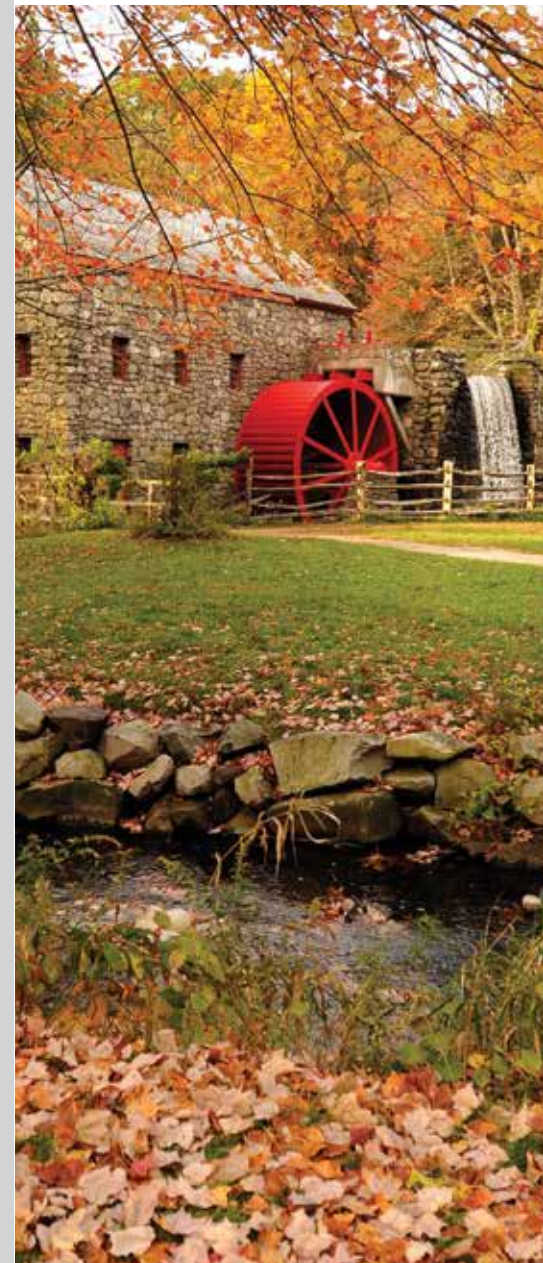
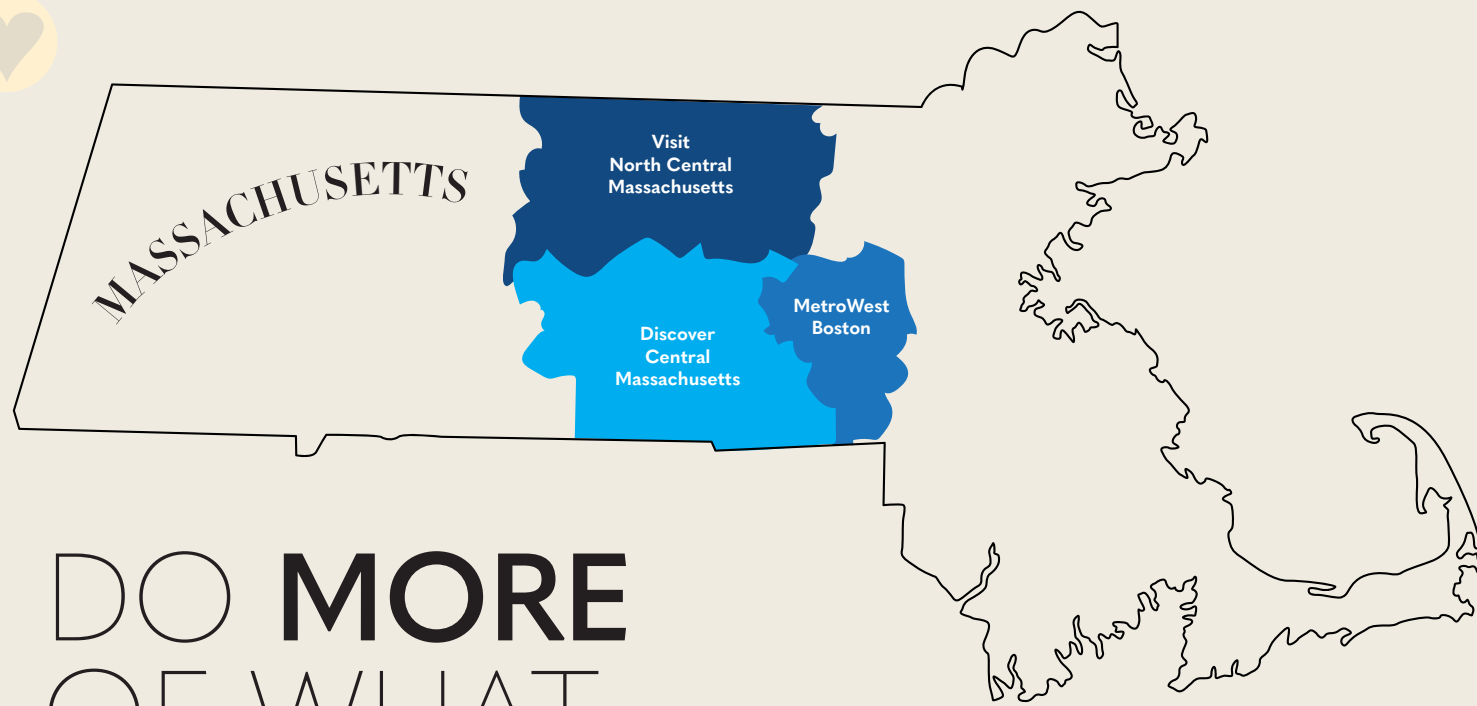


THE **HEART** OF MASSACHUSETTS

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, romantic restaurants, 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.

