

YANKEE

BEST OF

CONNECTICUT

Eat, Play & Stay



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BEST ATTRACTIONS IN CONNECTICUT

LOOKING FOR FUN IN THE NUTMEG STATE? YOU WON'T HAVE TO LOOK FAR! READ OUR PICKS FOR THE BEST ATTRACTIONS IN CONNECTICUT.

CINEMA OR DRIVE-IN

PROSPECTOR THEATER, Ridgefield

Lives forever changed. That's not just some Hollywood tag line at the Prospector, a 1940 movie house rescued from demolition that's become both a model for employment inclusivity and the state's most accessible entertainment venue. The nonprofit four-screen cinema pulses with playfulness and pride, from its sparkly purple lobby walls to its must-see preshows starring employees, most of whom are disabled adults fulfilling employment for the first time. Descriptive narration headsets and closed-caption glasses, low-mobility seating in prime viewing locations, and sensory screenings featuring turned-down audio, turned-up lights, and freedom to move about combine to make the thrills of moviegoing.

203-438-0136; prospectortheater.org

COASTAL CRUISE

MYSTIC WHALER CRUISES, New London

The winds of fate brought husband-and-wife captains John Eginton and Pat Beck together, and when you sail with this duo, the voyage—whether it's a brunch, lunch, or lobster dinner cruise or a multiday sleep-aboard adventure—will remind you that life's little clues only reveal themselves when your senses are fully awake. Aboard the half-century-old Mystic Whaler schooner, you'll savor every morsel of galley-cooked meals, rediscover simple joys such as conversing with friends, and find the relaxation that's eluded you on land.

860-447-1249; mysticwhalercruises.com

FAMILY ADVENTURE

NASKART, Montville

Head socks are required. That's the first clue that the world's largest multilevel indoor go-karting facility isn't just child's play. A full bar is clue two. Toasting victory costs extra, but your mandatory protective headwear is included with the small annual membership fee charged for access to twisting tracks that challenge even experienced drivers. It's easy to learn karting basics and safety rules. Racers must be 58 inches tall, but that doesn't mean little family members are left in the dust: A massive trampoline park has fun features for all.

860-444-7700; naskarttracing.com

FARMERS' MARKET

COVENTRY FARMERS' MARKET, Coventry

Connecticut's largest market for growers and makers tends to back up traffic for more than half a mile along the tree-lined road that leads to the Nathan Hale Homestead. So set out early and allow plenty of time to sample and shop for in-demand products such as Norm's Best marinated mushrooms and Dragon's Blood Elixir hot sauces, plus handcrafted gifts, meats, cheeses, and a cornucopia of just-picked produce. Live music, food trucks, and free tours of the historic farmhouse satisfy diverse Sunday Funday cravings. Weekly themes keep the vendor lineup fresh from June through October.

860-742-6917; coventryfarmersmarket.org



Best Garden Reincarnation | The Glebe House Museum & Gertrude Jekyll Garden, Woodbury
 Photograph by Julie Bidwell

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT – GARDEN REINCARNATION

THE GLEBE HOUSE MUSEUM & GERTRUDE JEKYLL GARDEN, Woodbury (1925)

Famed horticulturist Gertrude Jekyll designed more than 400 gardens in Europe. She lent her touch to only three in the U.S., and Connecticut's is the sole survivor. Garden lovers are enthralled by the story of how Jekyll's plans for the Glebe House grounds were lost, then rediscovered after a half-century and brought to life.

49 Hollow Road. 203-263-2855; glebehousemuseum.org

NATURE EXPERIENCE

BLACK HALL OUTFITTERS, Old Lyme

Sharp-eyed ospreys, eagles, and egrets know the 500-acre Great Island salt marsh well, but odds are you've never heard of this paddling paradise. The savvy folks at Black Hall Outfitters are determined to introduce first-time and experienced kayakers to the wildlife refuge's serene and shallow waters, which few humans have explored. Rent kayaks or SUPs, book a guided ecotour, or join a small group for a sunset outing, when each dip of a paddle sends iridescent ripples through the brackish liquid.

860-434-9680; blackhalloutfitters.com

NEW CULTURAL ATTRACTION

THE STORYTELLERS' COTTAGE, Simsbury

Is that bookcase laden with antique volumes a secret door to a castle chamber? Of course it is. From the steampunk library to the Jane Austen salon, every room in this storybook Victorian is filled with details to create a book lover's bliss. Since her literary attraction's debut, Lisa Natcharian has embraced every plot twist, allowing diverse activities to flourish within the enchanting spaces she's created. Visit during free open hours, when quiet nooks beckon to readers and writers, or attend a book talk, workshop, or vintage-themed event. Mystery-room "escape" games for any-age groups are best-sellers.

860-877-6099; storytellerscottage.com

SHORT HIKE

TALCOTT MOUNTAIN TOWER TRAIL, Simsbury

The visual rewards far outweigh the moderate effort required to hike the 1¼-mile trail up Talcott Mountain. Pause often to admire ever-expanding views of the verdant Farmington Valley; to the southeast, Hartford's skyline juts up from the waves of green, looking regal and remote. Climb to the top of 165-foot-tall Heublein Tower, built as a summer residence in 1914. You'll be following in the footsteps of presidents Eisenhower and Reagan, who visited back when this mountaintop exclamation point was owned by The Hartford Times.

860-242-1158; ct.gov/deep

SPECIALTY MUSEUM

NEW ENGLAND CAROUSEL MUSEUM AND MUSEUM OF FIRE HISTORY, Bristol

A rented space, a single carousel horse, a dream. Fast-forward 28 years, and this Bristol nonprofit now owns the 1837 factory building that houses a collection of 150 artfully carved carousel animals, plus a plethora of carnival memorabilia, a restoration workshop, a thunderous band organ, and a fully operating Venetian carousel you're invited to ride. After an exhilarating spin, head upstairs to view installations devoted to firefighting history and Greek culture. Curious why they're here? Ask your guide.

860-585-5411; thecarouselmuseum.org

SPORTS EXPERIENCE

365 SYNTHETIC SNOW PARK AT POWDER RIDGE, Middlefield

Skis? Check. Ski boots? Check. Helmet? Check. Snow? No longer required—not even on the hottest July day. Last year Middlefield's small but spunky Powder Ridge became the Northeast's first (and the nation's fourth) ski area to install a synthetic skiing and snowboarding slope, plus two year-round, carpet lift-serviced “snow” tubing lanes. It takes only a handful of runs to adjust to the feel of the polymer surface, which mimics hard-packed snow. Downhill mountain biking and a free Saturday-night summer concert series add to the mountain's burgeoning off-season appeal.

