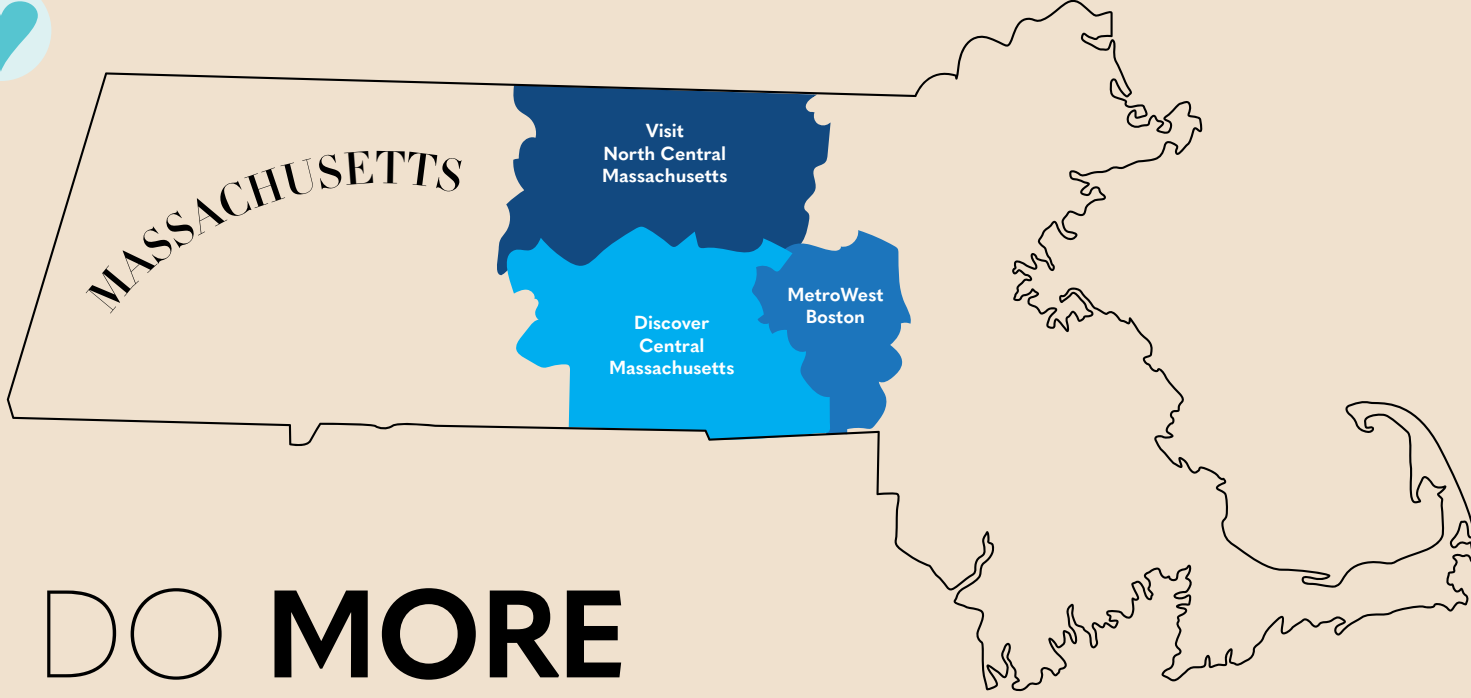


THE **HEART** OF MASSACHUSETTS

It's Memory-Making Season. Embrace It!





DO MORE OF WHAT YOU LOVE

Have you checked your pulse recently? If it's not dancing with excitement or anticipation, it's time for a remedy. We're here to prescribe a getaway in the Heart of Massachusetts, a region that's so convenient you can be here in less than an hour's drive from Boston, Providence, Hartford, or Manchester. And once you arrive, opportunities to do more of what invigorates you are nearly limitless.

There's no "off" switch when the seasons change in this energetic slice of New England. Late fall, winter, and spring might require warmer clothing, but our spirited cities, natural landscapes, diverse cultural organizations, historic and contemporary attractions, spooky spots, and family-fun destinations are still bringing the heat. This guide, created in collaboration with our partners at *Yankee Magazine*, will spark your desire to stay, play, and embrace the traditions we cherish during a time of year that is colorful in its own unique ways.

For more travel ideas that fuel lasting memories, **Discover Central Massachusetts**, **Visit North Central Massachusetts**, and the **MetroWest Boston Visitors Bureau** invite you to visit TheHeartofMA.com.



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THIS PAGE: Find this "as seen in movies" spot when you follow photographer Dave Long's winter shooting tour (details on page 12).

ON THE COVER: Climb Lookout Rock in Northbridge for dramatic views in every season.



HISTORY YOU CAN TOUCH

These immersive museums keep the flames of history burning.

BY KIM KNOX BECKIUS

Whether it's the warmth of a blacksmith's forge, the radiance of iconographers' divine art, the lessons of war, or the spark of ideas, museums in the heart of Massachusetts ensure the past is more than just a distant flicker. You won't merely see objects when you visit—you'll *feel* something, even when you can't touch. But in many cases you can . . .

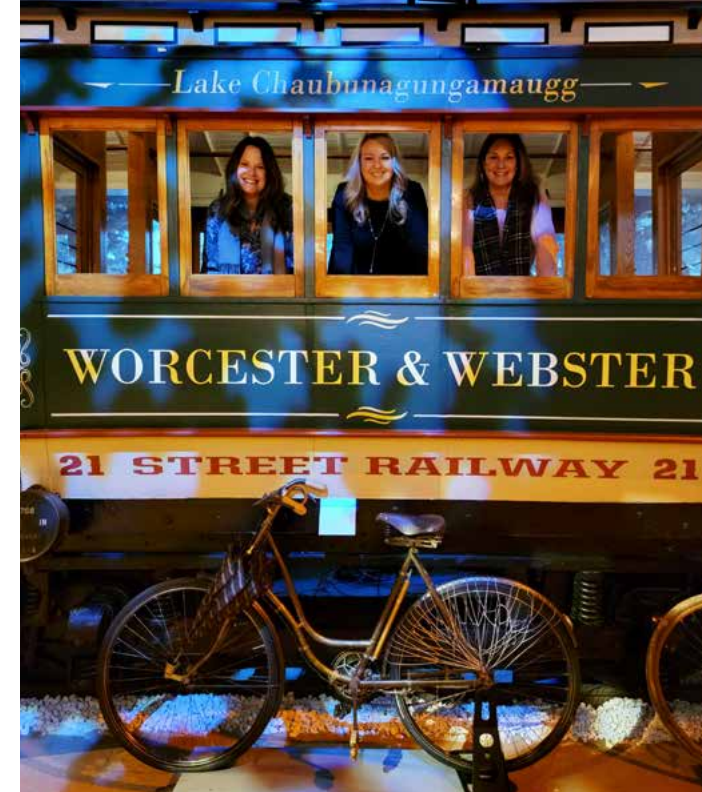
Step Into Another Century
Few living-history museums in the country rival **Old Sturbridge Village** in Sturbridge, where it's always the 1830s. Maybe you've explored the New England village's 40 antique buildings and working farmstead before, observing craftspeople and chatting with authentically attired

