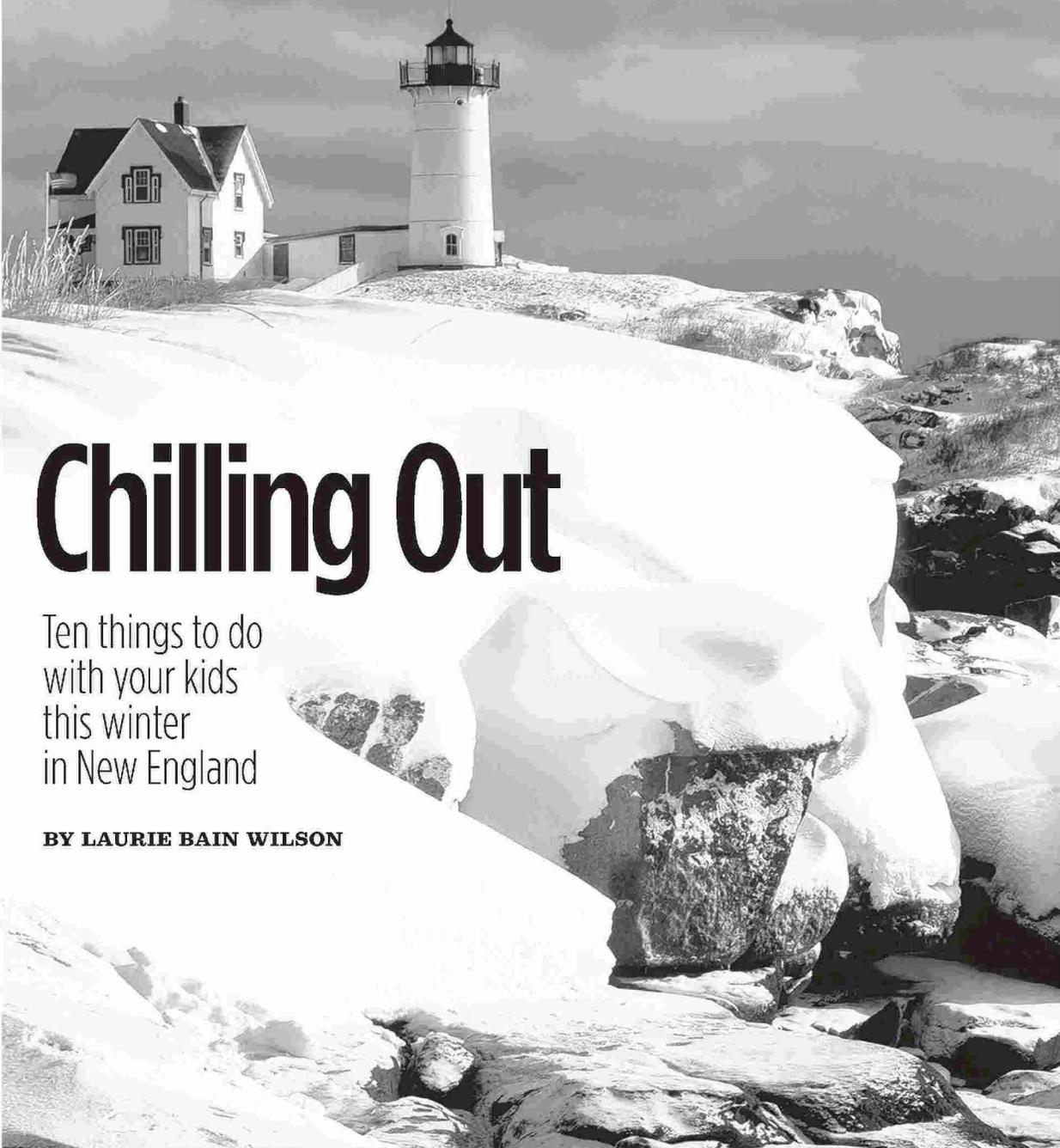


TRAVEL

FEBRUARY 3, 2008 • DAILY NEWS

The Nubble
Lighthouse
in York, on the
southern coast
of Maine
Photo by Getty

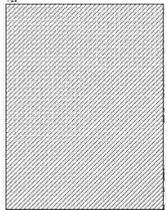


Chilling Out

Ten things to do
with your kids
this winter
in New England

BY LAURIE BAIN WILSON

LONG WEEKEND Williamsburg, Va. | IN THE CASINOS Vegas' new Palazzo | STEAL AWAY Rocky Mountain resort



New England's snow good

Ten ways to have an ice day in the frigid north

BY LAURIE BAIN WILSON

If Mother Nature ever needed a face-lift it wouldn't be in New England — especially in winter, when the mountains are frosted in powdery white and the ocean is dotted with icy whitecaps and starched sandy strands.