866-860-0208; powderridgepark.com

FARM EXPERIENCE

SUNFLOWER MAZE AT LYMAN ORCHARDS, Middlefield

Sunflowers—350,000 of them—tower above your head, their wall-to-wall angelic faces glowing with daylight. This room without a roof is the happiest place you've ever been lost. The annual Sunflower Maze makes August the best month to visit the Lyman family's agritainment complex, with pick-your-own fields, the Apple Barrel market, even 45 holes of golf. Maze proceeds benefit the Connecticut Children's Medical Center's pediatric-cancer unit.

32 Reeds Gap Rd. 860-349-1793; lymanorchards.com/events/sunflower-maze

FREE MUSEUM

SUBMARINE FORCE MUSEUM & HISTORIC SHIP NAUTILUS, Groton

Climb down into the narrow passageways of the USS Nautilus and imagine a submerged voyage to the North Pole aboard this record-shattering, Connecticut-built vessel. Audio tours of the world's first nuclear-powered submarine—which made headlines by journeying 20,000 leagues under the sea—are the highlight of visiting this museum.

1 Crystal Lake Rd. 860-694-3174; ussnautilus.org

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT – CONCERT VENUE

INFINITY MUSIC HALL & BISTRO, Norfolk (1883)

Infinity has a new big sister in Hartford now, but the original 300-seat music hall still hosts the state's most memorable concerts. Architecturally fabulous and acoustically superb, the venue is so intimate, it feels as though living legends are performing just for you.

20 Greenwoods Rd. 866-666-6306; infinityhall.com

NEW DOWNTOWN

STORRS CENTER, Storrs

Connecticut is rightfully proud of UConn's academic and athletic accomplishments, and the all-new dining and shopping district that's sprung up steps from campus is the place to embrace Huskymania. Tour the university's colorful, free Ballard Institute & Museum of Puppetry. Shop for UConn gear at the Co-op. Dine at Geno's Grille, and take home the Hall of Fame women's basketball coach's almost-as famous pasta sauces.

9 Dog Ln. storrscenter.com

SPECIALTY WINES

ARRIGONI WINERY, Portland

Want to pair wine with pancakes or pumpkin pie? Arrigoni's specialty wines are subtly crafted, and your tasting favorites may surprise you. Chocolate Love, a red blend, has just hints of the chocolate infused at the end. Smashed Pumpkin is a crisp, autumnal white made with locally grown fruit. And maple-syrup-sweetened Sugar House belongs on your breakfast table.

1287 Portland-Cobalt Road. 860-342-1999; arrigoniwinery.com

NOSTALGIC PICNIC SPOT

FROG ROCK REST STOP, Eastford

The boulder that State Representative T.J. Thurber painted in 1881 was a popular picnic backdrop for generations. But when Route 44 was straightened, Frog Rock was no longer roadside, and the site became overgrown and vandalized. In 2013, new landowner Joe Lernould repainted the quirky attraction and opened an antiques shop and food truck. It's worth the drive for buttery hot dogs, lobster rolls, and photo ops.

212 Pomfret Road. 860-942-0131; facebook.com/FrogRockEastfordCt

AUCTIONS

CANTON BARN, Canton

Forget eBay. Get in on the old-fashioned action, as auctioneer Richard Wacht and his partner, Susan Goralski, disperse estates before your eyes most Saturday nights. Order a slice of homemade pie, grab a seat cushion, and raise your hand to bid. There's no buyer's premium and no reserve. From fine furnishings to quirky possessions, everything's going home with new owners.

75 Old Canton Road. 860-693-0601; cantonbarn.com

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT

BEST UNDERGROUND DESTINATION CENTER CHURCH CRYPT, New Haven (1814)

Duck down into the basement of Center Church for a spine-tingling encounter with New Haven's early settlers. Visiting hours on Thursdays and Saturdays April through October introduce you to the crypt's inhabitants, who perished between 1687 and 1812. Notables include Benedict Arnold's first wife and Rutherford Hayes's ancestors. Colonial epitaphs still stir emotions.

311 Temple St. 203-787-0121; centerchurchonthegreen.org

BEACH

HAMMONASSET BEACH STATE PARK, Madison

Buoyant waves, two miles of sugary sand, nearly 600 campsites, cycling paths: "Good bones," as they say, but battering tropical storms left Connecticut's biggest beach craving a facelift. By Memorial Day, more than \$10.5 million in enhancements will be revealed, including new bathhouse and concession buildings and an interactive, immersive, 4,000-square-foot nature center with a circular touch tank and live animal displays.

1288 Boston Post Road. 203-245-2785; ct.gov/deep/hammonasset

ADVENTURE

ADVENTURE ROOMS, Middletown

It's like a video game IRL (in real life). "Room escape is fairly new in the U.S.," says game specialist Josh Becker of this craze imported from Europe and Asia. Reserve your experience for two to eight adults; enter a strange environment inside historic Sanseer Mill; solve your way out in 60 minutes. Your smartphone won't save you; street smarts might. Only 30 percent of teams succeed, but "an amazing time" is guaranteed, or the adventure is free.

282 Main St. Extension. 860-358-9130; myadventurerooms.com/connecticut

FLEA MARKET

ELEPHANT'S TRUNK COUNTRY FLEA MARKET, New Milford

It costs peanuts to treasure-hunt at Connecticut's largest flea market. But serious shoppers pay extra before 7:00 a.m. for dibs on what's sprouted in this field of extremes. Each Sunday, nearly 500 sellers parade out antiques, collectibles, and curiosities, from chainsaw art to deep-discount Cheez-Its. The mesmerizing variety has kept this colorful bazaar going strong for 40 years.

490 Danbury Road. 860-355-1448; etflea.com

FAMILY ATTRACTION

MARITIME AQUARIUM AT NORWALK, Norwalk

Harbor seals' antics tickle preschoolers. Tweens can spend all day petting jellies, sharks, and stingrays. Even Game of Thrones-loving grown-ups find the dragons—including America's only black dragon on public view—fascinating. Add in IMAX movies and excursions aboard a revolutionary new \$2.7 million hybrid electric research vessel, and the only aquarium devoted to Long Island Sound is an all-day fun destination.

10 North Water St. 203-852-0700; maritimeaquarium.org



Best Family Attraction | Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk, Norwalk
Photograph courtesy of The Maritime Aquarium

TOURIST HOT SPOT

LAKE COMPOUNCE, Bristol

There's something for everyone here: water rides, classic rides, kiddie rides, dance and comedy shows—and, of course, roller coasters and thrill rides. America's oldest amusement park celebrates 170 years of smiles and screams with its biggest investment yet in 2016. The magnetically propelled Phobia Phear Coaster—the first triple-launch roller coaster in the Northeast—will race at speeds of up to 65 mph and flip riders at 150 feet in the air, one of the highest inversions ever achieved. It's the most hotly anticipated new thrill in park history.

