



**Tempting Terrain:** The rocky coastline of Maine's Acadia National Park, the bucolic hillsides of Vermont and the covered country bridges of New Hampshire persuade visitors to explore the great outdoors.

# New England, Naturally

New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine are ideal stomping grounds for outdoor adventure-loving attendees

by JEFF HEILMAN

**F**OR PEAK PERFORMANCE OFF THE CLOCK, NEW HAMPSHIRE, VERMONT AND MAINE are perfect destinations for groups to enjoy what famed American naturalist Henry David Thoreau described as the "tonic of wildness."

Synonymous with the natural world, these three New England states offer every conceivable outdoor activity known to man, with the added quotient of millennia-old beauty and spirit. Rare is the outing that falls short of spectacular, with transcendent landscapes like New Hampshire's vast

800,000-acre White Mountain National Forest, Vermont's Champlain Valley or Maine's awe-inspiring Acadia National Park.

From ice climbing to leaps of faith, outdoor adventure and team challenge opportunities abound for groups.

## New Hampshire

With thousands of miles of scenic trails, including 1,200 miles in the White Mountain National Forest and a section of the Appalachian Trail, the Granite State—named for both its geology and spirit of self-reliance—is outdoor experience defined. Add 48 mountains over 4,000 feet, forest covering 80 percent of the land and glorious fall foliage, and the options at all recreational levels are endless.

"Whether climbing the highest peak in the East or sea kayaking along the Atlantic coastline, New Hampshire is the perfect backdrop for year-round outdoor activity," says Lori Hamois of the state's Division of Travel and Tourism Development.

For groups with high ambitions, New Hampshire has some of the finest rock and ice climbing in the East. A great resource for climbing instruction and guided ascents is the **International Mountain Climbing School** (603.356.7064; [www.ime-usa.com](http://www.ime-usa.com)) in North Conway. For 33 years, the school has taken climbers of all skill levels on waterfall ice climbing, avalanche courses and other winter adventures, including treks up fabled Mount Washington, the highest peak in the East at 6,288 feet.

The 90,000-member strong Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC)—the nation's oldest outdoor conservancy group—operates some 54 lodges, huts and shelters across New England. Bordering the White Mountain National Forest and located near the Bretton Woods ski resort (home to the grand Mount Washington Hotel), the **AMC Highland Center at Crawford Notch** (603.466.2727; [www.outdoors.org/lodging](http://www.outdoors.org/lodging)) is a prime group destination.

Opened in 2003 and based on an award-winning "green" architectural design, this lodge and outdoor education center offers more than 7,000 square feet of function space along with a mix of private and bunkhouse-style accommodations for groups of up to 130.

"Our approach is to take the mind off work and refocus it on the outdoor experience," says Vincent Spiotti, director of the center, whose team is waiting to outfit city-worn guests with complimentary L.L. Bean outdoor gear.

Offering a full complement of team-building and outdoor activities, including geocaching, orienteering, animal tracking, and rock climbing, Highland Center is also a preferred destination for leading team-building organization Outward Bound, which sends its instructors from around the U.S. there every year for instruction, in addition to holding regular team meetings.

Popular New Hampshire resorts with team-building programs include **The Balsams Grand Resort** (603.255.3400; [www.thebalsams.com](http://www.thebalsams.com)), **Mountain Club**

**on Loon** (800.229.7829; [www.mtnclub.com](http://www.mtnclub.com)) and **Attitash Grand Summit Hotel and Conference Center** (603.374.2368; [www.attitash.com](http://www.attitash.com)).

Meanwhile, the **New England Center** (800.909.6931; [www.newenglandcenter.com](http://www.newenglandcenter.com)), a top conference retreat located in a forested setting on the campus of the University of New Hampshire in Durham, works with the nearby Browne Center for Innovative Learning, where groups participate in unique team-building and outdoor adventure programs.

With New Hampshire's vast network of rivers, lakes and ponds, white-water diehards and flat-water enthusiasts have a wealth of kayaking and canoeing options. For hardcore paddlers, the Ammonoosuc River between Twin Mountain and Littleton is a favorite destination.

**Outdoor Escapes** (603.528.0136; [www.outdoorescapesnewhampshire.com](http://www.outdoorescapesnewhampshire.com)) is a top resource for guided water adventures throughout the state, offering trips and team-building expeditions down the famed Winnepesaukee River and other waterways. The Lakeport-based company, which provides a full menu of outdoor adventures, including photography, stargazing and survival skills training, also runs water-based programs in New Hampshire's postcard-like Seacoast region. Here, groups can kayak in the bays and harbors along the state's 18-mile coastline and, weather permitting, out to sea around the Isles of Shoals.

**Portsmouth Kayak Adventures** (603.559.1000; [\[kayak.com\]\(http://kayak.com\)\) in Portsmouth also has a strong corporate team-building kayak program.](http://www.portsmouth</a></p>
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## Vermont

Dave Hakins is a big fan of the Green Mountain state. Two years ago, he sold his New Jersey-based conference and event planning business and moved to Burlington, Vermont. In search of something interesting, fun and fulfilling to do, he now serves as executive director of the Vermont Convention Bureau.