historians. If so, you'll be surprised by all that's new at this 200-acre attraction. From a reconstructed 19th-century piggery (for adorable pigs!) that might be the last of its kind, to 3D tours you can enjoy from your couch, OSV's innovations abound. Keep an eye on the events calendar for opportunities to try forging a door latch, plowing with oxen, or building a wooden bucket in coopering class.

If you haven't heard of the **Samuel Slater Experience** in Webster or even of the man it's named for, you're in for quite the introduction to the traitor-hero at the region's newest historic attraction. Opened in 2022, this museum has artifacts, sure. But as you journey across the Atlantic with Slater, who smuggled secrets

that launched America's Industrial Revolution, it's the multisensory effects that will wow you. Get ready to talk to holograms, hear the sounds of a recreated textile mill, design your own fabrics, and board a trolley for a virtual ride down Main Street in 1910, when Webster was a boom town thanks to the Slater-built mills' wild success.

Admire What Faith Inspires
Icons, painted on wood with egg tempera since the 7th century, are more than religious paintings. They are portals to the sacred. The largest collection of these works outside Russia is in Clinton, Massachusetts. Visit the **Icon Museum and Study Center**, and you don't have to subscribe to Orthodox Christian



CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: Feel the heat as blacksmiths keep the forge fires burning at Old Sturbridge Village; It's 1910 again when you board the time-traveling trolley at the Samuel Slater Experience; The American Heritage Museum fosters appreciation for the technological advances war efforts demand; A bejeweled mid-18th-century Russian icon depicting *The Miracle of Saint George and the Dragon* is one of the treasures on view at the Icon Museum and Study Center.

beliefs to be moved by the prayerful passion behind these paintings. Most were amassed during his lifetime by founder Gordon B. Lankton, and the recently renamed museum (formerly the Museum of Russian Icons) is newly committed to expanding its holdings to include icons from other Orthodox cultures. You can't touch,



but scavenger-hunting kids can get wicked close to brushstrokes by using provided magnifying glasses. And for those with deep interest, public programs illuminate new understandings and keep this artistic tradition alive.

Honor Those Who Have Served
The ground rumbles beneath your feet; artillery fire rings in your ears. You're in a World War I trench, and the **American Heritage Museum** in Hudson is about to awaken your appreciation for those who have fought for Americans' freedoms and America's interests, from the Revolution through the ongoing War on Terror. To say exhibits and living-history events are immersive is inadequate, especially if you add on a ride or driving experience in a World War II-era tank. This 66,000-square-foot facility was built to showcase Jacques M. Littlefield's incredible collection of armored vehicles, but those who contributed to its opening

in 2019 conceived of a place where turbulent chapters in American history are brought to life. Most memorable of all may be chatting with veterans who continue to serve, now as museum volunteers, ensuring their sacrifices are not diminished and their stories are never forgotten.

Veterans also play a vital role in engaging visitors at the small **Fort Devens Museum** in Devens. The history of New England's one-time largest Army base stretches back to 1917, and here you'll learn about the many ways this city-sized post was utilized. You'll also encounter the personal effects and stories of some of the million-plus servicepeople who trained, worked, or passed through and the 5,000 German POWs held here during World War II.

Kim Knox Beckius taught high school history for one whole year, and she's the author of books like New England's Historic Homes & Gardens in addition to being Travel Editor at Yankee Magazine.



WORKOUTS WITH A VIEW

Take a deep breath of fresh air at one of these scenic spots.

BY MADELINE BILIS

Plenty of heart-pumping recreation can be found across central Massachusetts, from the region’s border with New Hampshire all the way down to the Rhode Island line. You can maximize your time outdoors here because you don’t need to travel far from activity to activity. What really takes your breath away isn’t all the physical exertion, though. It’s the loveliness of the natural surroundings and the serenity that is close at hand, no matter the season.

Lace Up Your Hiking Boots

Stunning hiking trails abound in the heart of Massachusetts. One of the most underrated is the journey to the top of **Mount Watatic** in Ashburnham. It’s a steady—and moderately challenging—climb, showcasing towering pine trees and smooth rock faces. At the top, you can spot the Boston skyline in the distance on a clear day, as well as Vermont’s Green Mountains and southern New Hampshire’s peaks.

Make the trip to **Lookout Rock** in Northbridge for a unique vantage point. To get here, follow the easy loop trail from nearby Rice Pond. Then scale the rock to discover panoramic views of the surrounding hills, as well as a bird’s-eye view of the Blackstone River meandering through Uxbridge and Northbridge.

If a gentle nature walk is more your speed, head to **Mass Audubon’s**

Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary in Princeton. There’s so much to see here. The variety of landscapes you’ll glimpse includes meadows, forests, brooks, and hilltops. While there’s plenty of wildlife to admire, you can also wave hello to sheep grazing in the pasture next to the parking lot.

Try a Wintry Trek

When Mother Nature delivers a fresh load of frozen precipitation, grab your snowshoes or cross-country skis and join others making tracks at **Hopkinton State Park** in Hopkinton. Once four or more inches of fluffy white are on the ground, trails here are also open to snowmobiles. There’s no parking fee from November through mid-May, and the winter-wonderland views are worth your effort.

Look for Animal Prints in the Snow

Even a sugary dusting is enough to reveal which animals are active in **Douglas State Forest**, a sprawling woodland in the corner of our region that touches Connecticut and Rhode Island. Bundle up to explore miles of trails like the loop around Wallis Pond, and make it your mission to scan the landscape for heart-shaped tracks of deer, anchor-like imprints of ruffed grouse, and four-dimple patterns left by hopping cottontail rabbits. Adding your own footprints to the array is a reminder of how natural it is to spend time outdoors, even on nippy days.