186 Enterprise Drive. 860-583-3300; lakecompounce.com

RAIL TRAIL

AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL, East Hampton to Thompson

Jog, walk, or pedal any or all of the 50-mile, flat, easy, gravel trail that cuts a diagonal through northeastern Connecticut, and you'll marvel at the same scenes that enchanted well-heeled "Ghost Train" passengers at the turn of the 20th century. The gold-trimmed, white-painted Pullman cars have vanished, but this stretch of the "Air Line" from New York to Boston has been reincarnated as a public path over viaducts and bridges, through wetlands and farmlands and forest preserves, for walkers, hikers, horseback riders, bikers, and cross-country skiers. See the website for downloadable maps.

860-295-9523; ct.gov/deep/airlinetrail

NEW MUSEUM

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF TORT LAW, Winsted

Consumer advocate and four-time presidential candidate Ralph Nader was the driving force behind the nation's first law-focused museum, which debuted last fall; that's why it's in his Connecticut hometown. Inside, you'll see a Corvair—the car Nader famously railed against in *Unsafe at Any Speed*—plus other exhibits and information on "cases that made a difference."

654 Main St. 860-379-0505; tortmuseum.org

SPORTS OUTING

HARTFORD YARD GOATS, Hartford

The Eastern League AA New Britain Rock Cats have a new home and a new name, but affordable family entertainment is still the game. Yard goats are workhorse locomotives in a rail-yard, and the ball club's identity, selected via a name-the-team contest, is such a home run that logowear shipped to all 50 states months before 6,000-seat, 360-degree Dunkin' Donuts Park was constructed. New and cherished traditions and promotions highlight 71 inaugural-season home games.

1214 Main St. (stadium), 99 Pratt St. (team office). 860-259-1039; milb.com

CRUISE

CROSS SOUND FERRY LIGHTHOUSE CRUISE, New London

From the sundeck, the bow, or the windowed, climate-controlled cabins of the fast-gliding SeaJet catamaran, you'll spy eight architecturally distinctive lighthouses and hear knowledgeable narrator Ted Webb's tales of pirates, ghosts, and historic events. Bonus sights during these two-hour Long Island Sound voyages frequently include sunbathing gray seals, the world's largest population of nesting common terns, and nuclear-powered submarines.

2 Ferry St. 860-443-5281; longislandferry.com

BREWERY

STONY CREEK BREWERY, Branford

Boat parking and Branford River views from multilevel, indoor/outdoor gathering spaces set this ultra-modern 2015 newcomer apart from the growing field of breweries in Connecticut. On a tour, learn how brewmaster Andy Schwartz, who's made beer for 20 years, hybridizes hoppy West Coast and fruit-forward East Coast recipes to craft his potent trio of "Cranky" IPAs.

5 Indian Neck Ave. 203-433-4545; stonycreekbeer.com

COMMUNITY THEATER

BRADLEY PLAYHOUSE, Putnam

This 115-year-old vaudeville theater in the heart of a revitalized mill town is home stage for a nonprofit, all-volunteer troupe that performs musicals, dramas, and comedies for enthralled audiences. The talent, staging, costuming, and effects are so superb, you'll swear this can't be 170 miles off Broadway.

30 Front St. 860-928-7887; thebradleyplayhouse.org

CHEESE LOVERS' OUTING

CHEESE SCHOOL OF CT AT FAIRFIELD & GREENWICH CHEESE COMPANY, Fairfield & Cos Cob
Cheesemongers Laura Downey and Chris Palumbo fill their shops' cases with rare selections, including New England's most sought-after artisanal cheeses. On Cheese School nights, they'll teach you to love and understand cheese with an ardor you usually reserve for your sweetheart.

2090 Post Rd., Fairfield; 203-292-8194. 154 East Putnam Ave., Cos Cob; 203-340-9227; fairfieldcheese.com/cheese-school

BEST LODGING IN CONNECTICUT

LOOKING TO REST YOUR HEAD IN THE NUTMEG STATE? WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED! CHECK OUT OUR PICKS FOR THE BEST LODGING IN CONNECTICUT.

CAMPGROUND

HIDDEN ACRES FAMILY CAMPGROUND, PRESTON

Every activity on a 1960s kid's summer to-do list is offered at this tucked-in-the-trees campground. Bring your tent or RV or rent a cabin, and within an hour of checking in you'll feel like part of a big family. The pride that Bill and Priscilla Migliaccio and their children take in preserving traditions that stretch back to 1972—when Bill's father bought Boy Scout Camp Quinebaug—makes this the rare destination where multigenerational bonds are knit tight. Kids will remember river tubing, fire truck rides, Saturday night dances, and free-ranging like the campground's resident muster of peacocks.

860-887-9633; hiddenacrescamp.com

CITY STAY, AFFORDABLE

THE QUINNIPIACK CLUB, NEW HAVEN

Connecticut's best lodging deal is unadvertised and exceedingly unusual. Walk past the colonial-looking brick "Q Club" building a half block from the New Haven Green, and you'd never know that nonmembers can instantly gain temporary memberships by booking one of 21 guest rooms. Fine dining and room service; billiard room, duckpin bowling alley, and 24-hour health club; and opportunities to view art and socialize with interesting professionals—these experiences, along with inexpensive rates (from \$115), make it easy to forgive the rooms' outdated decor. Plus, your stay helps sustain this 147-year-old community organization.

203-562-3147; graduateclub.com

CITY STAY, UPSCALE

THE GOODWIN, HARTFORD

Hartford's grand dame hotel awoke last summer from a nine-year slumber looking as alluring as ever on the outside and dramatically rejuvenated on the inside. It's not the first rebirth for this 1881 Queen Anne-style red-brick-and-terracotta building, but it's a quantum leap forward for capital visitors who appreciate high-tech amenities, enticing dining, and a soothingly contemporary design aesthetic. Just enough woodwork and other architectural details have been preserved to honor the hotel's original grandeur.

860-246-1881; goodwinhartford.com

HISTORIC INN

BOARDMAN HOUSE INN, EAST HADDAM

An expertise in architectural restoration makes Swedish innkeepers Andre and Mia Hylander ideal stewards of this 1860 mansion, built in dramatic Second Empire style more than a dozen years before Goodspeed Musicals' famous opera house debuted nearby. You'll perceive only comfort—in touches like downy bedding and heated bathroom floors—and none of the labor that the Hylanders put into fashioning this peaceful retreat. Claim a wicker porch chair and listen for the occasional strains of performers rehearsing their songs, as Goodspeed's Artists Village for visiting talent is adjacent to the inn.

860-873-9233; boardmanhouse.com

INN FOR FOODIES

ROGER SHERMAN INN, NEW CANAAN

“Celebrity chef” doesn’t do Francois Kwaku-Dongo justice. The Wolfgang Puck protégé has been a superhero in the fight to save this landmark inn, which was on the brink of doom a year ago. With local support and a worldly vision, Kwaku-Dongo has boosted the property’s culinary profile. Evolving menus nimbly leap from pan-seared New England seafood to classic French dishes. Stay overnight in one of 17 simple yet spacious rooms, and you can linger late over chocolate desserts handcrafted with fair-trade Omanhene chocolate from Ghana (another of Kwaku-Dongo’s admirable endeavors).