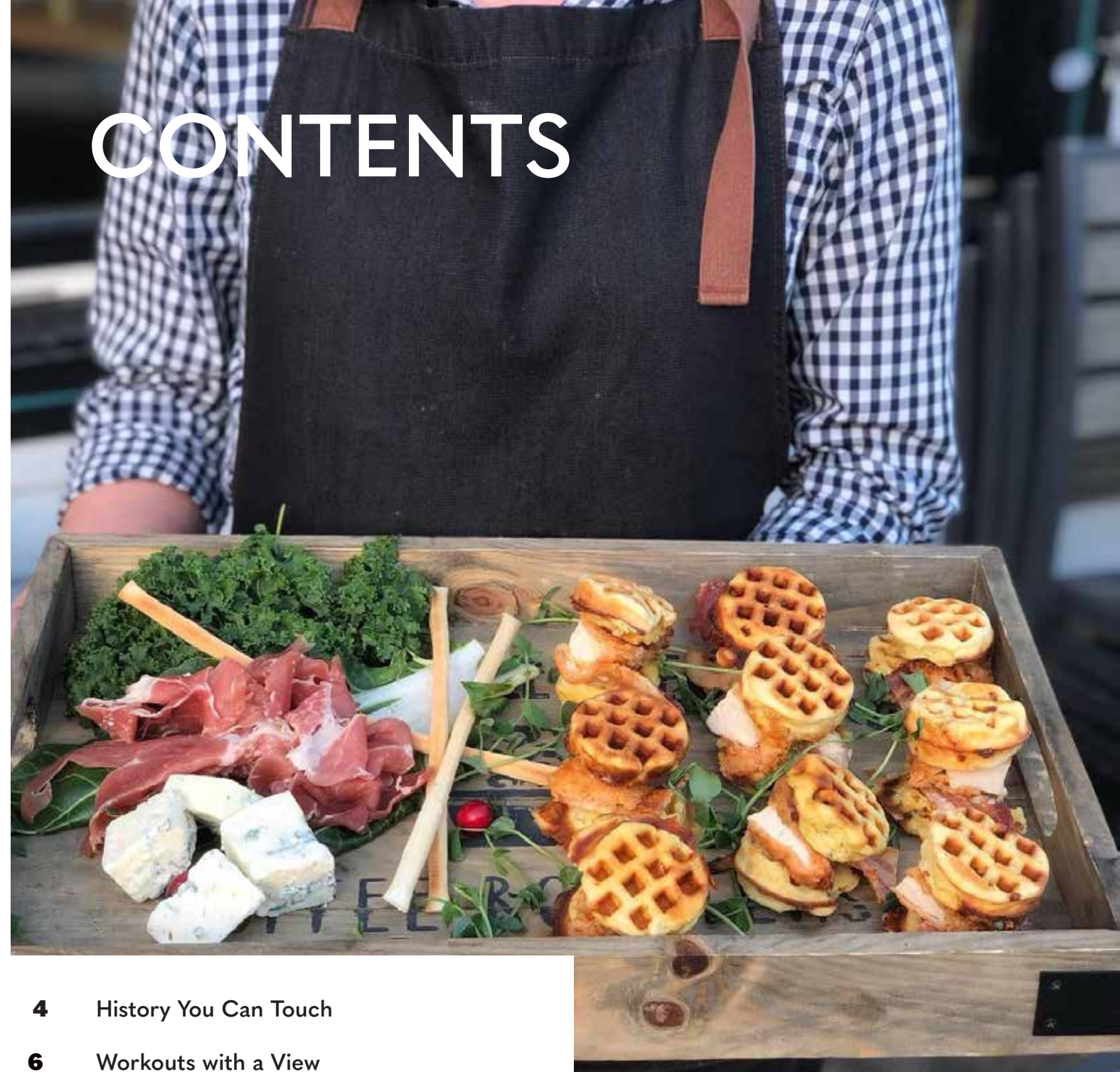


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THIS PAGE: The very best locally grown and raised products find their way into Chandra Gouldrup's comfort-food creations at The Farmer's Daughter in Sudbury.

ON THE COVER (LEFT TO RIGHT): The Wayside Inn in Sudbury still uses a former Pepperidge Farm grist mill to grind grains for baked goods served in its restaurant; Snowboarding is exhilarating day and night at Wachusett Mountain in Princeton; Tulips are spring's biggest show-offs at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in Boylston.



