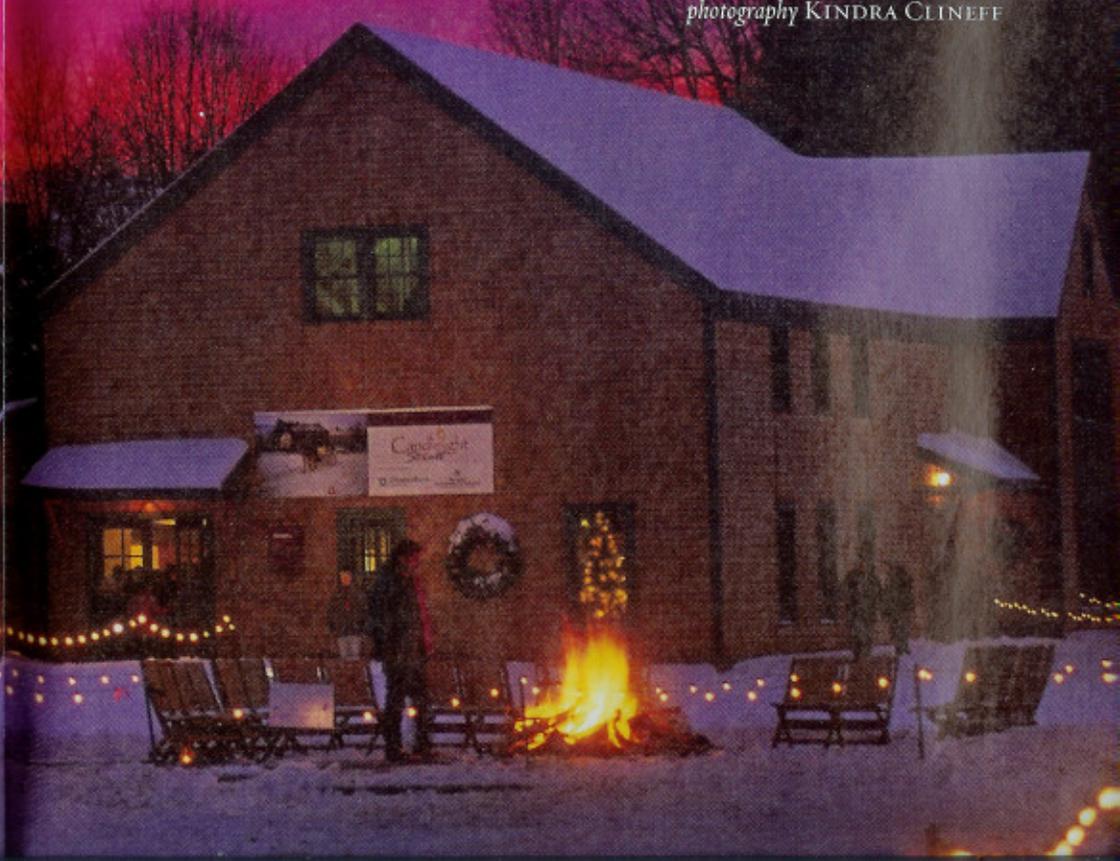


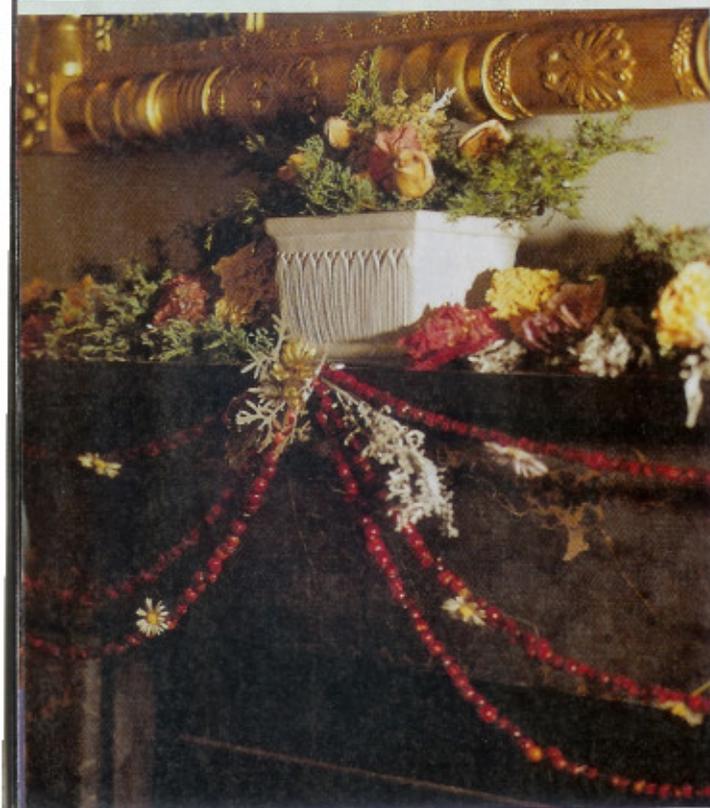


*Caroling, holiday lights, and even Scrooge himself bring the holiday spirit alive in New Hampshire's seacoast city.*

# *A Timeless Christmas*

*by BRIDGET SAMBURG  
photography KINDRA CLINEFF*





**C**HRISTMASES PAST AND PRESENT blend seamlessly in downtown Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Walking along the brick sidewalks recently dusted with snow, it's easy to picture the streets filled with horse-drawn buggies and carolers carrying lanterns.