203-966-4541; rogershermaninn.com

LAKESIDE LODGING

THE HOPKINS INN, WARREN

Even as competing inns that once ringed Lake Waramaug have fallen into private hands, Beth and Franz Schober—owners of the Hopkins Inn for 42 years and counting—have remained resolute that views of Connecticut’s prettiest lake should be shared. The cheery c. 1847 inn’s 12 rooms aren’t huge, but they’re priced reasonably, considering that many look out on the hill-surrounded lake. Son Toby’s European-inspired fare and an extensive wine list make lakeside outdoor dining popular even after dark. Sweaters are available to borrow: True hospitality is all about warmth.

860-868-7295; thehopkinsinn.com

NEW HOTEL

DELAMAR, WEST HARTFORD

With glossy magazine-worthy common areas, bold art on loan from the New Britain Museum of American Art, and champagne at check-in, Blue Back Square’s long-awaited boutique hotel is astonishingly sophisticated for its suburban location. Even visitors who aren’t staying in the quiet, natural light-filled guest rooms can book a restful session at the hotel’s European-style spa and savor farm-to-table fare at the indoor-outdoor restaurant Artisan, where the chef’s garden and dreamily illuminated pergola create the illusion that this is wine country, not West Hartford.

860-937-2500; delamar.com/west-hartford

OCEANSIDE LODGING

THE KELSEY HOUSE B&B, BRANFORD

Any thoughts weighing on you will dissolve the instant you step up to this Victorian cottage’s porch. On a clear day, you can see Long Island from this Maine-esque rocky point; ospreys nest on neighboring Kelsey Island. Innkeeper Susan Kelsey’s great-grandfather built the house, which she and husband Ken Olson now happily share with guests. Her ancestors—some of Connecticut’s earliest settlers—discovered this spot while searching for fish bone-meal fertilizer. Now, visitors in pursuit of calm are nourished by water views and three-course breakfasts starring freshly baked, seasonally inspired muffins.

203-481-5207; kelseyhousebb.com

ROMANTIC GETAWAY

THE WALLINGFORD VICTORIAN INN, WALLINGFORD

Built as a wedding present in 1891, this Queen Anne-style inn offers modern couples the gift they crave: carefree time away. Five posh suites are stocked with everything needed to unwind. The decor is period-inspired, yet restrained. Custom-cooked breakfasts are served at private, candlelit tables. And while restaurants and shops are just a two-block walk away, you’ll be content to porch-sit, play backyard chess, or listen to the player piano’s nostalgic tunes.

203-265-1200; thewallingfordvictorian.com

FAMILY CAMPGROUND

BEAR CREEK CAMPGROUND, Bristol

A day at Lake Compounce, America's oldest amusement park, is doubly fun when you're just a short tram ride away from marshmallow toasting and movie nights. An on-site campground is Lake Compounce's newest thrill. Bring your own tent or RV, or rent a cabin or handcrafted tipi—with electricity.

185 Enterprise Dr. 860-583-3300; campbearcreek.com

MOTEL

MILESTONE INN, Woodbury

It's a motel by definition: Doors open to the outside world. But once you're behind closed guestroom doors at this affordable lodging option in the heart of antiques country, you'll swear you're staying at a fine country inn.

146 South Pomperaug Ave. 203-405-6261; milestoneinnct.com

COLONIAL INN

LATHROP MANOR, Norwich

When a house has stood longer than the U.S. has been a nation, its 12-over-12 windows still intact, its hand-hewn wood beams testament to colonial builders' talents, its wide floorboards lovingly restored, it's bound to pack some history. Sit down to breakfast at the period table that Marco Middleton crafted in his woodshop, and be wowed by course after course made with farm-fresh ingredients.

380 Washington St. 860-204-9448; lathropmanor.com

GUEST HOUSE

THREE STORIES AT SAYBROOK POINT INN & SPA, Old Saybrook

The Saybrook Point Inn's owners couldn't bear to watch the 1892 Italianate mansion across the street crumble. Their rescue effort, completed in 2014, has made eight designer rooms—themed to honor prominent locals, including Katharine Hepburn's mother—available to adult guests.

2 Bridge St. 860-323-0143; saybrook.com/rooms/three-stories

WATERSIDE LUXURY

VILLAS BY THE SEA AT WATER'S EDGE, Westbrook

You can't stay closer to the water in Connecticut than these 20 sleek, spacious two-bedroom suites outfitted with gourmet kitchens and gas fireplaces. Built in 2013 for eventual sale as private beach condos, the newest accommodations at the multifaceted and enduring Water's Edge Resort sleep six and are rentable by the night or the week.

1525 Boston Post Rd. 860-399-5901; ownwatersedge.com

SPA ESCAPE

THE MAYFLOWER GRACE, Washington

Acquired by Grace Hotels in 2013, Connecticut's notoriously luxurious 30-room country manor reinvented its uber-exclusive spa—open only to guests and members—last year, featuring the country's only wellness experiences that utilize Earth Matters Apothecary's formulations for delivering nutrients via the skin. A quiz determines the balancing blend for your body type and personality.

118 Woodbury Rd. 860-868-9466; gracehotels.com/mayflower

BOUTIQUE HOTEL

ELIHU SPICER MANSION, Mystic

A neglected, fire-damaged, overgrown apartment building is a splendid mansion again. Guests slumber beneath stunning plasterwork and muraled ceilings uncovered during the Gates family's two-year effort to rescue this Victorian sea captain's home. With Mystic's loftiest views, locally procured breakfast fare, and the option to savor an eight-course dinner, Tomas Gates promises that an overnight is "an event."

15 Elm St. 855-679-2468; spicermansion.com



Best Historic Inn: The Griswold Inn, Essex
Photograph by Lori Pedrick

HISTORIC INN

THE GRISWOLD INN, Essex

There's no inn in America with a longer continuous record of welcoming, nourishing, and entertaining guests. The Paul family has updated the Gris a bit—the wine bar's a big hit—while devoting 20 years to fiercely preserving its traditions. Nightly live music in the Tap Room is more reliable than the postal service.

36 Main St. 860-767-1776; griswoldinn.com

ROMANTIC INN

INN AT STONINGTON, Stonington

This 18-room charmer is romance central, with fireplaces and Jacuzzis in most rooms—and restaurants, shops, a lighthouse museum, and a secluded little beach only steps away. Famous for repelling the British Navy with just three cannons in 1814, Stonington is still lighting sparks for couples both newly and eternally in love.