New England has seen record snowfalls this season, making it a venerable winter wonderland. Here are fun suggestions (skiing and snowboarding are givens) for getaways where you can chill with your kids:

The Eagles

From early January to mid-March, bald eagles head southward from Canada and northern New England to feed on fish in the lower Connecticut River.

These stunning creatures — sometimes golden eagles, too — are celebrated each year during the Connecticut Audubon Society's Eagle Festival in Essex, which several years ago was rated No. 1 in Norman Crampton's book "Best Small Towns in America."

The event takes place Presidents' Day weekend, Feb. 16-17, with free activities — an interactive weather station, live birds of prey and performances by American Indians — in huge, heated tents on Main St.

Eagles can be spied from the shore or, better yet, take a guided tour aboard a heated boat (with open deck and restrooms) for an informative cruise led by Audubon Society naturalists. (Eagle Festival, 1-800-714-7201; www.ctaudubon.org.)

Seals of Approval

Nature lovers will also want to head for Newport, R.I., where they can take a one-hour seal cruise, offered by the Save the Bay Narragansett Bay Exploration Center (401-324-6020). The seal watches leave from Bowen's Ferry Landing in Newport and are offered through March on weekends and during school vacation weeks. The fee is \$20 adults, \$15 for kids ages 6 to 12. Binoculars are provided.

Visit during the Newport Winter Festival Feb. 15-24. The 10-day party will feature 160 events, including a sand sculpture contest, pizza cook-off and citywide scavenger

hunt. The Hotel Viking, a festival sponsor, is host to Radio Disney's version of "American Idol" during the festival and will provide shuttle service to the festivities (1-800-556-7126; www.hotelviking.com).

Brrrr Brahmin

Lace up your ice skates and trace figure eights at Frog Pond at the Boston Common, America's oldest park. Ante up and take a skating lesson at the Boston Common Skating School.

The school offers classes for kids as young as 3, plus hockey skating lessons for your budding Gretzky. You can rent skates (\$8 teens and adults; \$5 for 13 and under); admission is \$4; kids 13 and under skate free (617-635-2120; www.bostoncommonfrogpond.org). Then warm up with tea or cocoa at one of the nearby hotels that surround the Common, such as the Four Seasons.

Other Boston diversions: If you have older kids who love chocolate, take the Chocolate Trolley Tour, which makes stops along the way for tastings at such Boston culinary landmarks as the Langham Hotel's Chocolate Bar (think chocolate fountain). The tour is offered Saturdays through April (call 617-269-7150 for reservations, or www.historictours.com).

Although snowballs are more common than baseballs this time of year, you can still take a tour of Fenway Park, home of the Red Sox. Winter tours are given from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and Sundays from 1 to 3 p.m. (617-226-6666; <http://boston.redsox.mlb.com/bos/ballpark/tour.jsp>). Note: Admission is double for New Yorkers (kidding).

Cape Escape

You won't find snow-draped mountains here. But if a moody, wintry sea stirs your soul, Cape Cod is magical in the off-season and generally not as cold as other New England destinations.

Unlike in the summer months, you'll practically have the beach all to yourselves — unless you count the thousands of harbor seals that retreat to the Cape from Maine and points north for the Cape's warmer climes.

The best spot to spy the seals are along the beaches of Chatham including South Beach and Monomoy, an 8-mile spit of sand extending southwest off the mainland. The Cape Cod National Seashore has 11 trails open year-round for biking and hiking. Check out their Winter Film Series at the Salt Pond-Visitor Center in Eastham, held every Sunday at 1 p.m., with such classic maritime movies as "Billy Budd," "The Old Man and the Sea" and "Captains Courageous" (508-255-3421; www.nps.gov/caco).

Stay at the Chatham Bars Inn, which offers a Family Vacation Week package, including such complimentary family activities as ice-skating, a snowman-building contest, juggling lessons, sledding and more (1-800-332-1577; www.chathambarsinn.com).