"My mission now is to help meeting planners connect with our great outdoors," he says.

He has plenty to work with. Situated between 120-mile-long Lake Champlain to the west and the Connecticut River to the east, Vermont is highly regarded for its sparkling waterways, bucolic farms, Yankee quintessence, and eponymous Green Mountains.

One organization helping groups to master the Champlain region's verdant peaks is the **Petra Cliffs Climbing Center and Mountaineering School** (802.657.3872; [www.petracliffs.com](http://www.petracliffs.com)) in Burlington, which specializes in team building. Owner Mike Anderson, who co-authored the popular *Team-building Puzzles* book, is an expert in adventure play, community building and team development. Emphasizing goals assessment and post-event debriefing, programs at Petra Cliffs include indoor climbing, ropes courses and team challenges. Outdoor pursuits include ice climbing, caving and back-country mountaineering. If you cannot make it to Petra Cliffs, Anderson will come to you.

Facilitation and feedback are also on the menu at **The Bolton Adventure Center** (802.434.6831; [www.boltonadventurecenter.com](http://www.boltonadventurecenter.com)), which partners with Petra Cliffs and part of the **Bolton Valley Resort** (802.434.3444; [www.boltonvalley.com](http://www.boltonvalley.com)) in the town of the same name. Featuring high and low ropes courses, environmental education programs such as shelter building

and orienteering, and highly popular four-wheel off-roading, the meetings-ready property is focused on corporate success.

"The key is to give attendees something to take back to the office," says Pete Cahn, general manager, adding that follow-up is an important aspect of the service. "We can check in six months after the event to see that the lessons are being continued at work."

Located close to Vermont's tallest peak, the 4,393-foot Mount Mansfield, the 120-room **Inn at Essex** (802.878.1100; [www.vtculinaryresort.com](http://www.vtculinaryresort.com)) in charming Essex Junction is constructing an on-site team development and adventure services facility. Slated for completion in June, the Northern Lights Challenge and Leadership Institute will include rock climbing and ice climbing, dual 400-foot zip lines and a unique team challenge course.

With convenient access to Smuggler's Notch and four other ski resorts,

the meetings-capable Inn at Essex, which just became the first Orvis-approved fly-fishing lodge in Vermont, also offers acclaimed culinary team-building events in conjunction with the **New England Culinary Institute**.

How about disc or Frisbee golf down a mountain? Both are on offer at the **Sugarbush Resort** (802.583.6300; [www.sugarbush.com](http://www.sugarbush.com)) in Warren, part of a new summer adventure center. Located in the heart of Vermont's Mad River Valley, this meetings-ready, four-season resort also has a new 800-foot zip line. With six interconnected peaks, 111 trails stretching over 53 miles and 2,600 feet of vertical drop,

Sugarbush is also a prime winter-time choice, with customized racing camps, guided outback tours, snowshoe treks, and overnight backcountry trips also available for groups.

Few properties are more classically Vermont than the **Woodstock Inn & Resort** (802.457.1100; [www.woodstockinn.com](http://www.woodstockinn.com)). Facing a village green in "America's prettiest small town," this Colonial-style gem dates back to a farm on the site from the 1800s. Laurance S. Rockefeller, grandson of John D. Rockefeller, opened the inn in 1969, and it has been part of Vermont history ever since.

Experienced with all forms of

corporate meetings, the property also has a diverse outdoor recreational menu, including orienteering, hiking, cycling, and kayaking. There is also exceptional skiing on the 23 trails of the Inn's Suicide Six Ski Area.

Also based in Woodstock is **Bike Vermont** (800.257.2226; [www.bikevt.com](http://www.bikevt.com)), which offers expeditions statewide and has long worked with groups.

## Maine

Nature lovers, rejoice. While famed for its rock-bound coast and dramatic ocean scenery, the Pine Tree State's main at-

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## Planner's Perspective

**Terry Coyle**, Account Executive;  
Outward Bound Professional; Camden, Maine

**Describe your event.** This Outward Bound Program was a three-day event at the AMC Highland Center (HC) at Crawford Notch in New Hampshire for the senior management of a utility company. The purpose of the outing was for the leadership team to build strategic relationships, develop skills of a high-performing team and to align individual and organizational behaviors with organizational strategy.

**Why did you decide to host the meeting at the Highland Center in New Hampshire?** We chose the HC because of the wide range of high-impact activities that are available at Crawford Notch State Park—rock climbing, rappelling, rafting, peak ascents, building a giant zip line over Flume Cascade—and the accommodations.

**What surprised you the most?** We were delighted with the range of services available at a remote location—types of rooms (private or group), meeting rooms, the gear room (ability to borrow outdoor clothing and equipment), the friendly and helpful staff, and the quality of the food.

**What did your attendees seem to enjoy the most?** The attendees really enjoyed the feeling of being in a remote and beautiful location yet being only a couple of hours drive from major metropolitan areas. They also enjoyed the many high-impact activities that were available just a few steps from the HC.