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

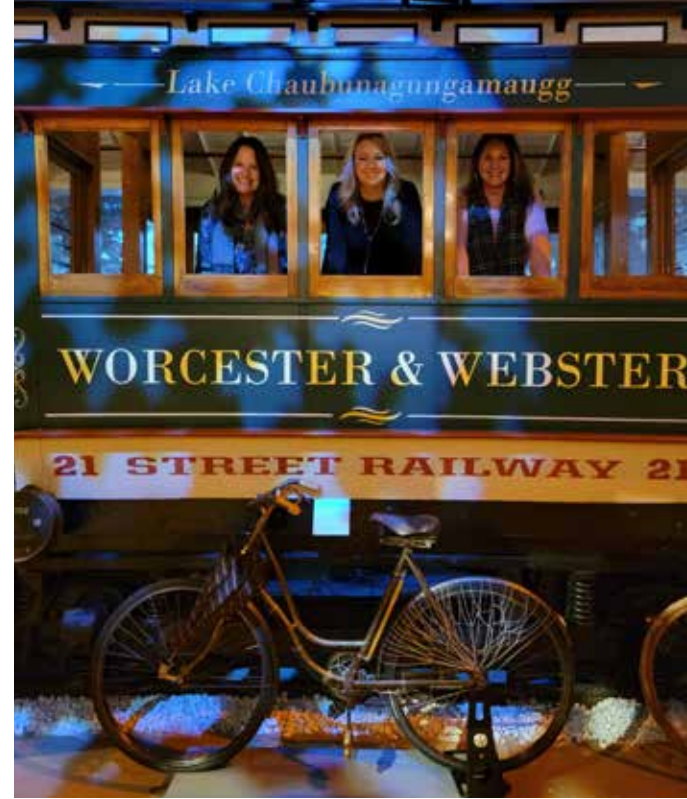
historians. If so, you'll be surprised by all that's new at this 200-acre attraction. From a reconstructed 19th-century piggery (for adorable pigs!) that might be the last of its kind, to 3D tours you can enjoy from your couch, OSV's innovations abound. Keep an eye on the events calendar for opportunities 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-eighteenth-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 the sheep at Goodnow Farm next to the parking lot.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Earn a vibrant view by climbing to the top of Lookout Rock, open from dawn to dusk; Sweet Meadow Farm's patient, well-trained horses help youngsters learn how to steer, stop, and trot; Bring your own board or rent one to gracefully descend one of Wachusett Mountain's 27 trails. If you're not ready to leave when your time is up, you can reload your ticket online and head directly to the lift.

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.

Glide Down a Mountain

Interested in winter sports but less interested in driving for hours to get

to the crowded high peaks? Feel the wind in your face as you swish down the slopes at **Wachusett Mountain** in Princeton. At 2,006 feet, this is the highest point in Massachusetts east of the Connecticut River, and eight lifts take skiers and snowboarders up the mountain for some of the state's most elevated views. For novices, the Easy Rider trail is conveniently steps away from the Waffle Cabin, which churns out perfectly golden Belgian waffles with an optional chocolate drizzle.

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, stop by **Goodstuff Smokehouse** in Blackstone for a bag of traditional or seasoned kettle corn, made the old-school way in a cast-iron kettle.

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.

Treat Your Kids to Some Horseplay

Introductory private horseback-riding lessons for kids four and up are offered year round (moving to the indoor ring when the weather's uncooperative) at **Sweet Meadow Farm** in Sherborn. Along with riding skills, kids learn basic horse handling and grooming. Got even littler kids? Here's a scene you won't soon forget: By reservation September through May, mini riders under 50 pounds and 42 inches can ride a



miniature horse and interact with farm and exotic animals while you snap photos galore.

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.



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

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

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.

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 drop-in "hodgepodge" workshops at **Periwinkle Art & Glassworks** in Groton, you can create a colorful piece with scraps of glass, shells, and other sparkling treasures. Kaleidoscopic (and colorful) patterns on the floor are just a bonus.

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.

Get Kids' Creative Juices Flowing during School Vacation

Got a whole week of freedom with nothing planned? Sign the family up for art classes at **ConnectED & Inspired** in Milford, a studio offering a variety of courses for aspiring artists young and old. Kids' sessions are meant to foster artistic confidence and ability through guided activities.



They'll work with canvas, clay, fabric, paper, and other materials to create one-of-a-kind pieces.

See Art in the Wild

Harvard's **Fruitlands Museum** puts art and a beautiful landscape—some 210 acres of it—on display. In that pastoral setting, an outdoor exhibit called *The Edge of Becoming* by Rachel Hayes invites viewers to reflect on their connection to the world. The 100-foot-long installation, on view through April 1, 2024, is made up of brightly colored fabrics, recalling some of the Shaker textiles in the museum's collection. The piece complements Hayes' indoor exhibition of large color-block textile hangings called *Transcending Space*, which evokes an array of artistic movements, challenging the traditional meaning of "women's work."

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

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.

the Hanover Theatre, an Indigenous depiction by Marka27 on 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 Watercolor Class

Try your hand at artmaking at the **Danforth Art Museum** in Framingham, which offers classes ranging from drawing to palette-knife painting. Newbies might opt for the popular Beginning Watercolor class, where students learn about different types of paper and brushes, as well as color mixing and basic techniques. After class, wander the museum's galleries to admire pieces dating from the eighteenth 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.



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 **Ski Ward** in Shrewsbury has plenty of opportunities for both with nine ski and snowboard trails and a tubing park with a dozen lanes. Ski Ward's 220 feet of vertical drop is rightsized for a half day (or magical evening) on the slopes, especially when learners

and little ones are along for the ride.

Families can strap on skates and glide around the **Worcester Common Oval**. The 12,000-square-foot rink is also the best vantage point for the city's winter lighting installation that glows throughout December. Before or after hitting the ice, look for the big neon sign beckoning diners to **George's Coney Island**, serving up snappy hot dogs and other kid-friendly fare on nearby Southbridge Street since 1918.