60 Water St. 860-535-2000; innatstonington.com

INTIMATE RETREAT

THE INN AT WOODSTOCK HILL, Woodstock

If it's privacy you crave, this 19th-century country estate, with an exceptional fine-dining restaurant, is the rare off-the-beaten-path place where you can order duck à l'orange in your room. Ready to venture out of your elegantly appointed hideaway? Historic sights, farms, and a British tearoom are all a short walk away.

94 Plaine Hill Road. 860-928-0528; woodstockhill.com

BEST DINING IN CONNECTICUT

HUNGRY? THE NUTMEG STATE OFFERS PLENTY OF RESTAURANT OPTIONS FOR HUNGRY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS ALIKE. HERE ARE OUR PICKS FOR THE BEST FOOD & DINING IN CONNECTICUT.

BURGERS

PRIME 16, NEW HAVEN

In the city that lays claim to the first-ever hamburger, America's favorite meal on a bun is being reinvented. Prime 16 is a boisterous den of beer and beef, where the creative team behind juicy, high-stacked menu stars like the honey-truffle burger is sometimes outdone by diners who go the build-your-own route. The math gets a little crazy when you calculate possible combinations of nine distinct patties, from bison to vegetarian; dozens of cheeses and toppings; and 20 house-made condiments—particularly when you factor in the unconventional craft-beverage selections pouring out of 20 taps. Additional locations in Orange and Pelham. 203-782-1616; prime16.com

CHEF'S TABLE

PRESENT COMPANY, TARIFFVILLE

In 2016, pedigreed and passionate chef Jeffrey Lizotte ditched downtown Hartford's most elevated kitchen, On20, to catapult this rustic yet refined 50-seat restaurant in his suburban hometown to the top of Connecticut's culinary heap. With co-owner Tom Gale wrangling details, Lizotte is free to incessantly outdo himself, fashioning never-tasted dishes from fresh-harvested ingredients. The sizzle and steam, the smells, the chance to talk shop with the mastermind behind five-course tasting menus—and to witness the precision Lizotte demands from his team—make courtside seats at the open kitchen's counter the best in the house. 860-658-7890; presentcompanyct.com

DOUGHNUTS

DONUT CRAZY, SHELTON

Mmm ... maple-bacon doughnuts. If the mere thought of syrup-glazed orbs encrusted in bacon hunks has you drooling, you'll understand why this only-in-Connecticut chain is the state's sweetest success story. Now with four locations (and two in the works), Donut Crazy has achieved doughnut domination by constantly unleashing new flavors with wow-factor taste and visual appeal—and by offering evening hours for fans who know that crème brûlée, s'mores, and cannoli doughnuts are worthy desserts. 203-538-5560; donutcrazyct.com

FARM-TO-TABLE

PLANTIN' SEEDS FARM KITCHEN, CANAAN

Sit down to a meal; leave deeply aware of the oneness of all humanity. It's an ambitious mission, yes. Yet connections are sparked whenever this Canaan storefront restaurant serves its family-style, farm-fresh fare. Ingredients for each evening's feast are sourced from local agricultural enterprises, including Plantin' Seeds founder Dale McDonald's own Pom's Cabin Farm. You'll be warmly greeted and invited to take the next seat available in this communal (but solo diner-friendly) country kitchen. Leave a cash donation after you polish off dessert. The price you pay for healthy nourishment and conversation is entirely up to you. 860-453-4363; plantinseeds.org/kitchen

HOT DOGS

JACK RABBITS AND THE RABBIT HOLE TAVERN, OLD SAYBROOK

A citrus-bright, family-friendly café? Or a dimly lit bar serving boozy milkshakes? Whichever door you choose at this two-for-one dining destination, you'll be among hot dog devotees. It can be excruciating, choosing among traditional styles and amped-up originals (like the One-Eyed Jack, slathered with caramelized onions, bacon, corn relish, and mustard), all with Hummel, kosher beef, kielbasa, red hot, turkey, and vegetarian dog options. And that's before you notice the game changer: lobster hot dogs. These hand-rolled, soy paper-wrapped tubes of buttered, shredded lobster are as decadent as dogs get. Try the Angry Red Dragon topped with red chili mayo and onion-jalapeño relish.

860-510-0048; jackrabbitsct.com

NEW RESTAURANT

THE ESSEX, CENTERBROOK

Chef Colt Taylor has come home to Essex, Connecticut—not merely to launch a restaurant but rather to invent his own chic culinary world, where local and upscale ingredients are as meldable as Play-Doh in a preschooler's clutches. Inside a deceptively staid Tudor mansion, the spontaneous energy of a live cooking show swirls through brightly lit open kitchens, a bar stocked with artisan spirits, and a gourmet market. Expect unpredictable menus, particularly if you opt for omakase-style tasting experiences hosted in the quieter Hearth. Trust Taylor to startle your palate, even if you're no stranger to adventurous dining.

860-237-4189; theessex.com

SEAFOOD SHACK

CAPTAIN SCOTT'S LOBSTER DOCK, NEW LONDON

When the occasional train rolls by, you'll catch a look in the eyes of window-side passengers that's easy to identify: envy. So be thankful you braved the line at this waterside, open-air, BYOB seafood-feasting spot. The wait gives you time to build your dream order: steamers and butter-splashed lobster roll, whole bellies and flaky fried fish. Besides, cooling your heels for a bit is nothing compared with the owners' ancestor's act of endurance. As legend has it, Captain Thomas A. Scott saved hundreds aboard a sinking ferry in 1870 by "corking" a hole with his body for more than an hour.

860-439-1741; captscottsnl.com

STEAKHOUSE

GABRIELE'S ITALIAN STEAKHOUSE, GREENWICH

Want VIP treatment at a sumptuous old-world steak emporium? Simply walk through the doors of this celebrity-magnet restaurant, where polished, personable servers and trivia-slinging general manager Tony Capasso make every guest feel entertained and indulged. Order a glass of wine: A third of a bottle arrives in an extra-large goblet. Pastas are homemade; the filet mignon is fork-cuttable. Spicy, juicy charred broccoli is the star of the sides, although the football-size stuffed baked potatoes are contenders.

203-622-4223; gabrielesofgreenwich.com

VEGETARIAN

G-ZEN, BRANFORD

The message isn't preachy, but it's clear: This snug, all-organic restaurant is powered by plants. Still, one bite of the raw taco will immediately have you wondering how a vegan concoction can taste so meaty, so satisfying. Chefs and farmers Mark and Ami Shadle are driven to make healthful, sustainable cuisine accessible and inventive. Burgers, pizza, pastas—even a rich lemon-lavender "cheesecake"—are familiar yet ingeniously crafted without animal-derived ingredients. The same conscientiousness goes into the lineup of elixirs, cocktails, wines, and craft brews.