**Was anybody particularly helpful?** All of the staff was helpful, but the group sales department, especially Erin Soraghan, the hospitality coordinator, was extremely helpful—from making the reservations to arranging meeting rooms, gear requirements and box lunches.

**What other types of groups would fit well with the property?** Any corporate, government or nonprofit organization desiring to tie in an outdoor experience with a business meeting would be most pleased with the HC.

**Would you return?** Not only would I return, but we have brought numerous groups of my clients to the HC for all of the reasons listed above. My colleagues and I at Outward Bound Professional are most pleased with the HC and hope nothing changes there except the seasons.

## ForMoreInfo:

### Maine

Bar Harbor COC 207.288.5103  
www.barharbormaine.com

CVB of Greater Portland 207.772.4994  
www.visitportland.com

Greater Bangor CVB 207.947.5205  
www.bangorcvb.org

Maine Office of Tourism 207.287.5711  
www.visitmaine.com

### New Hampshire

Manchester Area CVB 603.666.6600  
www.manchestercvb.com

Mount Washington Valley COC  
and Visitor's Bureau 603.356.5701  
www.mtwashingtonvalley.org

New Hampshire Tourism Network  
and Meeting Sites 603.694.3333  
www.nhmeetingsites.com

New Hampshire Division of Travel  
and Tourism Development 603.271.2665  
www.visitnh.gov

White Mountains Attractions  
Visitors Bureau 603.745.8720  
www.visitwhitemountains.com

### Vermont

Vermont Convention Bureau 802.860.0606  
www.vermontmeetings.com

For more information, visit: [MeetingsFocus.com](http://MeetingsFocus.com)

Western Maine is rich with mountainous natural bounty. For winter-time conferences, heaven awaits at Sugarloaf (207.237.2000; www.sugarloaf.com). Maine's largest ski mountain is home to the 120-room Grand Summit Resort Hotel and Sugarloaf Conference Center. Sugarloaf also has the state's largest Nordic trail network, with some 62 miles of cross-country trails. In the summer, white-water rafting and other guided outdoor adventures are musts for groups.

*Ski Magazine* named Bethel the "greatest ski town in the universe" in testament to its immensely popular Sunday River Ski Resort (207.824.3000; www.sundayriver.com), offering over 130 trails on eight peaks. The historic Bethel Inn Resort (207.824.2175; www.bethelinn.com) is a prime meet-

ing and event destination in the locale touted as "Maine's most beautiful mountain village." To take advantage of the area's great diversity of outdoor pursuits, the property just launched its Activities Concierge Center, helping groups organize all-terrain vehicle trips through the woods, evening moose and wilderness safaris, horseback riding, and other activities.

In the wilds of northern Maine rises spectacular Mount Katahdin, the state's tallest mountain and northern terminus of the famed Appalachian Trail. Located in Baxter Park, the peak's Knife Edge trail has challenged hikers for generations. For a fee, explorers can also follow the park's so-called Golden Road to extremely remote areas of the Park. With Moosehead Lake nearby—at 40

miles the largest inland body of water in the East—this area is the ultimate wilderness getaway.

A good group base is the Birches Resort (800.825.9453; www.birches.com) in Rockwood, with a lodging mix including waterfront cabins along Moosehead Lake, private home rentals and wilderness yurts, plus event space for up to 60. Groups can shoot 14 miles of rapids on the Penobscot River with resort partner Wilderness Expeditions, and activities include snowmobiling, moose cruises, eco-tours, Jeep expeditions, and ice fishing. \*

Jeff Heilman is a frequent contributor to MEETINGS EAST.



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traction is forest, covering 90 percent of a landmass larger than the other five New England states combined.

There is a multitude of lakes and rivers, too, and for escorted canoe trips, the "Master Maine Guides" of Sunrise Expeditions (207.942.9300; www.maine canoe.com) in Bangor are among the state's best. Specializing in group and custom arrangements, the outfit has a variety of seasonal trips to classic destinations like Allagash and Saint Croix.

Expertise is also on the bill at Acadia Mountain Guides Climbing School (207.288.8186; www.acdiamountain guides.com), the state's only American Mountain Guides Association-accredited climbing school. Headquartered in the spectacular 35,000-acre Acadia National Park, the company's instructors have international climbing experience and offer group climbing and adventure programs in Maine and across New England.

Just south of Camden, Samoset Resort (207.594.2511; www.samoset resort.com) treats groups to a verdant waterfront setting along Penobscot Bay and utilizes guides from Maine Outdoors for wilderness programs that include bird watching, fishing and canoe excursions highlighting local wildlife.

Just north of Portland, Freeport-based L.L. Bean has been dressing and supplying outdoor enthusiasts since 1912 and is a great resource for guided outdoor adventures. The company's Outdoor Discovery School (888.552.3261; www.llbean.com) offers a wide range of customized group outings, including fly-fishing, paddling, clay shooting, outdoor leadership, photography, and bike riding. Sample expeditions include island-hopping by kayak in Casco Bay and a Maine coastal camping bike tour.