Princeton's **Cornerstone Ranch** lets visitors ride a horse, drive a horse, or get pulled around by a horse, snow or no. Trail rides are offered year round, as are classes that introduce kids and adults to driving a wagon or sleigh. Prefer to have a pro at the reins? The ranch also has half-hour wagon and sleigh rides that end with hot cocoa and s'mores by a warming bonfire. Or stop at **Stone Cow Brewery** in nearby Barre, where most of the Barn Kitchen's ingredients are grown or raised on-site, and kids can amuse themselves on the sledding hill while adults sip a Cows Out Milk Stout or two.

Ninety rope bridges, 16 ziplines, and three "leaps of faith" are sprinkled across nine aerial courses

at **Boundless Adventures** in Berlin, open early April through late November. Courses are tailored to different ability levels, and there are day and night options for families with kids ages seven and up.

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.

The **EcoTarium** in Worcester 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. Try to catch a **Worcester Railers** hockey game at the **DCU Center** between October and April, too.

Stimulate young minds and bond as teammates at escape-room destinations like **Escape Games Worcester**, where you can choose from four adventures including a Hollywood murder mystery. Or become a UFO "truther" at **Live**

Action Escapes' extraterrestrial-themed brain teaser, one of five escape rooms at this Worcester complex. For older kids, **Natick's Level99** amps up the challenges with 40 themed escape rooms, scavenger hunts, and one-on-one competitions including elements like mazes and a ceiling full of swinging axes.

"I'm bored" might be the rarest phrase ever spoken at **Apex Entertainment** in Marlborough, which has acres of indoor activities including go-kart racing, a two-story laser-tag arena, 18 holes of glow-in-the-dark mini golf, bowling, an arcade, and—dangling above it all—a ropes course. Active families will also enjoy bouncing around the **Altitude Trampoline Park** in Marlborough or **Urban Air Adventure Park** in Bellingham, where attractions also include an aerial course, indoor playground, and dodgeball court.

Mini golf, a ropes course, and a live-action fantasy game are part of the fun at **Great Wolf Lodge** in Fitchburg, but the big lure is the resort's massive indoor water park with age-appropriate attractions for everyone from tots to teens. Slides, tube rides, a wave pool, a lazy river, and constant warmth banish the winter blues.



FROM LEFT: Dodgeball gets a bouncy makeover courtesy of **Urban Air** in Bellingham, with a trampoline arena adding high jumps and soft landings to the proceedings; Built in the 1960s by the Louis Paul Jonas Studios, the life-size **Siegfried the Stegosaurus** statue greets visitors at **Worcester's EcoTarium**; Open Sundays or by appointment, **Plain View Farm's** friendly alpacas, llamas, and chickens make good family-friendly company.

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** both have year-round petting zoos populated with farm animals. At **Plain View Farm** in Hubbardston, you can meet a pack of alpacas and shop for super-soft winter hats and gloves.

Southwick's Zoo in Mendon hosts an annual Winter Wonderland holiday light display from mid-November through the end of December, with possible bonus viewings of cold-loving zoo animals. For the full experience—including animal-encounter programs, a trail through a deer forest, and a rainforest-themed maze—the zoo reopens for spring in mid-April.

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.



CREATE YOUR OWN RECIPE FOR ROMANCE

Find just the right ingredients to respark your love life.



Whether or not you believe oysters are potent aphrodisiacs, look for them on menus at cozy spots like **Less Than Greater Than**.

Half the fun of a romantic escape is planning and anticipating the trip. So rather than prescribe your getaway for two, we've created this matrix of ideas for you to peruse with your sweetheart. Cuddle up and connect as you consider the possibilities, mixing and matching fun activities, comfy accommodations, and meals to remember. Everything's close at hand in the Heart of MA, so you can squeeze as much—or as little—as you'd like into your time away.

INDOOR ENCHANTMENT

1. Your own unforgettable safari awaits when you book an Extreme Private Tour at **Animal Adventures**, an exotic-animal rescue facility in Bolton. Meet and interact with some of the rarest creatures you'll encounter in your lives, like an African spurred tortoise, a mountain coati, and a pearl fox.

2. For a blast of summer any time of year, check the schedule of drop-in sessions or book private court time at the **Beach House** in Natick, where it's always beach-volleyball season. Classes for beginners are an exhilarating opportunity to try something new together.

3. Concerts at the new **Groton Hill Music Center** in Groton are transportive thanks to the acoustically superb design of the timber-and-stone concert hall. Get dressed up (or don't) for a classical performance, an evening of jazz, or an intimate show with a legendary singer-songwriter.

4. Mystery lovers? Follow your sense of intrigue to **Less Than Greater Than**, a speakeasy in Hudson that's camouflaged to look like a cobbler shop. Once you find your way through the hidden entrance, you'll have your pick of decadent food and drinks including whipped ice-cream cocktails.

OUTDOOR EXHILARATION

1. The **New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill** in Boylston is a wondrous place for a hand-in-hand walk year round, but get there before the end of December if you can to see the annual holiday-season illumination, *Night Lights: Starry Skies*.

2. Romantic tingles get cued the moment you hold mittened hands and step tentatively onto the slick surface of the **Town Common Ice Skating Rink** in Sturbridge. Open free from dawn until dusk, weather permitting, and restricted to a max of eight skaters at a time, this intimate little rink surrounded by classic buildings is straight out of a Hallmark Channel movie.

