritual ambience. See p. 214.
- ◆ **Kykuit** (Tarrytown, NY): This Rockefeller estate and its gardens, sculpture, and other artworks are the must-see gem of the Hudson. See p. 177.



### Why I Love Metro North Railroad

Metro North trains go almost everywhere north of the city that you could want to go. You can choose to ride in seats facing backward or forward, the trains have decent bathrooms, and, if you can keep away from cellphone yappers, it's a quiet, scenic trip any season of the year (especially on the Hudson Line). You can even bring your bike if you get a \$5 lifetime permit in advance.

But mainly I love Metro North because they don't mind toting along my dog, Lilly (as long as none of the nearby passengers mind her either). If you can get your dog to Grand Central, you can bring him or her on board a Metro North train inside a carrier or even on a secure and controlled leash. As long as you keep the leash short throughout the trip and your dog is not being a nuisance of noise, odor, or wild antics, you can ride up the Hudson to any number of patches of open land and let your furry friend run free.

Metro North does say that:

- ◆ Dogs cannot occupy a seat.
- ◆ Dogs are "subject to approval" by the conductor.
- ◆ Naturally, service animals are always welcome.

The trick, however, may be getting your dog to Grand Central in the first place—subways, buses, and the LIRR do *not* allow doggies unless they are safely tucked inside a kennel carrier. (Metro North seems to be the crunchy, animal-loving hippie of the MTA.) Living in Brooklyn, we have had good luck with several car services that are willing to pick us up and let our dog ride on our laps in the car, as long as we specify that we're bringing her when we call for a pickup. Cabs may or may not pick you up when you've got a leashed dog. As a last resort, you may end up having to get to the terminal on foot. But what dog doesn't mind an extra walk? For more information, go to [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info) and type "pets" in the Search text field.

- ◆ **Caramoor** (Katonah, NY): Treasures from around the world fill this elegant estate. Music events and afternoon teas complement the house tours. See p. 171.

### BEST WAYS TO SEE IT ALL

- ◆ **Vintage Tours of Long Island Wine Country:** Tour, taste, and talk about wines when you spend a day in the heartland of some of the state's finest grapes. See p. 100.
- ◆ **Royal Rolling Chair Rides in Atlantic City, NJ:** Save your feet but see the boardwalk when you're pushed along the length of it swaddled in an old-fashioned wicker basket ([www.rollingchairs.com](http://www.rollingchairs.com)). See p. 64.

**BEST PLACES FOR A PICNIC**

- ◆ **West Mountain on the Appalachian Trail:** Spread out on the rocks with hawks above and a patchwork of farmland below. See p. 22.
- ◆ **Olana** (Hudson, NY): Frederic Church shared the views from his hilltop estate with friends from across the world; now they are open to you, too. See p. 185.

**BEST B&B BREAKFASTS**

- ◆ **Lefèvre House** (New Paltz, NY): Three decadent, chef-prepared courses in a metro-chic modern dining room. See p. 73.
- ◆ **The Martin Coryell House** (Lambertville, NJ): Bountiful homemade breakfasts of stuffed French toast or blueberry waffles served on antique china. See p. 196.

**BEST ART MUSEUM**

- ◆ **Williams College Museum of Art** and the **Clark Institute** (Williamstown, MA): Not far from the Porches Inn in North Adams, these are two of the most highly regarded art institutions in the country. See p. 212.

**BEST ALTERNATIVE ART MUSEUMS**

- ◆ **Mass MoCA** (North Adams, MA): Postmodern art fills this former textile-printing plant across from the Porches Inn, where the workers used to live. See p. 208.
- ◆ **Dia: Beacon** (Beacon, NY): Natural elements are a common medium in this quiet showplace for unconventional art. See p. 203.