Or if an indoor pool is a main draw, check into the less-pricey Cape Coddler Resort in Hyannis and check out the splashy Wave Pool (1-888-297-2200; www.capecoddlerresort.com).

Winter Carnivals

Hardy New Englanders don't hibernate when the temperatures plummet. Instead, practically every town in the region celebrates the season with a winter carnival (think bonfires, ice sculptures, polar bear swims, snow volleyball, snow golf, chili cook-offs, parades and fireworks).

The Stowe Winter Carnival is one of the biggest, with a jam-packed schedule of activities and events. This year's theme is "Stowe Away the Blues" and includes the much-celebrated Village Night Block Party (877-GO-STOWE; www.gostowe.com).

In southern Vermont, Mardi Gras at Mount Snow will be held next Saturday, with face-painting and a bead-throwing parade (www.mountsnow.com). While there, bundle up under a blanket for a sleigh ride — led by two Belgian draft horses — to a log cabin for cocoa and music at the Adams Family Farm in Wilmington (802-464-3762; www.adamsfamilyfarm.com).

Frostbite Follies Winter Carnival in New Hampshire is another popular winter event. It's taking place this weekend in Littleton and six nearby towns: Franconia, Lisbon, Sugar Hill, Bethlehem, Bretton Woods and Whitefield.

The Ice Woman Rises

In the spirit of a woman running for President (as well as to honor Maine Sen. Olympia Snowe), the town of Bethel was determined to build the world's largest snowwoman — Bethel is already in the Guinness Book of Records for the tallest snowman.

The snowwoman-building commenced Jan. 22; whether it was record-setting and how long it remains standing remains to be seen. The Bethel Inn offers family packages and has a 92-degree outdoor heated pool that's open year-round (www.bethelinn.com).

Winsnow Shopping

If your idea of a perfect winter escape is to enjoy the views of snow-slicked hills in a store window's reflection, consider a visit to Freeport, Me.

Home to the original (and huge) L.L. Bean store (open 24 hours a day!), downtown Freeport has more than 170 factory outlet stores. But the real reason you'll want to visit is for the Maine lobster stew served in the cozy Broad Arrow Tavern at the Harraseeket Inn here.

The inn is a snowball's throw from L.L. Bean and has the requisite fireplace in 23 rooms (1-800-342-6423; www.harraseeketinn.com).

Eskimo Kisses

For an educational and fun event, head to Montshire Museum in Norwich, Vt., on Presidents' Day weekend to build an igloo with the expert help of Norbert Yankielun, author of "How to Build an Igloo and Other Snow Shelters" (802-649-2200; www.montshire.org).

Dog Day Afternoon

Dog sledding has become a popular New England adventure, and one of the few places you can do it is at the historic Mount Washington Hotel nestled in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Choose to take

a 20-minute afternoon dog sled ride that zips along open fields (\$62 for two people, an additional \$20 per person) or one of the more ambitious, 60-minute night sled rides along the Ammonoosuc River are \$145 for two people, an additional \$20 per person (1-800-314-1752; www.mountwashingtonhotel.com).

How Sweet It Is

New England is sweet on maple-sugar houses. Maple Grove Farms in St. Johnsbury, Vt., said to be the country's oldest (established in 1915) and largest maple-syrup processor, gives tours of the two-floor factory and kitchen where maple syrup and candies are made and packed; you can also visit the Sugar House Museum here (Maple Grove Farms, 1-800-273-3334; www.maplegrove.com). Vermont's Seventh Annual Maple Open House Weekend is held throughout the state March 28-29 as part of a kick-off to the maple season. Visitors can tour the sugar houses and sample the sweet stuff (www.vermontmaple.org).

Or head to Sturbridge, Mass., for Maple Days, held on weekends March 8-23. The celebration features a pancake breakfast and 19th-century maple sugaring demonstrations at an outdoor sugar camp (508-347-3362; www.osv.org).

Maybe you'd rather be rubbed and wrapped with the sticky, sugary stuff – which happens to be a great exfoliant. Succumb to the Maple Sugar Body Polish at the Stoweflake Resort & Spa in Stowe, Vt.; kids between 7 and 15 can get a mini-maple body polish (1-800-253-2232; www.stoweflake.com).

Teens will also sweeten up to the Super Sugar Scrub treatment at Stowe's Topnotch Resort and Spa, not to mention the new teens-only zone that features ice-skating, outdoor music, a bonfire, hot cocoa and, yes, video games and Internet access (www.topnotchresort.com).