203-208-0443; g-zen.com

WATERFRONT DINING

SHELL & BONES, NEW HAVEN

The boat-filled waters of New Haven Harbor are visible not just from the deck, with its fire pits for warmth and pizzazz, but also from practically every seat inside this subtly nautical restaurant with an open floor plan. Cleverly named to reference both the Yale secret society Skull and Bones and the superfresh seafood (such as black garlic cod as thick as filet mignon) crowding the surf and turf menu, Shell & Bones is a place where playful plating and exotic flavor twists will have you conflicted about whether to gaze at your meal or the sunset views. 203-787-3466; shellandbones.com

SUSHI

MIYA'S SUSHI, New Haven

Don't expect tuna: This is futuristic sushi for the adventurous! Chef Bun Lai is so passionate about sustainability that he maintains his own seaweed and shellfish beds and trains his team to dive and fish. Do your part to rid the world of pests by selecting from the invasive-species menu. Ordering Kanibaba, a dish made with Asian shore crabs, is the tastiest thing you can do to clean up Long Island Sound.

68 Howe St. 203-777-9760; miyassushi.com

BAR FOOD

ENGINE ROOM, Mystic

Want bacon-fat caramel popcorn with that "BIG stack" double cheeseburger with smoky secret sauce? That's an easy decision compared with choosing from 50+ rare and wide-ranging bottled and draft beers. The team that catapulted Mystic's Oyster Club to acclaim has transformed the riverside Lathrop Marine Engine factory into the home of grown-up happy meals.

14 Holmes St. 860-415-8117; engineroomct.com

HIDDEN LOBSTER SHACK

LOBSTER LANDING, Clinton

Situated down a narrow drive, this marina-side shack is tricky to find. Don't bother searching online; they don't have a website. What they do have—headlining a menu board that typically features only three items—is toasted sub rolls loaded with a quarter-pound of freshly shelled, lemon-spritzed, butter-slathered lobster. A heated tent extends the season through December.

152 Commerce St. 860-669-2005

LOCAVORE EXPERIENCE

COMMUNITY TABLE, Washington

Yes, that's a beehive out back: Taste the honey in a Bee's Knees cocktail as you're indoctrinated into the practice of mindful dining. Chef Joel Viehland sources raw materials from a who's who of local, ethical growers, foragers, and producers. The black-walnut tables were made from trees cut down in the back yard and the hand soaps in the restrooms are made by the pastry chef.

223 Litchfield Turnpike. 860-868-9354; communitytablect.com

CUPCAKES

HARDCORE SWEET CUPCAKES, Watertown

He plays guitar in a hardcore punk band and rocks at rolling fondant. She went from baking for their kids' parties to inventing decadent grown-up treats like Drunk Jack Balls (beer-fudge and pumpkin-ale cake truffles). Since winning Cupcake Wars in 2013, Jeremy and Nicole Braddock's edgy, irreverent sweets have been all the rage.

20 Main St. 860-417-6660; hardcoresweetcupcakes.com

SPORTS BAR

BOBBY V'S RESTAURANT & SPORTS BAR, Windsor Locks

Connecticut native and former Major League Baseball manager Bobby Valentine's latest venture isn't fandom central just because the largest of its 70+ indoor and outdoor TVs is 17 feet wide. Culinary Institute of America-trained chef Jordan Stein hits a home run with filet mignon sliders and nachos grande enough to be a meal.

11 Schoephoester Road. 860-627-5808; bobbyvsrestaurant.com

BIG-CITY DINING IN COW COUNTRY

ARETHUSA AL TAVOLO, Litchfield

Arethusa Farm owners and Manolo Blahnik execs George Malkemus and Anthony Yurgaitis added a restaurant to their agrarian empire in 2013. Chef Dan Magill styles dishes such as Foraged Mushrooms & Arethusa Camembert Ravioli with primo ingredients, including dairy delights from Arethusa's famously pampered cows. Service is extraordinary; the vibe unpretentious. You'll wish that every meal of your life ended as blissfully with a shot glass of milk and a cookie.

828 Bantam Rd. 860-567-0043; arethusaaltavolo.com

MEATLESS CAFÉ

THE MUSICAL FOREST CAFÉ, North Haven

Think meatless dining isn't satisfying? Try the vegan-bacon mac-and-cheese panini at this tiny tiki bar inside the Music Center of North Haven. When owner Mark Minotti's serious illness responded positively to a macrobiotic diet, he decided to share his newfound knowledge. Burgers, Philly cheesesteak, and Costa Rican empanadas are all on the menu, as are vegan baked goods. Minotti handmakes all of the "meats."

473 Washington Ave. 203-234-8865; musiccenternorth.com/Stagetime-Cafe.html



Best Big City Dining in Cow Country | Arethusa al tavolo, Litchfield
Photograph by Julie Bidwell

BREAKFAST

THE SLOPPY WAFFLE, Newington

Pearl sugar from beets in the dough makes Liège waffles rich, crispy-sweet, and nothing like any other batter waffle you've tasted before. Now imagine Belgium's gift to the world topped with apple cobbler, s'mores, bananas Foster. It gets better: Regulars are gaga for chicken and waffles drizzled with real maple syrup, and the "Sloppy Waffle," topped with any-style eggs, bacon or sausage, cheese, and maple syrup, is reason to wear your loosest-fitting pants. 2551 Berlin Tpke. 860-436-6893; thesloppywaffle.com

LOBSTER

FORD'S LOBSTER, Noank

When a mere lobster roll won't do, try a "Lobster Bomb": a tender, grilled sourdough bread bowl heaped full of cold or hot buttered lobster. Yes, it will blow up your wallet. But paired with lobster-rich bisque, it's plenty for two, and the BYOB policy at this waterside marina deck with table service (and indoor seating off-season) will save you some dough. 15 Riverview Ave. 860-536-2842; facebook.com/fordslobster

ICE CREAM FLAVORS

GRASS ROOTS ICE CREAM, Granby

Don't get too attached to scoops of "Salted Caramel Bacon Brittle," "Blood Orange Chocolate Chip," or "Goat Cheese & Wild Blueberries." The mad-genius ice-cream artisans behind this teeny creamery's surging popularity incessantly shake up the chalkboard menu, offering about 30 all-natural flavors from their repertoire of hundreds—handcrafted on site in small batches—at any given time.

4 Park Place. 860-653-6303; grassrootsicecream.com

SWEET SHOP

TSCHUDIN CHOCOLATES & CONFECTIONS, Middletown

Filmmaker, TV personality, lawyer, firefighter, Food Network battle winner: The plot twists in Roberto Tschudin Lucheme's résumé hint at why his sweets are sublime. In the hands of a passionate, inquisitive mastermind, stone-ground, couverture chocolate becomes an artistic medium, from which Lucheme handcrafts exotic truffles and edible sculptures. Nibble a merlion-shaped "Night in Tunisia," and red chiles, fenugreek, cardamom, coriander, and ajwain will have your tastebuds calling for backup. "It's designed to hit all of your senses," he says.