Earn a vibrant view by climbing to the top of Lookout Rock, open from dawn to dusk.

Hop on a Bike

Pedaling along the **Blackstone River Bikeway** is a treat in every season. Start in Uxbridge and bike 3.5 miles down to Blackstone, where you’ll cross a whopping eight bridges and have the option to reach out and touch the Rhode Island border. The highlight is stopping at Millville Lock, the best-preserved historic lock along the Blackstone Canal. Before you pedal back, shift gears and grab a refueling meal at one of the casual restaurants or coffee shops in Blackstone Village.

Spread Your Wings

Binoculars come in handy at **Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary** in Natick, a Mass Audubon property where hundreds of species of birds have been recorded. There are more than nine miles of trails to discover including the Quacking Frog Trail, where you’ll behold a series of nesting boxes. By late April, tree swallows—known for their cheerful songs and for happily nesting in spots close to humans—will have claimed these snug dwellings.

Give Peace a Chance

If walking things off is your go-to strategy when life feels chaotic, there’s a spot in Sherborn where you’ll feel an extra dose of calm with each step. Situated on the grounds where the Peace Abbey, a nonprofit promoting nonviolence, was established in 1988 after a visit to the site from Mother Teresa, **Peace Memorial Park** is a petite but powerful place for a meditative walk where statues of Gandhi and a sacred cow will keep you good company.

Madeline Bilis is a writer, editor, and lifelong New Englander who lives in Newton, Massachusetts. She’s the author of the guidebook 50 Hikes in Eastern Massachusetts.



ADD MORE **ART** TO YOUR LIFE

Admire masterpieces, encounter public art, or try your hand at creating a special piece.

BY MADELINE BILIS

You don't have to travel to far-flung locales to see world-renowned art, nor do you have to shell out big bucks to learn a new creative skill. Stunning museums, thought-provoking public exhibits, and a wide variety of art classes make central Massachusetts a place to feel inspired and encouraged to express yourself. Here are nine fun ways to add more art to your life.

Ponder Contemporary Pieces by New England Artists

ArtsWorcester's rotating exhibits feature contemporary works by emerging and established artists. You can stop by to see the newest installations at the organization's gallery on Portland Street. And if you find yourself wishing you could take a painting off the wall and hang it in your living room, consider attending Art on the Line, an annual fundraiser featuring pieces donated by living artists.

Open Your Heart to Public Art

The most romantic of all public art displays in New England is free to discover every day of the year. Heart sculptures are scattered all over Framingham. The project, called "**Many Cultures, One Heart,**" highlights the diversity of the city with designs by Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, Brazilian, Jewish, white, multiracial, disabled, and LGBTQ+ artists of all ages. There's an interactive map of all 32 sculptures online (along



Amazing Night
by Sasha Kuznetsova
represents ātac: downtown
arts + music's mission to
foster community and
creativity through increased
access to the arts.

with videos from the artists), though you'll easily spot four hearts if you go for a stroll near City Hall.

Sit Down at a Pottery Wheel

If you've always wanted to sculpt a vessel on a spinning pottery wheel, it's high time you signed up for a ceramics class at the **Worcester Center for Crafts**. Those new to the world of ceramics can register for an introductory course. Despite its beginner label, it's still a fast-paced class that covers operating the wheel, the basics of clay working, and how to get creative with your pieces.

Admire the Classics

Appreciate fine art from around the world in the heart of Fitchburg, where the ivy-covered **Fitchburg Art Museum** showcases pieces in a range of media across its 20,000 square feet of gallery space. Rotating exhibitions span cultures and points of view, while the ongoing *Evoking Eleanor* curation tells the story of the museum's founder, Eleanor Norcross, through her own paintings and belongings.

Discover a Multi-arts Destination

Got a taste for the dramatic? Love art shows? Want to learn a new craft in one day? **Hopkinton Center for the Arts** is Hopkinton's one-stop spot for hands-on workshops, gallery showings, and a vibrant calendar of events. HCA's resident theater company even stages plays and musicals year round.

Color Your World

Watching sunlight stream through your window on a frigid afternoon is a treat in itself, though hanging up a piece of handmade stained glass could really up the ante. At the **Worcester Center for Crafts**, beginner-friendly workshops invite you to create playful suncatchers, and advanced classes introduce you to more complex techniques for soldering sparkling treasures. Kaleidoscopic (and colorful) patterns on the floor are just a bonus.



Take Private Music Lessons

Groton Hill Music Center in Groton is more than a stunning concert venue. Its nonprofit music school offers a variety of classes and programs including one-on-one lessons for all ages. Even if it's been years since you picked up an instrument, resolve this winter to try something new or to rediscover a passion you put aside. With more than 90 faculty members, you can be sure you'll be paired with a teacher who will inspire you to progress at your own pace. Start with a four-session introductory package. You could be tooting a tuba, singing rock vocals, or impressing your friends with a vibraphone solo before you know it.

Take a Mural Walk in Worcester

Many of **Worcester's larger-than-life painted murals** debuted during the city's former POW! WOW! festival, and they remain visible for visitors to photograph and enjoy. On a short walk, you'll glimpse the blue-and-red work of Greek artist Insane 51 on one side of the Hanover Theatre, an Indigenous depiction by Marka27 on

THIS PAGE: Changing exhibitions at ArtsWorcester often feature works submitted by more than 100 artists; **LEFT:** Douglas Kornfeld's colossal red *Thurston* outside the Fitchburg Art Museum was fabricated by local students.

a wall of the Federal Plaza parking garage, and the faces of Askew One on the YWCA building on Salem Street.

Enroll in a Beginner-Friendly Workshop

Try your hand at artmaking at the **Danforth Art Museum** in Framingham, which has one-day, beginner-friendly workshops ranging from landscape photography to embroidery. Those with a bit of experience might opt for the popular Inspired by Nature collage session, where students learn to take creative risks. After class, wander the museum's galleries to admire pieces dating from the 18th century to today.

Madeline Bilis is a writer, editor, and lifelong New Englander. She's the author of the guidebook 50 Hikes in Eastern Massachusetts and lives in Newton.



BE THE COOL PARENTS

These mega-fun activities will give you cred with your kids.