3. There's a mile-ish long, lightly used walking trail along a gentle brook at Marlborough's **Jericho Hill Recreation Area** that beckons to couples in all seasons, but it's the hill that will truly make you feel like giddy kids once it's coated in snow. If it's been a while since you went sledding, vow to remedy that this winter.

4. At **Harvard Alpaca Ranch** in Harvard, you can pet the herd and hear the cute humming of these gentle animals on a free farm tour. Online advance reservations are appreciated, as are purchases of soft goods in the Alpaca Shop.

COZY DINING

1. Experience true farm-to-table dining at **Gibbet Hill Grill** in Groton, where most of the produce you'll consume was grown on the surrounding 500 acres. Even the cocktails reflect what's harvested and created here. Once you're inside the red barn, you'll find it hard to tear yourselves away from the fire-lit warmth, so save room for maple hot toddies and dessert.

2. A dinner or Sunday-brunch date in the rustic environs of **Deadhorse Hill** in Worcester is an experience you'll reminisce about when you return to real life. Trust staff to recommend the perfect cocktail or wine to pair with creative seasonal fare.

3. At **Framingham Station Brazilian Steakhouse**, you'll share a memorable all-you-can-eat feast that begins with a bountiful, help-yourself bar of salads and sides and continues until you've had your fill of meats, served Rodizio-style by roaming Gaucho Chefs. Take breaks to admire the 1885 rail station's grandeur.

4. On select Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from November through April, you'll be treated to a 1700s-style, hearth-cooked meal at **Salem Cross Inn** in West Brookfield, where multisensory **Fireplace Feasts** immerse you in the foodways of Colonial America.

ROMANTIC INNS & HOTELS

1. If you love music and pop culture, you'll have so much fun at **The Verve Hotel Boston Natick, Tapestry Collection by Hilton** in Natick, playing old-school video games together, snapping photos with classic album covers, sipping cocktails in the kaleidoscopically cool **Violet Thorn** lounge, and dining at **Pantry**, styled to remind you of Julia Child's kitchen.

2. With amenities like 24-hour room service and plush robes, the boutique **Beechwood Hotel** in Worcester is ideal for hiding away from Mother Nature's worst, particularly if you book an Executive Fireplace Suite.

3. The **Groton Inn** in Groton, with its own **Forge & Vine** restaurant where food is cooked over a wood fire in an open kitchen, is the kind of place where you can check in and never leave. Splurge on a room with bucolic views of the cows on Gibbet Hill.

4. Imagine how many couples have retreated to the **Wayside Inn** in Sudbury during its 300-plus years of warm hospitality. Write your own romantic chapter at this timeless destination, with on-site dining, walking trails, and 10 bright guest rooms priced affordably enough to entice you to book a long weekend.



"ALE" ABOARD FOR A WEEKEND OF SAMPLING CRAFT BEERS

Let off some steam at cozy breweries in central Massachusetts. No chugging allowed.

By Daniel McGinn



Beers worth savoring are on tap at dozens of microbreweries in the heart of the Commonwealth. When patios are closed, these destinations for beer lovers offer cozy indoor settings for drinking and dining heartily. So don't wait for warm weather to run away from responsibilities for a weekend. Get some friends together, choose one of these itineraries, and give some of Massachusetts' best beers a taste.

A Beer Lover's Marathon

To run the Boston Marathon, you must qualify, train, and make it to the starting line in Hopkinton early on Patriots' Day. Or you can get a jump on marathon season by eating and drinking your way along the race route.

Begin Saturday at Hopkinton's **Start Line Brewing Company**, located about a mile south of the start of the Boston Marathon course. Housed in an airy post-and-beam building, the brewery is known for cool-weather comfort food like chili and nachos. Pub-style apps, salads, and sandwiches are available, too. On the revolving beer menu, you'll likely find a half dozen IPAs (including best-selling Hop Load Hazy) along with a robust selection of ales and stouts.

Follow the marathon route into downtown Framingham, where

PHOTO: WORMTOWN BREWERY



THIS PAGE: Jack's Abby celebrates the highly German art of lager brewing, using both traditional and modern methods; LEFT: Wormtown Brewery sources beer ingredients from nearby farms, ensuring freshness while supporting the local economy.

Jack's Abby invites you to dash down a multitude of lagers: lighter, lower-alcohol Bavarian beers. Find your seat at one of the Beer Hall's communal tables, and you'll feel transported to the land of Oktoberfest. Servers deliver hearty, German-influenced fare including schnitzel, bratwurst, and sausage platters. The menu also features wood-fired pizzas. Pints as well as smaller, 8-ounce pours are available, so it's easy to pace yourself.

Less than a mile east, **Exhibit 'A' Brewing Company** now occupies Jack's Abby's former Framingham digs. Limber up with a critically acclaimed Goody Two Shoes Kölsch-style ale or best-selling The Cat's Meow IPA while browsing the work

of local visual artists in the taproom's Morton Street Gallery. You'll feel good about artists receiving 100 percent of the sale price if the beverages put you in a buying mood.

Wind down at **Aloft Framingham**, where you can play a round of pool in the chic lobby before tucking in for the night, then enjoy a refreshing swim in the indoor saline pool on Sunday morning before making your way toward the finish line.