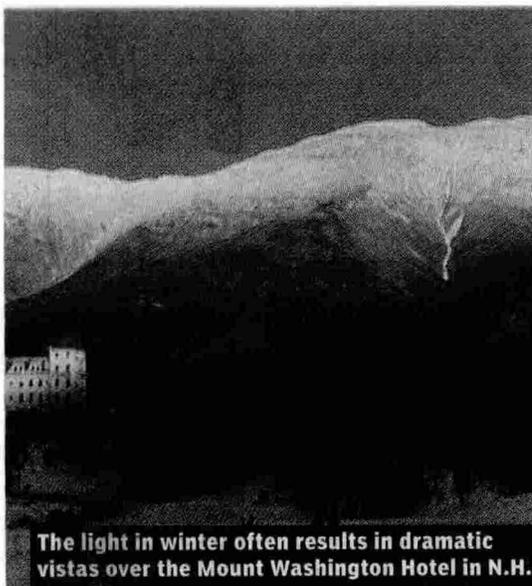
Winter visitors can explore the Adams Family Farm in Wilmington, Vt., on sleighs pulled by Belgian draft horses.

Skaters of all ages and different experience levels take to the ice at the Frog Pond rink in Boston Common. FayFoto



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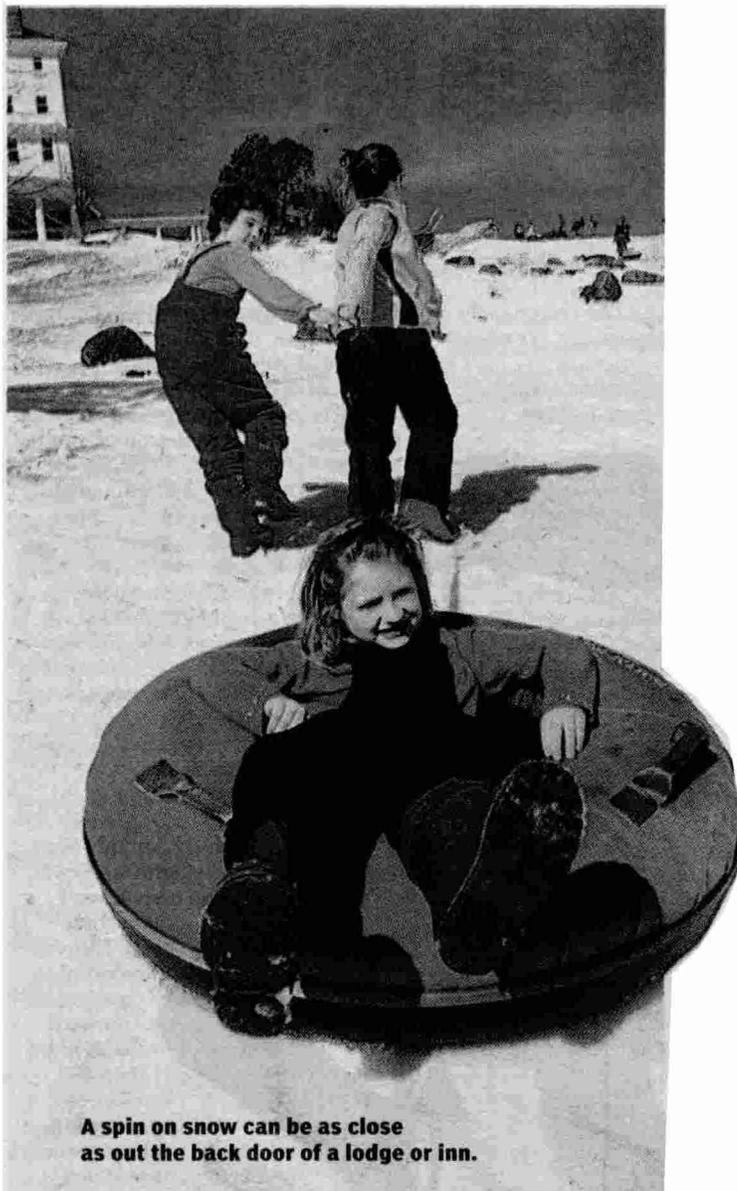
The light in winter often results in dramatic vistas over the Mount Washington Hotel in N.H.



Topnotch Resort has spa treatments for the winter weary.

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Bald eagle on the prowl.
Photo by Tom Brakefield