BY BOB CURLEY

Keeping kids active and engaged during cabin-fever season doesn't have to feel like a challenge. It might just be your chance to show them how awesome you are. The Heart of Massachusetts has a sleighful of family-friendly indoor and outdoor activities to help you warm up a winter weekend, and even more to do when the first buds of spring arrive.

Do More Outdoors

Kids are seemingly impervious to weather when they're playing and having fun, and outdoor activities abound in central Massachusetts, from downhill skiing and tubing in Shrewsbury to horse-drawn sleigh rides in Princeton. After snowstorms, **Ashland State Park** is a paradise for

cross-country skiers. The mostly flat 3.5-mile loop around the Ashland Reservoir is a family favorite that can be traversed on skis or snowshoes, or even on foot.

Parents and kids can strap on skates and glide around the **Worcester Common Oval**, a 12,000-square-foot ice rink that's also the best vantage point for the city's winter lighting installation, which glows throughout December.

Purgatory Chasm State Reservation in Sutton is a year-round fresh-air destination, and while the popular Chasm Trail is closed in winter, the rest of the park's trails remain open for hiking and cross-country skiing. The **Broad Meadow Brook Wildlife Sanctuary** in Worcester is a 400-acre wooded wonderland

crisscrossed with mostly easy to moderately challenging hiking trails. Mass Audubon also offers a variety of kid-oriented attractions including a trailside Nature Play Area, wildlife-discovery sessions for preschoolers, and classes for children ages 4 to 12 during school-vacation weeks in February and April.

Even diehard golfers usually put away their clubs for the winter, but disc golf—which substitutes Frisbee-like discs for golf balls—can be played in almost any weather. In Milford you can take a spin at **Louisa Lake** in Milford, where families can play nine holes on a professionally designed lakeside course with the option of easy or challenging layouts on each hilly hole.

For half a century, the ladybug has been the official state insect



FROM LEFT: Built in the 1960s by the Louis Paul Jonas Studios, Siegfried the Stegosaurus greets EcoTarium visitors; Embark on an out-of-this-world adventure at the Christa McAuliffe Center at Framingham State University; Your kids will never forget their stint as junior zookeepers.

of Massachusetts, an anniversary celebrated on Franklin's **Ladybug Cultural and Historical Trail**. Ladybug sculptures help guide visitors to about two-dozen sites downtown including the **Franklin Historical Museum** and a collection of public murals and statues.

The Great Indoors

Not every winter day is ideal for outdoor fun, but the Heart of MA is sitting pretty when it comes to indoor adventures, even if the weather turns ugly.

Founded as the Worcester Lyceum of Natural History, the **EcoTarium** in Worcester celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2025. This museum makes science rad with interactive displays like a hurricane simulator, a climbing wall where kids learn about rocks and minerals as they ascend, and a planetarium with daily sky shows. Knowledge from the Secrets of the Forest exhibition can be applied on hikes around the EcoTarium's 45-acre grounds.

Catching a professional ice-hockey game at Worcester's **DCU Center** from October to April is one way to see some stars in the making; another is to attend a community stargazing event at the **Christa McAuliffe Center at Framingham State University**. In addition to allowing the public to look through its telescopes at these free monthly events, the Center also has family-friendly planetarium shows and films.

The **Worcester Art Museum's** total collection numbers more than 37,000 works of art dating back as far as five millennia. Ancient arms and armor are a lively part of the tour, giving history buffs a chance to go deep on Roman soldiers and medieval knights through a series of interactive presentations. Elsewhere, touch carts invite kids to hold real artifacts and reproductions, while hands-on activities allow visitors to make their own treasures.

Local history has come to life in innovative ways for nearly 140 years at the **Framingham History Center**. Its current exhibition, "Framingham's Collective Journeys: Stories of Immigration, 1960-Present," is the museum's first multilingual presentation. It tells the story of the city's recent past through a rich collection of oral histories, interactive experiences, and artifacts.

Innovation, meanwhile, is all the rage at **New England Sci Tech** in Natick, which puts the fun world of science and electronics literally into the hands of participants. Computer coding, radio electronics, and 3D design are just a few of the many workshops offered at this one-of-a-kind STEM learning center. Activities are led by working professionals and retired educators.

A year-round lineup of concerts, films, and lectures awaits at **The Center for Arts in Natick (TCAN)**, whose center stage resides in a converted 19th-century firehouse.

Walk with the Animals

You know who doesn't mind the cold? Animals that wear big, furry coats. **Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm** in Lincoln and Worcester's **Green Hill Park Farm** are both populated with critters you can visit year round. **EARTH Limited**, the nonprofit arm of **Southwick's Zoo** in Mendon, offers hands-on educational opportunities including a Junior Zookeeping program and a rare opportunity to meet two white rhinoceroses, Thelma and Louise. A fundraiser for rhino-related conservation and education, these Rhino Encounters are available at 9 a.m. several days a week from mid-April through October.

Freelance travel journalist Bob Curley has written about New England destinations for Lonely Planet, Yankee Magazine, Rhode Island Monthly, New England Home, and many other print and digital publications. He is the author of three books about travel in the region.





A WINTER PHOTO SAFARI

When there's a fresh dusting of snow, set out to capture the magic of the Heart of MA.

BY DAVE LONG

Every month of the year has its own visual appeal in this region where historical architecture punctuates the landscape. Even in the subdued months between November and April, there are scenes that call to photographers. The following route, which curves northeast, then southeast, then southwest, encircling the center of the state, can be easily driven in a day. It makes use of major roads, has plenty of parking, and features short walks requiring little time out in the elements. In short: it's any photography enthusiast's perfect day out, especially when there's newly fallen snow.

The first stop is the **Old Stone Church** in West Boylston. Sitting on the edge of the Wachusett Reservoir, the castle-esque edifice is famous for its huge, vertical American flag, which is replaced with a similarly grand evergreen wreath for about six weeks around Christmastime. I like to arrive here just before sunrise when

the facade is still lit and the water is perfectly smooth for a wonderful reflection. There are quite a few shooting locations, but my favorite is a five-minute walk along the Route 140 causeway.

The next stop, **Gibbet Hill**, is about 40 minutes away in Groton. Arrive midmorning or earlier and feast your lens on the pastoral scene of churches and farms. The view has been featured in many movies, most recently 2019's *Little Women*. You'll find the trailhead on Lowell Road. It's a heart-pumping 15-minute walk to the top, but it's worth it. Pop into one of the great coffee shops in town for a warming post-walk reward.