100 Riverview Center. 860-759-2222; tschocolates.com

FINE DINING

UNION LEAGUE CAFÉ, New Haven

The crème de la crème of Connecticut special-occasion restaurants has remained owner Jean Pierre Vuillermet's passion and workplace for more than two decades. Inside a Beaux-Arts landmark, this French master chef—who has fed presidents of several nations, including our own—styles elegant plates with the region's seasonal bounty, classic French culinary precision, masterly attention to textures and tastes, and creativity ensuring that even traditional dishes such as duck-leg confit are transcendent.

1032 Chapel St. 203-562-4299; unionleaguecafe.com

BAKERY

HEN & HEIFER, Guilford

Tell Whang Suh that his sweets are too pretty to eat, and he's flattered but displeased. Half Korean, half Italian, 100 percent gifted, this French Culinary Institute- and Per Se-trained pastry chef's creations are exhibited like delicate sculptures in his jewel box of a bakery. But cinnamon-blueberry macarons, tarts glistening with local fruit, torpedo-shaped croissants—all are made to be devoured.

23 Water St. 203-689-5651; henandheifer.com



Best Lunch | Heirloom Food Company, Danielson
Photograph by Julie Bidwell

LUNCH

HEIRLOOM FOOD COMPANY, Danielson

It's worth a road trip to this organic café, where a chalkboard gives props to local farms for ingredients playfully intertwined in salads, soups, sandwiches—even vivid drinks like the strawberry, mango, flax, and apple juice “Summer Solstice.” Most selections are vegan; all can be ordered gluten-free. And devotion to freshness means baked goods such as oatmeal cream pie taste heavenly.

630 North Main St. 860-779-3373; eatheirloomfood.com

DOUGHNUTS

TASTEASE, Hartford

“We open Saturdays at 8:00. At 9:30, I had zero,” boasts Tony Mendes of his record day, when 2,500 mini doughnuts left his and wife Susan’s 400-square-foot bakery in minutes. He hand-decorates every one of these ridiculously tiny, cute, and addictive treats, sometimes pulling all-nighters. Order ahead—three dozen if you want to try every flavor—to avoid disappointment.

70 New Park Ave. 860-233-2235; tasteaseminidonut.com

OUTDOOR DINING

RED 36, Mystic

On balmy days, even the indoor dining area is open-air at this Mystic River waterfront hot spot. And the sun-splashed deck's umbrella and lobster-trap tables, nautical couches, and bar seats are in high demand. Boat or drive—just be sure to arrive parched and famished. The line-up of cocktails, Connecticut-brewed beers, and inventive fare from land and sea is as universally pleasing as the view.

2 Washington St. 860-536-3604; red36ct.com

SOUTH AMERICAN FARE

CORA CORA, West Hartford

Andean music, vibrant woven tablecloths, alpaca-wool wall hangings too cuddly not to touch ... You're Peru-bound even before you peruse an encyclopedic menu of ancient and futuristic dishes from the land of the Incas. Amiable servers help newcomers navigate page after page of ceviches, quinoa stews, beef, and seafood. Don't miss lúcuma fruit ice cream: The texture's otherworldly; the taste's a mashup of pumpkin, coffee, and peanut butter.

162 Shield St. 860-953-2672; coraperu.com

ETHNIC EXPERIENCE

HASNA'S AFGHAN FUSION CUISINE, Waterbury

Hearty kabobs, spinach- and potato-stuffed bolani, pillowy naan flatbread, butter chicken bathed in spicy, fragrant sauce: This strip-mall eatery is pleasing diners with pretty much everything that emerges from the tandoori oven, including "fusion" offerings like pizza and burgers. It's Waterbury's new place to eat incredibly well yet affordably.

625 Wolcott St. 203-805-4044; hasnasrestaurant.com

STEAMED CHEESEBURGERS

TED'S RESTAURANT, Meriden

Steamed cheeseburgers are a Connecticut thing, and this classic lunch counter—family-owned for three generations since 1959—is the place to fall for them. Juicier and healthier than their grilled brethren and erupting with molten steamed cheddar, these hefty burgers are the most satisfying meal you can buy for the price. A heaping side of nostalgia is included—free.

1046 Broad St. 203-237-6660; tedsrestaurant.com

WINGS

J. TIMOTHY'S TAVERNE, Plainville

Shuffle off, Buffalo! You haven't had chicken wings until you've tried them "dirt" style: a technique invented in the mid-'90s at this 1789 tavern. Now, more than 200 tons of these tasty poultry parts hit the fryer each year. The dirty secret? They're sauced, then refried, then sauced again in four flavors: Buffalo, honey BBQ, teriyaki, and sweet red chili. If you guessed that they're extra-crispy-sticky, you're right.

143 New Britain Ave. 860-747-6813; jtimothys.com

BEST BARGAINS IN CONNECTICUT

PINCHING PENNIES NEVER FELT SO GOOD! CHECK OUT OUR PICKS FOR THE BEST BARGAINS IN CONNECTICUT.

BYOF (BRING YOUR OWN FOOD)

FIREFLY HOLLOW BREWING, Bristol

Brewmaster Dana Bourque, who started homebrewing with his dad and “couldn’t stop,” has concocted more than 30 different beers since he and 10 partners opened this 10-barrel microbrewery in an old warehouse in October 2013. The taproom’s hyperfocus on pouring what’s fresh from the tanks means that you’re encouraged to bring whatever food pairings you crave. The trendy BYOF policy will save you money on food and tips, so you can bring a growler of beer home.

139 Center St. 860-845-8977; fireflyhollowbrewing.com

FREE RIDE

SIMSBURY FREE BIKE, Simsbury

Launched with six loaners in 2011, Connecticut’s largest bike share now offers more than 50 bicycles at 14 locations in five Farmington Valley towns, with access to a vast network of paved trails. A refundable deposit lets riders 18 and up borrow bikes, helmets, and locks for up to 24 hours.

simsbury.bike

FREE ANIMAL ATTRACTION

RAY OF LIGHT FARM, East Haddam

Ever felt an instant bond with a shelter cat or dog? The same sense of joy and attachment fuels repeat visits to this nonprofit haven for hard-luck livestock. Wander among the rescued horses and barnyard menagerie (daily except Wednesday); there’s no admission, not even fistfuls of food to buy. Donations and kids’ pony rides (Thursday to Saturday) fund the farm’s rehab and adoption efforts and therapeutic riding programs.

232 Town St. 860-873-1895; rayoflightfarm.org

AFFORDABLE ANTIQUES

PRIME FINDS, Lakeville

Attractive window displays lure curious browsers, and once inside, the price tags make their eyes pop. This is a thrift shop—but stocked with antiques—where generous homeowners’ fine castoffs are sold at bargain prices to fund Prime Time House, a nonprofit that helps individuals with serious mental illness regain independence.