Head east to the Natick Mall, where **Night Shift Brewing's** taproom is ensconced on the second floor. You'll enjoy lunching here on Wagyu burgers or Detroit-style pizza. A full bar complements its lineup of craft beers including three light lagers: Day

Lite, Lime Lite, and Nite Lite. If you're still feeling energetic, Night Shift shares its space with **Level99**, where you can try your hand at more than 40 themed "challenge rooms" (sort of like escape rooms). Who says a beer-themed marathon can't test you physically and mentally?

A City Brewery Tour

There are myriad reasons to love downtown breweries. You can often barhop on foot, reducing the need for designated drivers. Alternatively, Ubers are easy to find. If you tire of bar food, full-fledged restaurants abound. And when you're ready to call it a night, hotels are nearby.

Worcester has at least a half dozen

PHOTO: JACK'S ABBY

INTOXICATING ENVIRONS

Relaxed, charming, and easy on the eyes, these pastoral grain-to-glass facilities will put you in a good place.

Set in a century-old hay barn in rural Brookfield, **Oakholm Brewing Company** draws crowds by offering an array of activities including sip and paint, musical bingo, karaoke, bands, and make-your-own candles. Before the holidays, buy a fresh-cut Christmas tree at adjoining **Oakholm Farm**—and after the holidays, bring it back to burn in the brewery's post-Christmas bonfire. Winterfest, usually held in late January, typically features dog-sled rides, snowman-building contests, and food trucks. In addition to all this entertainment, they serve a full menu of their own craft beers. Order a flight, served on a wooden oak leaf.

Nestled against the babbling Mine Brook in Franklin, **GlenPharmer Tasting Room & Restaurant** has transformed a nineteenth-century textile mill into a picturesque destination distillery. A polished-rustic dining room, an outdoor patio, and a heated covered bridge inspire lovers of fine food and craft spirits to indulge in the intentional pairing of the two. The scratch kitchen invents dishes to complement whiskeys, rums, and other liquors distilled on-site. And spirits even make their way into recipes, including desserts like whiskey-toffee pudding.

It doesn't get more farm than the Beer Pasture at **Milk Room Brewing Co.** in Rutland. The season here typically begins around the first weekend in April but it all depends on Mother Nature. So, refresh their Facebook page constantly once the snow melts.



You'll automatically be drawn to the aroma-packed, flavor-driven beers at Thirsty Robot Brewing Company, where traditional styles mingle with whimsical one-off batches.

craft breweries to choose from. To get in beer-drinking mode, start your Saturday with a \$10 tour of **Polar Park**, home of Minor League Baseball's WooSox. On winter Saturdays, the first tour's at 10 a.m. and the last is at 2 p.m. Once baseball season is underway, each Saturday's last tour is at noon on game days or 4 p.m. when the team's away.

Now, you're primed for a visit to **Worcester Public Market**, where you're hit with the aromas of multiethnic cuisines: Japanese, Jamaican, Indian, Italian, Middle Eastern, and African fare, all served from stalls. Anchoring the market is **Wachusett Brew Yard**. At the bar, servers offer free popcorn and pour glasses of Blueberry Ale with three berries floating on top. There are more than 20 other options on tap, too. (On another trip, visit their flagship Westminster location, about a half hour north, to sip **Wachusett Brewing Company's** handcrafted microbrews while cozying up to the open-air firepit or bellying up to the indoor bar converted from an Airstream trailer.)

Worcester's **Wormtown Brewery** is only a 20-minute walk away. Its outdoor Beer Garden closes in cooler months, but its expansive tap room remains open, serving flights of beer, house-made hard seltzer (try the coconut), and a menu of snackable, shareable plates.

Two of Worcester's best restaurants, **Volturno** and **One Eleven Chop House**, are only a few steps from Wormtown, so you may want to settle in for a fancier meal in the evening. **Hilton Garden Inn Worcester, AC Hotel by Marriott Worcester**, and **Homewood Suites by Hilton Worcester** are all within a mile radius if you're staying over.

The next day, it's worth the 35-minute drive to Fitchburg, home to **Thirsty Robot Brewing Company**. With house-smoked barbecue, pizzas, and Patriots games on a big-screen TV, Thirsty Robot is the perfect place to spend a wintry Sunday afternoon. Its beer menu is eclectic. Fan-favorite IPAs Clank and Anne Droid cohabit with a chocolate-coconut stout and a sour that tastes like Key lime pie. Have one for dessert.

Daniel McGinn is an executive editor of Harvard Business Review and a freelance travel writer. He has lived in central Massachusetts for 25 years.

Think Cider's Finer?

These apple-country destinations pour alcoholic beverages made with locally grown fruit.

By Jacqueline Cain



Johnny Appleseed's famous journey blossomed in the Heart of MA. While we may imagine the folk hero from Leominster with bushels of juicy fruit for snacking and baking, historians actually believe he propagated orchards to produce the nineteenth century's favorite boozy beverage. Today, Johnny's legacy lives on in hard-cider makers throughout the region.

Agromony Farm Vineyard, Oakham: Maple, McIntosh, and heirloom-apple trees coexist with nearly two acres of grape vines at this family farm. The tasting room, open weekends from early March until late December, offers wines

and semi-dry hard ciders, including an unfiltered style sweetened with Agronomy's own maple syrup.

Carlson Orchards, Harvard: Once the PYO season ends, the Cider Barn at this 100-acre orchard keeps spirits bright every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday with handcrafted hard ciders, flatbread pizzas, and seasonal fare.