I love to walk along the Piscataqua River, past tugboats strung with Christmas lights. Prescott Park features views of the rushing river and of Kittery, Maine, directly across the channel. Although it's winter and undeniably cold, the coastal air and lapping waves are irresistible.

But the most compelling draw to Portsmouth this season awaits in the past: Strawberry Banke, a living-history museum on the site of the town's original seaport, brings the holidays alive with interactive exhibits spanning the eras between the late 1600s and the 1950s.

During Strawberry Banke's annual Candlelight Stroll (see the "Traveler's Calendar," page 120), the walkways are illuminated by hundreds of luminarias. Paths lead to Colonial and Federal homes that are filled with period decor and costumed interpreters.

The Goodwin Mansion, once the home of a New Hampshire governor and adorned with lavish Victorian decorations, is by far the most romantic of the homes. As I walk from home to

The Goodwin Mansion is decked out in turn-of-the-last-century finery.

#### Don't Miss

**Strawbery Banke,**  
Marcy St. 603-433-1100.  
strawberybanke.org  
**The Music Hall,**  
28 Chestnut St. 603-436-  
2400. themusichall.org  
**The Players' Ring,**  
105 Marcy St. 603-436-  
8123. playersring.org

#### Stay Here

**Wentworth by the Sea, a Marriott Hotel & Spa,**  
588 Wentworth Rd., New Castle. Rates: \$300-\$1,200.  
Entrées: \$26-\$38; Sun. brunch: \$29.95. 866-240-6313,  
603-422-7322. wentworth.com  
**Sheraton Harborside Portsmouth,** 250 Market St. Rates:  
\$159-\$289. Entrées: \$17-\$35; Sun. breakfast buffet: \$15.95.  
877-248-3794, 603-431-2300. sheratonportsmouth.com  
**Sise Inn,** 40 Court St. Rates: \$119-\$279, including continental  
breakfast. 877-747-3466, 603-433-1200. siseinn.com

The view toward Market Street features the spire of North Church—the best known landmark in Portsmouth.

### Shop Here

**Anna Street Studio**, 113 Market St. Designer Carrie James mixes and matches fabrics to create stylish handbags. 603-433-2247. annastreet.com

**Attrezzi**, 78 Market St. This shop has a distinctive collection of cookware, dinnerware, glassware, kitchen utensils, and gadgets, plus wines and gourmet foods. 603-427-1667. attrezzi.com

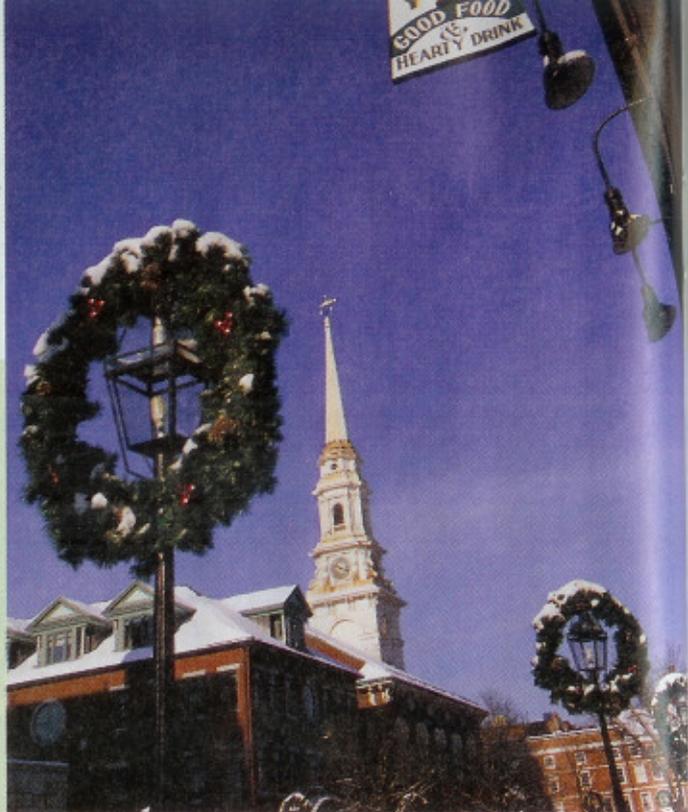
**Byrne & Carlson**, 121 State St. A local chocolatier. 888-559-9778, 603-559-9778. byrneandcarlson.com

**Cobble Hill**, 82 Fleet St. A furniture and home design shop featuring antiques and contemporary pieces. 603-334-6866.

**Macro Polo**, 89 Market St. Find cultish toys, knick knacks, retro trinkets, and games that are perfect as offbeat gifts. 603-436-8338.