Climb back into your car for a 45-minute drive to the **Wayside Inn** in Sudbury. On a half-mile stretch of Wayside Inn Road, you'll see the 338-year-old inn, the Martha-Mary Chapel, and the Grist Mill, along with several smaller barns and buildings. All look fantastic after a snowfall, and it's a snap to park at each location.

If you're hungry for a late lunch, the inn offers hearty tavern fare including fish and chips and Yankee pot roast. Dining here supports the nonprofit foundation that maintains these photogenic landmarks.

Next, it's a 50-minute drive to **Moore State Park** in Paxton. Beautiful trails and small waterfalls abound, but the highlight is the 19th-century sawmill that you can frame from Artist Overlook, which is about a 10-minute trek from the parking lot.

Your final stop is **Old Sturbridge Village**, the largest outdoor history museum in the Northeast. Enchanting any time of year, it sparkles brilliantly with snowy embellishments. Christmas by Candlelight events keep the attraction open until 8 p.m. on select December evenings, and that's an opportunity to practice your low-light skills. Check the hours of operation before venturing here at the end of your journey, or plan to spend a full winter or early spring day photographing the 1830s village with

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
The sawmill in Moore State Park;
West Boylston's Old Stone Church;
the Wish Bridge at Old Sturbridge
Village; the Wayside Inn.

its genuine antique structures and working farm.

Professional landscape photographer and winter-photography enthusiast Dave Long has lived in New England for more than 30 years and currently resides on Cape Cod. He travels the region extensively, teaching workshops, giving presentations, and capturing images, which have appeared in calendars, on the VisitMA.com website, and in publications including Outdoor Photographer, The Boston Globe, Newport Life, Cape Cod Magazine, Yankee Magazine, and Downeast Magazine. Find more winter photography tips and his e-book Winter Landscape Photography in New England at davelongphoto.com.





Bring along special treats to reward your canine buddy after a ramble in Rutland State Park.

DOGGIE DAY TRIPS

Because every member of your family deserves a little getaway, including your pet. BY ANNIE SHERMAN

The smile on your dogs' faces when they escape the car and bound into the woods will be priceless, as if they're saying with their whole wagging bodies, "Let's go!" Don't disappoint them by leaving them at home. In the Heart of Massachusetts, there are countless places for you to explore with beloved pups by your side, from wooded and quiet state recreation areas to rowdier dog parks. BYO water, "business" bags, leash, and a sense of adventure.

Seek Solitude

Where better than the largest mountain peak in eastern Massachusetts to let yourself—and your pooch—roam free? The hiking trails, fields, streams, and alpine meadows at Princeton's **Wachusett Mountain State Reservation**, with 2,006-foot **Mt. Wachusett** at its heart, are ideal for doing just that. Fun fact: the word "Wachusett," which comes from Indigenous languages such as Nipmuc and Wampanoag, means "near the mountain" or "mountain

place." As the landscape turns amber, humans and pets can frolic through fallen leaves in the state's largest old-growth forest. When winter white falls from the sky, this area comes alive with snowshoers and cross-country skiers who love the tranquility of this vast wilderness. Come springtime, it's a haven for hikers and loyal pups searching for the year's first wildflowers.

You and Fido will feel invigorated among the soaring trees at **Douglas State Forest** in Douglas. March on

with your trusty companion beneath the canopy of the 2.2-mile Coffee House Loop or 5.5-mile Wallis Pond Loop trails. Other easy to moderately challenging paths warrant repeat visits. Take binoculars for bird watching in fall and spring or cross-country skis in winter, when dogs can romp along through the snow.

Or how about a day of adventure in **Rutland State Park**? As you wander a bit of the immense, idyllic Midstate Trail, your furry friends will lead the way, tails wagging and noses sniffing. Promise them a return trip for a warm-weather picnic beside Whitehall Pond.

Water-loving pups find the trio of ponds in Natick's **Cochituate State Park** inviting. Dogs are banished from swimming areas from May 1 through September 15, but they can splash to their hearts' content in the shoulder seasons. This is a popular paddling

destination, too, so test their sea legs on a canoe or kayak ride. Not warm enough for water play? The Snake Brook Trail is an easy, 1.5-mile walk in the woods.

Get Social

An abandoned 19th-century rail corridor between Fitchburg and Leominster now signals freedom for dogs and their walking and running humans. The 4.7-mile, mostly paved **Twin Cities Rail Trail** loosely follows the Nashua River, passes two dams and a playground, crosses over Route 2, and offers myriad opportunities for companion animals to cruise through this urban district.

A dog park is a dog park, right? Well, yes and no. Sure, they're fenced-in areas where tail waggers can shed their leashes and meet pawsome new friends. But at the whole-acre-sized **Fitchburg Dog Park**, smaller and larger

dogs have their own distinct spaces for zooming around. Conveniences here include a water fountain, picnic tables, doggie bags, and a small pavilion. The **Ayer Community Dog Park** also has separate sections for petite and not-so-petite dogs to scamper in sandy, enclosed lots. Tall trees provide a bit of springtime shade.

Even on a cloudy morning in the dead of winter, the **South Natick Dam Park** is a doggie destination. Adjacent to the Charles River's dam—and a charming waterfall—this small urban park was established in 1933 on the site of a former Colonial-era grist mill. Trivia treat: millstones embedded in the paved area come from that mill. Leashed dogs are welcome to explore year round and to sit with their humans for a spring picnic on benches or the grassy lawns.

Dacey Community Field in Franklin is a sweeping recreational facility for the whole family. While the kids play soccer, you can walk pups along wooded trails and play a round of disc golf. In addition to being your squad's mascot, your dog can hunt for missing discs! When snow blankets the fields, bring your toboggan here to sled down the gentle slopes—just make sure there's room up front for your four-legged pal.

*Annie Sherman is a lifelong and 11th-generation New Englander and an award-winning journalist and editor. She lives in Newport, Rhode Island, and authored **Legendary Locals of Newport**. Watch for her feature on Worcester in the spring 2025 issue of Yankee Magazine.*



HEART OF DARKNESS?

Come for the ghosts, stay for the history, scenery, and folklore at these five cemeteries and other spooky spots.

BY BRIAN KEVIN

When only authentically spooky will do, this region out-ghosts the competition. Collect all of these macabre spots ... if you dare.