Common Ground Ciderworks, North Brookfield: Fun flavored ciders like Salted Caramel and Winter Citrus—plus seltzers, slushies, and beers—make this spot a true hidden gem. The mostly outdoor outfit is open Thursday through

Sunday with fire pits and frequent live music (though it takes a brief winter break in January and February).

Lookout Farm Brewing & Cider Co., South Natick: One of the country's oldest farms dates back to 1650. It's now a thoroughly modern meeting place with a solar-powered operation growing fruit and hops to flavor ciders and beers served at the on-site restaurant. There's often live music on tap, too.

Red Apple Farm, Phillipston: This generations-old farm, a scenic stop off Route 2 overlooking Mount Wachusett, never slows down. Festivities like Winter Lights, which illuminates

the orchard with twinkling bulbs through December 31, keep travelers making the trek here. It doesn't hurt that the country store is abundantly stocked with gifts and delicious apple treats. Nor that the post-and-beam Brew Barn is also open daily, serving Red Apple Farm hard ciders, Moon Hill beers brewed in nearby Gardner, barbecue, and brick-oven pizza.

Stormalong Cider, Sherborn: The MetroWest community of Sherborn once claimed the world's largest refined cider mill. Now it's home to one of the Commonwealth's most popular cider makers. Stormalong doesn't have a tasting room, but you can try a flight at **Heritage**, the town's farm-to-table tavern and provisions shop.



FROM LEFT: The Zack Bolles Band plays acoustic covers at Lookout Farm Brewing & Cider Co., where the fruit is sometimes ripe for picking and the food is always good for eating; As their name suggests, Agronomy has the production of delightful cider down to a science.



MADE WITH HEART IN THE HEART OF MA

Savor all that's handmade, locally grown, and home cooked here.

By Jacqueline Cain



Even the working landscapes in the heart of Massachusetts are stunningly scenic. Rambling rural farmlands and riverside downtowns that have been a backdrop to history now provide the inspiration and raw materials for makers who contribute to the cultural identity of the area in creative ways. You'll want to shop, taste, and savor it all.

One-Stop Shops for Art and Crafts

Gift giving for any occasion is a joy when you visit one of these destination shops:

It's Christmas year round at the **Vaillancourt Folk Art Retail Gallery** in Sutton. Step into a wonder world of whimsical ornaments and

hand-painted chalkware figurines celebrating many holidays, seasons, and occasions. Vaillancourt has been making these collectibles in Massachusetts since 1984, and your first piece may just be the start of a new tradition.

Creative Connections is a sunny art gallery in Ashburnham with a gift shop presenting not only diverse works on canvas but also blown glass, artisan ceramics, wearable art, and stylish audio equipment made by emerging and mid-career artists from the Monadnock Region of north-central Mass.

In Worcester, New England's second-largest city, pop into **Crompton Collective**, a curated flea market of vintage picks and indie-made wares such as upcycled button

jewelry, vinyl art stickers, needle-felted animal ornaments, and sassy sewn baby bibs.

For timeless kitchen items like red-clay pottery and hand-formed tin cookware, shop the **Ox & Yoke Mercantile** at Old Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge, where those village-made crafts are beautifully displayed for sale.

More Art in Unique Spaces

Exemplifying creative reuse, vacant storefronts and former factory buildings throughout the heart of MA are now art galleries. Make a day out of visiting several.

Starlite Gallery is a haven for the arts in quaint downtown Southbridge that moonlights as a craft-cocktail bar. Rotating exhibits

of contemporary art hang on the walls while touring and local acts frequently fill the two-room storefront with music, poetry, or theater.

A one-time woolen mill, **Saxonville Mills** in Framingham is now a complex of 70 small businesses and workshops. Dozens of painters, photographers, and other artists enliven the high-ceilinged **Saxonville Studios** on the second floor of Building 2, displaying their creations and entertaining patrons in a shared lobby gallery.

A collective of artists' studios is hidden in plain sight within the Neiman Marcus wing of the **Natick Mall**. Part of the multi-state **Zero Empty Spaces** initiative to transform vacant storefronts into places for artists to create and collaborate, the mall's gallery sells work by these local visionaries.

Exercise Your Creativity

Feeling inspired by all you've seen? These cultural organizations can help you discover a new passion:

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sunburst lanterns and other tin decor items handcrafted at Old Sturbridge Village are sold at the attraction's gift shop and online; Vaillancourt figurines are cherished for their color, detail, and collectibility; You can keep your resolution to take up a new hobby by joining a class at the Worcester Center for Crafts.

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. Fight the urge to hibernate by trying something new, even if you only commit to a one-day workshop.

Fitchburg's **Diamond Hearts Art Studio** is readying a new multifunction space to be unveiled in Gardner in March 2024. Along with pour painting and resin art classes, the new gallery will bring vibrant programming to north-central Massachusetts with events like book signings by local authors and open mic nights.

Molly's Apothecary lets locals and visitors get their hands dirty—





LEFT, ABOVE, AND RIGHT: You don't need a golden ticket to taste the love Tom and Monica Rogan pour into their farm-based business, Goodnow Farms Chocolate; BELOW: Buttermilk cornbread adorned with homemade ricotta, lavender honey, and orange zest is a must on the menu at Buttercup.

yet clean at the same time. These makers of organic skin- and hair-care products, tucked inside a restored mill in Medway, host hands-on soap-making workshops and parties.

Local Flavor, from Trees to Table

The sweetest tastes in this region start with trees. How many can you sample?