**Serendipity**, 41 Pleasant St. A wonderful women's clothing boutique. 603-427-0650. serendipity.com

**Somnia**, 107 Congress St. The collection of luxurious linens will leave you pinning for bed. 603-433-7600. somnia.net



home, carolers and a fife and drum band provide good cheer. Steady flames of a nearby bonfire add warmth to the cold evening air and offer respite for icy feet and hands. Across the green is the Shapiro House, where a 1919 Hanukkah celebration is being held, complete with latkes (traditional potato pancakes) frying on the stove in the tiny kitchen. The alluring smell reminds me that there are many tempting tastes waiting to be discovered in the modern downtown. As I leave Strawberry Banke, I wave to Saint Nicholas, encircled by children of all ages.

I did not come to Portsmouth in December to sleep, but my bed rests in a lovely spot: the Sise Inn on Court Street, only a five-minute walk to the center of town. In the morning I reenter Christmas present while dining at a lavish brunch buffet at the Wentworth by the Sea hotel on Great Island. It's fun

watching the kids crowd around Santa, who listens carefully to their wishes. Nestled among the buffet's ice sculptures are a towering gingerbread house and animated elves. (Fewer than three miles away, the Sheraton Harborside also offers a breakfast buffet every Sunday in December with Mr. and Mrs. Claus. The couple happily pose for pictures with the hotel's stunning 12-foot tree as a perfect backdrop.)

My afternoon is all about music. At the historic Music Hall, the New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra graces the stage with its Holiday Pops concert, and within minutes I find myself humming along to some of the more popular holiday tunes.

In the evening I am immersed in gloom, fear, and hope. The gem of the local drama scene is the annual perform-

ance of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* at The Players' Ring. This intimate theater makes me feel like I'm at a private performance with close friends. The acting is superb—think real tears and a convincing curmudgeon (one of Scrooge's fits is downright frightening). Beware the truly haunting ghost of Christmas past, which is a testament to the technical staff's expertise in special effects.

Of course, Christmas shopping lends its own special effect to a Portsmouth stroll. Boutiques and galleries offer everything from whimsical stocking stuffers and trendy clothing to expensive jewelry and handmade furniture and crafts. Many of the downtown businesses stay open late during December, and a few serve wine and cheese.

As I continue to walk, the warmth of

## Eat Here

**Breaking New Grounds**, 14 Market Sq. Prices: \$1.35-\$5.50. 603-436-9555.

**Lindbergh's Crossing**, 29 Ceres St. Entrées: \$18-\$31. 603-431-0887.  
lindberghscrossing.com

**Ceres Bakery**, 51 Penhallow St. Don't miss the gooey, buttery, and simply sinful mammoth sticky buns. Prices: \$1.50-\$7.00. 603-436-6518. ceresbakery.com

**Friendly Toast**, 121 Congress St. You may have to wait on weekend mornings, but the eclectic atmosphere and extensive menu make it worth your while. Prices: \$7-\$11. 603-430-2154.

**Jumpin' Jay's Fish Cafe**, 150 Congress St. A seafood hot spot in the heart of town that draws a lively crowd seven days a week. Entrées: \$18-\$25. 603-766-3474.  
jumpinjays.com

**Victory 96 State Street**, 96 State St. Low-key dining featuring "new" New England dishes with outstanding flavors. Entrées: \$19-\$27. 603-766-0960. 96statestreet.com



a café beckons. Breaking New Grounds, in the center of Market Square, has a wall of international coffees and teas. Local musicians often play here in the evening, and the café's brownies are fresh, delicious, and more than enough for two. Try the hot chocolate—it's thick and rich, but not too sweet. For dinner I head to Lindbergh's Crossing, a small and intimate eatery tucked away on Ceres Street, overlooking the harbor.

After dinner, I pass again through Market Square, where the city's Christmas tree sparkles. At the annual tree lighting (this year on December 1), you'll find bagpipers and festive carolers, with local businesses passing out cookies and drinks.

The following evening brings the Holiday Parade (see the "Traveler's Calendar," page 120), a staple for more than 25 years, with a spirited array of floats, bands, and people dressed in costume. The scene gets only more beautiful when it snows. Even Scrooge might smile then. ✨

Portsmouth's Christmas tree stands in Market Square, the hub of downtown.