Church Hill Cemetery, Framingham
“Surprising death to you soon may / come in some unexpected way,” warns the grim headstone of John Cloyce, who died alongside cemetery neighbor Abraham Rice when the pair were simultaneously struck by lightning in 1777. At least Peter Salem, whose grave is nearby, met a nobler demise: the formerly enslaved Salem fought for the Continental Army, and his grave commemorates all Black veterans of the Revolutionary War.

Murdock-Whitney House, Winchendon
Ghost hunters and casual occultists can book time at the Winchendon History and Cultural Center’s two “extremely active” properties: the circa-1790 Isaac Morse House, which hosts an antique toy museum, and this circa-1850 Colonial Revival manor. In 2018, paranormal researchers captured infrared footage there of what they claim was, well, a libidinous spirit, alone in a tub and, shall we say, taking the self-guided tour.

“Spider Gates” Cemetery, Leicester
A woodsy Quaker cemetery, it was

once marked by gates meant to resemble rays of sunshine but which (whoops!) came out looking like spiderwebs. The creepy entryway, wrought in 1895, prompted tales among locals of arcane rituals performed after dark. In fact, it’s a lovely spot with headstones dating to the 18th century, open to respectful visitors during daylight hours.

KNOW YOUR GHOST:
Marmaduke Earle
The namesake of the country road leading to Leicester’s “Spider

Gates” cemetery, Earle was a prominent Quaker farmer who homesteaded a few miles away. He died in 1839, at age 90, but local legend holds he’ll speak to anyone who circles his gravestone ten times, lays an ear on it, and utters a certain phrase. Leave poor Marmaduke alone, though: he fathered 14 kids and deserves some peace in the afterlife.

College of the Holy Cross, Worcester
This college has more than its share of dark legends including the oft-retold account of an exorcism gone wrong. Three days after two priests and a possessed woman were locked in a Fenwick Hall tower, the door was opened to reveal two dead priests and no sign of the woman.

Harvard Shaker Village’s “Lollipop” Graveyard, Harvard
Ne’er-do-well youths, visiting after hours, have long claimed ghost sightings. But the most interesting things about this cemetery, established by the celibate, pacifist Shakers in 1792, are the candy-like cast-iron markers with which later brethren replaced older headstones.

Mount Wadsworth Cemetery, Sudbury
The most prominent monument in this suburban graveyard is a nearly 22-foot granite obelisk, commemorating English soldiers who fell in 1676 to anticolonial Nipmuc warriors. Nearby, a smaller spire marks the resting place of Jerusha Howe, a 19th-century innkeeper and jilted lover whose unrestful spirit is said to wander.

KNOW YOUR GHOST:
Jerusha Howe
They called her the Belle of Sudbury for her grace, her musical talents, and the warm welcome she gave visitors to the Wayside Inn, made famous in a book of poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Overnight guests at today’s inn, a nonprofit historic site, sometimes report feeling her touch, smelling her perfume, or spotting her at the foot of the bed. It’s said that Howe, abandoned by an English paramour who had promised to return, died of a broken heart. Tuberculosis did not help.

Kellogg House, Framingham
A friendly spirit purportedly haunts the well behind this 1747 former

reverend’s home, now part of the campus of the Learning Center for the Deaf (school mascot: the Galloping Ghost). More interesting still is the Deaf Cultural Center housed inside, which welcomes visitors to explore art and artifacts tracing Deaf history.

Goose Hill Cemetery, Rutland
Specter seekers follow a trail out of this forested graveyard to find the graffitied ruins of the Rutland Prison Camp. Some 60 petty criminals who were interned there, most of whom died of tuberculosis, are buried in its small cemetery. Rumor holds that a long-dead warden’s wife still patrols the grounds.

Wachusett Mountain State Reservation, Princeton
You can drive to the summit of this 2,006-foot peak, eastern Massachusetts’ highest point, or hike its 17 miles of wooded trails. But maybe not after dark? The Mount Wachusett ghost—either an 18th-century lost child or her distraught mother, depending on whom you ask—is said to meander the mountain. Scan for mysterious footprints from the lifts at the mountain’s ski resort.

KNOW YOUR GHOSTS:
Lucy and Martha Keyes
To no avail, search parties combed the primeval woods for four-year-old Lucy Keyes, who wandered off her family homestead on the eastern slope of Wachusett in 1755. Was she kidnapped, drowned, set upon by wolves? Despite a questionable deathbed murder confession by a neighbor decades later, Lucy’s family never learned her fate—and some say her mother, Martha, has never stopped roaming the woods, calling out her missing daughter’s name.

Brian Kevin is a writer in midcoast Maine who once heard chains rattling outside his tent while camping in Brimfield.



ABOVE: The iron work has vanished, but “Spider Gates” cemetery is still a curious place to visit. RIGHT: Ghostly doings are routine occurrences at the Murdock-Whitney House in Winchendon.



SHOP WITH HEART IN THE HEART OF MA

Do good with your gifting—we've got ideas.

Giving can have double meaning when you support charitable organizations through your purchases. Whether you're checking your holiday shopping list twice or searching for the perfect birthday, anniversary, or just-because gift, consider these unique items and experiences from the region's nonprofits. And don't forget to treat yourself while you're at it.

Tickets, Please

For music lovers, tickets to an upcoming performance at **Groton Hill Music Center** in Groton are always a welcome surprise. From violinist Midori to folk-rock band Cowboy Junkies, the lineup in early 2025 offers something for every taste. You might

even plan ahead for Valentine's Day, when singer-songwriter Paula Cole takes the stage.

The Milford-based **Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra** celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2025, and you can wrap up tickets for their Silver Anniversary Triumph concert in April. Or peruse the lineup at **Hanover Theatre & Conservatory** in Worcester, and gift tickets to an evening with Cher or another unforgettable show.

If you have a piano player on your gift scroll, there's no more unique present than admission to the **Frederick Collection of Historical Pianos** in Ashburnham. Call 978-827-6232 to arrange a visit. Tours typically last three hours due to the sheer number of pianos, including

many antique instruments your favorite keyboardist can sit down and play. Need something to wrap? Order one of the dozen-plus CDs featuring recordings of pianos from the collection.

An immersive theater experience is also a memorable gift, and **The Center for Arts in Natick** is as intimate and exclusive as you can get with just 270 seats for each performance. That includes not only plays and musicals but top-notch performances by Grammy-winning artists and local musicians.