Yes, chocolate grows on trees (or at least cacao beans do), and the most award-winning producer of fine chocolates in North America is located in a 225-year-old barn in Sudbury. **Goodnow Farms Chocolate** directly trades for single-origin cacao beans to craft gold-medal chocolate bars and hot cocoa. They don't have a retail store, but they offer factory tours on Thursdays beginning in late March. And you can mosey just down the road to **Duck Soup** to buy all of their products including hot cocoa.

There's no nonsense at **Pure BS Maple Shack**, a backyard maple farm in Auburn. Sap masters Bruce and Sully (the "BS" in question) tap sugar, Norwegian, and red maple trees by hand, and they offer free tours during the sugaring season in February and March.

Hollis Hills Farm in Fitchburg is the largest producer of maple in the eastern part of the Commonwealth. There are typically sugarhouse tours each weekend in March, and a buffet breakfast showcases the sweetness in season.

Brookfield Orchards in North Brookfield has a classic country store stocked with local products, antiques, and oddities. Cellared apples appeal year round (especially when dipped in chocolate fudge and sprinkles), and the 100-year-old orchard also crafts nonalcoholic sparkling cider sold by the four-pack.

Bolton Orchards in Bolton is

open daily year round for fresh cider doughnuts, locally roasted Red Barn Coffee, fresh-pressed sweet cider, and ice cream. Jarred jams, salsas, and preserves made with farm-grown produce assure a taste of high season any time.

Third-generation farm **Lanni Orchards** in Lunenburg is richly diverse, growing apples, pumpkins, and berries for picking. The farm store is stocked year round with house-baked sweet and savory pies, locally packaged meats, cheese, cider, soups, and coffee.

A breakfast-and-lunch restaurant, bakery, and farm store are welcoming year round at **Meadowbrook Orchards** in Sterling. Bring a cooler and take home easy meals like trays of homemade herb-stuffed chicken and eggplant parm, or just enjoy the quiet of the 100-acre farm with a cup of coffee from a perch on the porch. Try the apple-

cider-doughnut French toast and this won't be your last visit.

Bring binoculars to **Sholan Farms** in Leominster, which boasts 100 acres of trails and forests perfect for birdwatching, as well as 60 acres of working land. The community-run farm offers apple picking in season, Christmas trees, and an annual winter light show.

Unforgettable Meals Made with Love

Between Boston and Worcester, here are some of the best places to sample farm-to-table local fare:

As cozy as somebody's home (because it once was), **C'est La Vie Bistro** in Northborough serves Frenchy breakfast and lunch, such as crêpes and omelettes flipped to order and Le Burger, topped with whiskey-ale cheddar.

Popular brunch spot **The Farmer's Daughter** has locations in North Easton and Sudbury. Proprietor Chandra Gouldrup gets creative with comfort food, from a chef's-whim veggie hash to a Benedict with chive hollandaise to the sweet signature cornbread buckle: an old-fashioned bake topped with walnut streusel and apple-pumpkin butter.

Hudson eatery **Kith and Kin** is there for you all day with breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Husband-and-wife owners Joe and Amanda Boudreau simply serve what they like: build-your-own Bloody Marys every day of the week, local oysters on the half shell, slow-cooked French onion soup, rustic meatloaf with roasted-mushroom gravy, and scrumptious specials.

At **Buttercup**, a contemporary American restaurant in Natick, you'll love signature dishes like fried-halibut tacos topped with crunchy farm radishes, or thick ribbons of handmade pappardelle pasta with tender beef short ribs. Chef Dora Tavel-Sanchez Luz sources ingredients from her own Sunwashed Farm in Framingham.

Jacqueline Cain is a freelance writer who was born and raised in the heart of MA. She now lives in Boston.



HOW TO
SPEND A

Weekend

exploring
Central Massachusetts



Skate at Worcester Common Oval



local - BUCKET list -

Discover diverse cuisine
at Worcester Public Market

Snow tubing at Ski Ward

Planetarium show + hands-on
science at EcoTarium

Visit local breweries in
Worcester & beyond

Dine on Shrewsbury Street
in Worcester

Learn something new at
an art or history museum

See a show at Hanover Theatre
& Conservatory for the Performing Arts



GET
TICKETS:
before they
sell out!



Jack's Abby Craft Lagers

From breweries to bakeries,



Birchwood Bakery



Clafin Hill Symphony Orchestra

performing arts to adventure parks,



Urban Air Adventure Park



American Heritage Museum

history to mysteries,



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Attend the annual Pond Skim at Wachusett Mountain as a daredevil or spectator, and bid farewell to winter in memorable fashion.

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. Pond Skim, Wachusett Mountain, Princeton:** Watch for a date announcement as the snow melts and join in the madcap fun of this end-of-the-ski-season party. Costumes are mandatory for skiers who want to take a run that ends in a cold, cold pool of water. It's equally fun to be a spectator.
- 2. Paradise City Arts Festival, Marlborough:** It may still be gray outside in mid-March, but 200-plus of the most celebrated fine artists and craftspeople will color your world. Shop for vividly hued creations for you or those you love. Or both. Artists remind us there are no limits.
- 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 nearly 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 Hopkinton for almost a century. Celebrate that hundredth anniversary in 2024 by being at the starting line to see the runners off, then heading to **Start Line Brewing Company** to sip a Marathoner IPA. Sales support the **26.2 Foundation's** dream of building an 8,000-square-foot International Marathon Center here, with interactive exhibits including a running track.