Creative Exercises

Want to give someone a new creative lease on life? These cultural organizations help grownups discover a new passion.

Lessons in photography, metalworking, ceramics, stained glass, collage, bookbinding, block printing, and even healing arts like Reiki are a click away when you browse **Worcester Center for Crafts'** online catalog. Visit the Worcester organization's Handcrafted Shop to purchase a gift card, or call 508-753-8183, ext. 305 to have your gift in any



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sit close enough to feel the heat at The Center for Arts in Natick's Firehouse venue; Discover gifts for the green thumb in your life at The Garden Shop at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill; You can foster a new hobby by gifting a class at the Worcester Center for Crafts.

identity of the area in creative ways, and art is always an avenue when you're looking to truly wow recipients with gifts that are one of a kind.

For gardening gifts like pruners, gloves, botany books, and even a paint-your-own gnome kit, visit **The Garden Shop at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill**, where nature-themed items are beautifully displayed. You can pop into this destination store without purchasing admission to the attraction (except during Night Lights), or visit purchase.nebg.org to have selections shipped to you or to loved ones.

Here's a well-hushed secret. Visit **Garden in the Woods** in Framingham on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday while it's closed in November and December, and you can press the Call button to have the gate opened for a nearly private browsing experience at the Garden Shop. Locally made and fair-trade goods are among the selections that support Native Plant Trust's efforts to conserve native New England plants.

denomination sent to you or directly to someone who'll be thanking you profusely.

At **Hopkinton Center for the Arts** in Hopkinton, workshop offerings like Adult Ceramics Night Out and Pastel Painting from Start to Finish are excellent for newbies and dabblers. For the more serious artist, multi-week classes allow talent to flourish. Call 508-435-9222 to give the gift of enrollment.

Handmade Is Heartfelt

Makers contribute to the cultural



10 HEARTFELT HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

Carve out time between Thanksgiving and mid-January for memorable, merry, meaningful experiences.

You don't have to call the Heart of Massachusetts home to make it your home for the holidays. Each of these events is worthy of becoming an annual tradition for you and your beloveds. Bundling everyone up for some fun is a gift that lasts longer than anything that comes in a box.

1. Night Lights at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, Boylston

The photo ops will dazzle you, but be sure to put your phone away and simply appreciate the twinkle of a quarter-million colorful lights reflecting in your loved ones' eyes. Go ahead and snap one more selfie in the tunnel of lights before warming up with s'mores and seasonal drinks.

You can also get your glide on at the new outdoor skating rink. Night Lights kicks off November 23 with Diwali Lights—a celebration of Indian culture featuring art displays, local vendors, and activities for all ages—and continues daily through January 5.

2. Winter Wonderland at Southwick's Zoo, Mendon

The first breathtaking glimpse of this family attraction dressed in more than 4 million lights never gets old, but the larger-than-life illuminated displays are just one of the curiosity-sparking discoveries you'll make. Held Thursday through Sunday evenings, November 21–December 29, Winter Wonderland traditions include singing along with animatronic penguins and meeting the head elf himself

Home for the Holidays at Salisbury Mansion in Worcester offers a quiet interlude amid the frenzy of the season.

at Santa's Barn. There's a thrilling nightly variety show, too, and you can warm up by a fire pit at Kringle Café with a hot toddy in one hand and a gingerbread cookie in the other.

3. Home for the Holidays at Salisbury Mansion, Worcester There's no place like a 252-year-old home for the holidays. The Worcester Historical Museum decks the halls of Salisbury Mansion in extravagant style reminiscent of the mid-19th century, transporting guests to a shimmering scene of light and beauty far away from the stresses of a modern-day holiday season. If a yearly promenade

PHOTO: WORCESTER HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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through the mansion is not already a tradition, make it so with a self-guided tour, available November 30–January 4. Or attend a Friday or Saturday evening candlelight tour for a deeper experience of time travel.

4. Holiday Stroll and Tree-Lighting Ceremony, Gardner

On the Sunday after Thanksgiving, community musicians, representatives from local shops, and the citizens of Gardner meet up with THE Santa Claus to stroll from Gardner City Hall to Monument Park and delight in the lighting of the town's massive tree. You know a tradition is special when the *entire* community is involved. So, warm up your caroling voice, bundle up, and join in the festivities downtown December 1.

5. Tree-Lighting Ceremony and Holiday Block Party, Framingham

One moment you're in a snowy forest. The next, you're standing beside a menorah, immersed in a festive Kwanzaa scene, or cuddling up to a holiday-sweater-wearing dog or kitty. Posing for photos in front of an interactive green-screen background is just one of the activities that sets Framingham's Holiday Block Party

See the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in a new color palette during the six-week run of Night Lights

apart from other yearly traditions. The fete also features festive music emanating from an antique oil truck. The 33rd Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony takes place on December 6, with sweet treats galore, free books from the public library's Bookmobile, and a Story Walk that will put a smile on the faces of kids and children at heart.

6. Light Fight, Hubbardston

There's no time like the holidays, when a whole town comes together to ... fight? Hubbardston's 9th Annual Light Fight encourages friendly competition between houses and stores, vying for your votes by dressing up to the max. During the first three full weekends of December, grab a Light Fight map, hop in your vehicle, and follow the bright glow to the merriest displays in town.

7. A Christmas Carol Presented by the Sudbury Savoyards and the Wayside Inn, Sudbury
Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is such a classic holiday story.

However, award-winning performing-arts group the Sudbury Savoyards puts a spin on the tale each year with a riveting four-person rendition at the majestic Martha-Mary Chapel at the Wayside Inn in Sudbury. Three shows take place December 7, 13, and 14, and all proceeds go to the food pantry A Place To Turn and to the Wayside Inn Foundation.

8. Claflin Hill Holiday Pops, Milford
Create another core holiday memory by singing along with the Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra and the Greater Milford Community Chorus at their annual Holiday Pops concert. The Milford Town Hall Grand Ballroom is transformed into a scene of magical winter wonder, and it's even rumored a jolly man in a red suit will take a break from his laborious preparations to join in the fun. Purchase concert tickets online, and be there December 14.

9. Menorah Car Parade at Chabad House Jewish Center, Milford
It's an annual spectacle and you can take part, whether or not you place a menorah atop your car. The parade winds its way through the towns of Medway and Franklin, with gatherings at Choate Park and Franklin Town Common for menorah lightings, before turning back to Milford's Chabad House Jewish Center, where soup and latkes will be served. Those who choose to drive in the parade on December 29 will receive a Chanukah party box with snacks and activities.

10. Christmas Tree Bonfire, Westminister
Who says Christmas traditions have to end in December? On January 11, 2025, strap that tree back up on top of your car, pile your people inside, and head on over to Westminister's annual Christmas Tree Bonfire at VFW Field. Not only will that browning fir attain a new purpose in life, this community event is filled to the top of the eggnog carton with fun. Food, drinks, live music, and s'mores await.



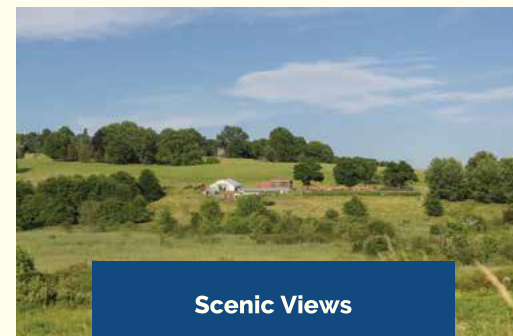
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CELEBRATE THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING!

Five memorable ways to greet the season.

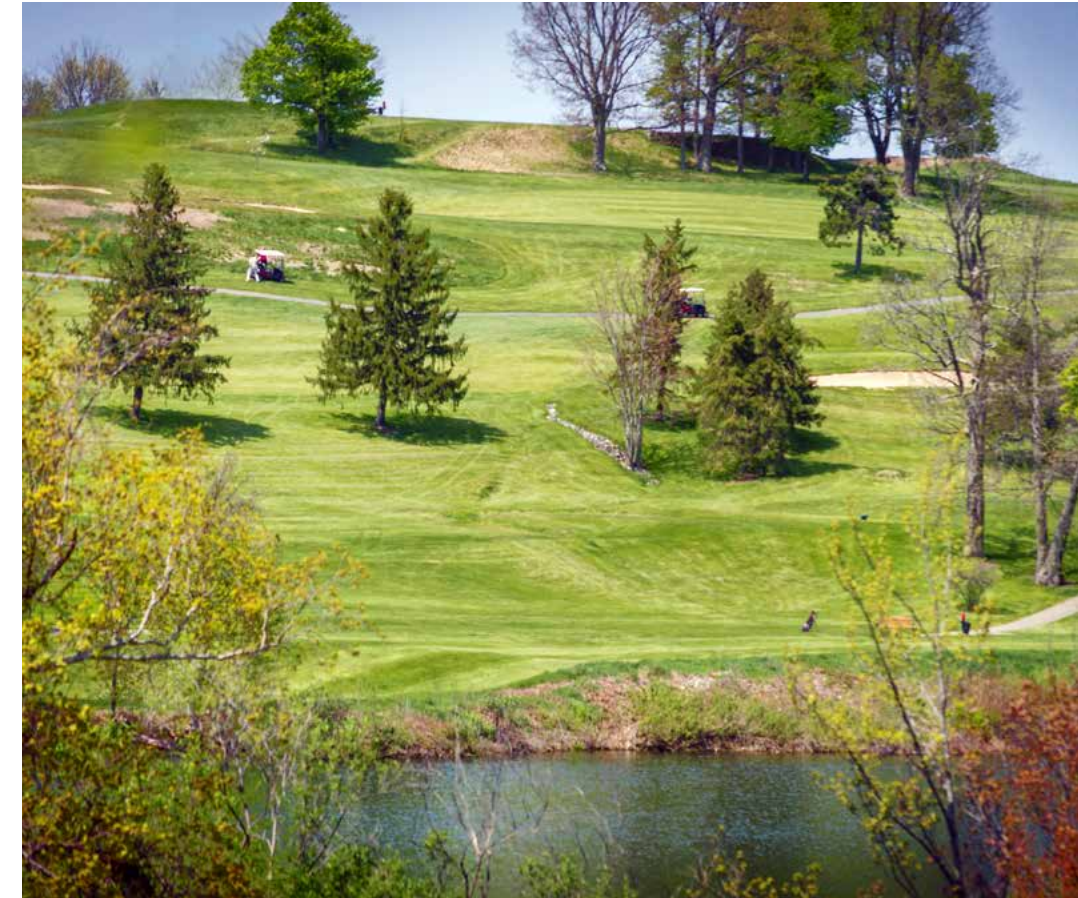
Don't just stick a semicolon between winter and spring this year. Of all the seasonal transitions, this one deserves an exclamation point. Everyone's invited to participate in these unforgettable springtime rituals. How many can you squeeze in before shorts weather arrives?

1. Garden in the Woods, Framingham: Take a walk on the woodsy side when this botanic garden, uniquely devoted to native New England plants, reopens in April. Be on the lookout for trilliums emerging: Native Plant Trust has cultivated a nationally recognized collection of these delicate wildflowers, which bloom in colors ranging from snow white to scarlet.

2. Green Hill Golf Course, Green Hill Park, Worcester: If you're itching to practice your swing, head to this municipal golf course, which typically opens for the season by mid-March. Even if the ground's still too soft for your liking, you can burn off cabin-fever energy by springing for a bucket of 120 golf balls at the driving range.

3. Field of Daffodils, New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, Boylston: It's not clockwork, but by the first weekend in April, you'll likely see some of the 25,000 stars of this show soaking up the limelight. As the month progresses, this field of dreamy color becomes an ideal backdrop for photoshoots.

4. River Rat Race, Athol to Orange:



Got a canoe? You and a paddling buddy could be contenders in this 60-year-old rite of spring on the Millers River, held in early April. If not, join hundreds of spectators who will whoop and cheer as racers sprint the 5.2-mile distance. There's an all-morning pancake breakfast that will sweep you right up in the community spirit.

5. Boston Marathon, Hopkinton: The world's oldest marathon may end in Boston, but it's kicked off in

Even before the landscape fully reawakens, you can play nine or 18 holes at the golf course tucked inside Worcester's largest park.

Hopkinton for more than a century. Celebrate the 101st anniversary in 2025 by being at the starting line to see the runners off. Be sure to visit the **26.2 Foundation's** website to learn how you can support the dream of building an 8,000-square-foot International Marathon Center here, with interactive exhibits including a running track.