2 Main St. 860-435-9709; primetimehouse.org/prime-finds

FREE CONCERTS

MOHEGAN SUN WOLF DEN, Uncasville

Ask anyone in Connecticut to share ultimate concert experiences, and you’ll likely hear about the Wolf Den. The list of recording stars who’ve played this cave-like, 300-seat venue at the heart of Mohegan Sun’s original Casino of the Earth is astounding, considering that nightly shows are free. Alums include Frankie Valli, Peter Frampton, Duran Duran, Blake Shelton, and Matt Nathanson.

1 Mohegan Sun Blvd. 888-226-7711; mohegansun.com/poi/venues/wolf-den.html

BEST CLASSIC ATTRACTIONS IN CT

THERE'S A LOT TO SEE AND DO IN THE NUTMEG STATE, BUT SOME ACTIVITIES REALLY STAND THE TEST OF TIME. READ OUR PICKS FOR THE BEST CLASSIC ATTRACTIONS IN CONNECTICUT.

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT – CENTURY-OLD RIDE

BUSHNELL PARK CAROUSEL, Hartford (1914)

Hartford's treasured merry-go-round, with its 48 meticulously restored, hand-carved wooden horses—one of fewer than 200 survivors of carousels' golden age—turned 100 in 2014. This year, she receives a fitting gift. The pavilion that houses this antique ride has been renovated with heat and indoor restrooms to enable year-round operation.

1 Jewell St. 860-585-5411; thecarouselmuseum.org

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT – CLAMS

THE PLACE, Guilford (1940s)

They arrive at your table in a bath of buttery cocktail sauce, still on a grill grate, straight off the wood fire. Instantly you understand why folks have been pulling off Route 1 to savor roasted littlenecks here since 1971. This casual, seasonal restaurant's origins stretch back to the 1940s, and one other thing has never changed: tree stumps for seats.

901 Boston Post Road. 203-453-9276; theplaceguilford.com



Best Century-Old Ride | Bushnell Park Carousel, Hartford
Photograph by Aimee Seavey

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT – THROWBACK BAR

THE OWL SHOP, New Haven (1934)

A drink and a smoke? It's outlawed just about everywhere except at this warm, masculine, well-ventilated cigar bar, where live jazz packs the house on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Why? This landmark's long history as a tobacconist exempts it from smoke-free statutes. Joe Lentine has handcrafted the shop's aficionado-caliber tobacco blends since 1964.

268 College St. 203-624-3250; owlsshopcigars.com

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT – ARTS HUB

FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM, Old Lyme (1947)

Florence Griswold's boardinghouse became the epicenter of American Impressionism when she hosted preeminent painters in the early 20th century. This 11-acre museum complex strives to remain Creativity Central, with a packed calendar of programs like Make-a-Painting Sundays, Art Bar happy-hour workshops, outdoor festivals, and changing exhibits.

96 Lyme St. 860-434-5542; florencegriswoldmuseum.org

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT – ART-HOUSE CINEMA

BANTAM CINEMA, Bantam (1927)

The first moviegoers to escape reality inside this barn-like, two-screen theatre watched silent flicks with organ accompaniment. That was 1927, and Connecticut's oldest continuously operating movie house finally ditched its 1930s-vintage equipment for a digital projection system in 2013. If they ever abandon real butter, those who adore the popcorn and eclectic films will surely revolt.

115 Bantam Lake Rd. 860-567-1916; bantamcinema.com

BEST OUTDOOR ATTRACTIONS IN CT

THE NUTMEG STATE HAS PLENTY TO OFFER IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS. READ OUR PICKS FOR THE BEST OUTDOOR ATTRACTIONS IN CONNECTICUT.

MINIATURE GOLF

MINI-GOLF AT SAYBROOK POINT, Old Saybrook

If your putting's not up to par, you'll love this picture-perfect course, where distracting views of Long Island Sound and shorebirds soaring overhead are a convenient excuse when you miss a shot. Rebuilt in 2013 following the destruction wreaked by Superstorm Sandy, its features are modeled after town landmarks like Saybrook Breakwater Lighthouse and Fort Saybrook.

154 College St. 860-388-2407; oldsaybrookrec.com

BLUEBERRY FARM

OLD BARN FARM, Goshen

Grab a blue pail, and try to resist the urge to race like a kid toward the meticulously cultivated rows of bushes at this solar-powered pick-your-own farm, which grows just one crop exceedingly well: blueberries. With 19 early-, mid- and late-season varieties of these antioxidant-rich gems, a long harvest season typically runs from July through early August.

300 Bartholomew Hill Rd. 860-491-0017; oldbarnfarmct.com

CAR BUFF'S NIGHT OUT

MARK'S CLASSIC CRUISE, East Granby

A '28 Plymouth sedan. A '68 Camaro Z/28. A '14 Corvette Stingray. Monday nights May through September, a 25-acre plot becomes a field of dreams for automobile enthusiasts. At 20 years old, New England's largest weekly cruise night is already a classic. Admission's free, and more than 800 heart-stopping vehicles turn out on perfect-weather evenings.

Russell Rd. 860-653-2551; markscruisenight.com

9-HOLE GOLF COURSE

HOTCHKISS SCHOOL GOLF COURSE, Lakeville

Perhaps you never had the wherewithal to attend a classic New England prep school in the Berkshire foothills. But, you can play nine challenging holes at this campus course designed by Seth Raynor. It's open for public play daily after 11:00 a.m.

40 Interlaken Rd 860-435-4400; hotchkiss.org

FLY-FISHING OUTFITTER

UP COUNTRY SPORTFISHING, Pine Meadow

In-the-know anglers realize that active stocking and thoughtful management have made the Farmington River's West Branch home to the state's densest population of big trout. Ideally situated on the Farmington's banks, UpCountry offers gear, bait, fly-tying instruction, expert guide service, even a three-bed apartment for visitors eager to chase 20-inch fish.

352 Main St. 860-379-1952; farmingtonriver.com

SPOTLIGHT: GOLD COAST

HEADING TO THE CONNECTICUT GOLD COAST? WE'VE GOT THE PERFECT ROUNDUP OF WHAT TO SEE, DO, AND EAT WHILE YOU'RE THERE, PLUS WHERE TO STAY WHEN IT'S TIME FOR BED. READ ON TO SEE OUR PICKS FOR THE BEST OF THE CONNECTICUT GOLD COAST!

BEST ATTRACTIONS ALONG THE CONNECTICUT GOLD COAST

TOWN BEACH

JENNINGS BEACH, Fairfield

Plentiful parking, a “sandcastle” playground, a patriotic pier lined with American flags snapping in the breeze, a skate park, a concession stand with affordable fare, including tender fried shrimp with zingy cocktail sauce... Oh, and the town's largest public beach, where lifeguards watch over swimmers and warm sand lulls sunbathers to sleep.

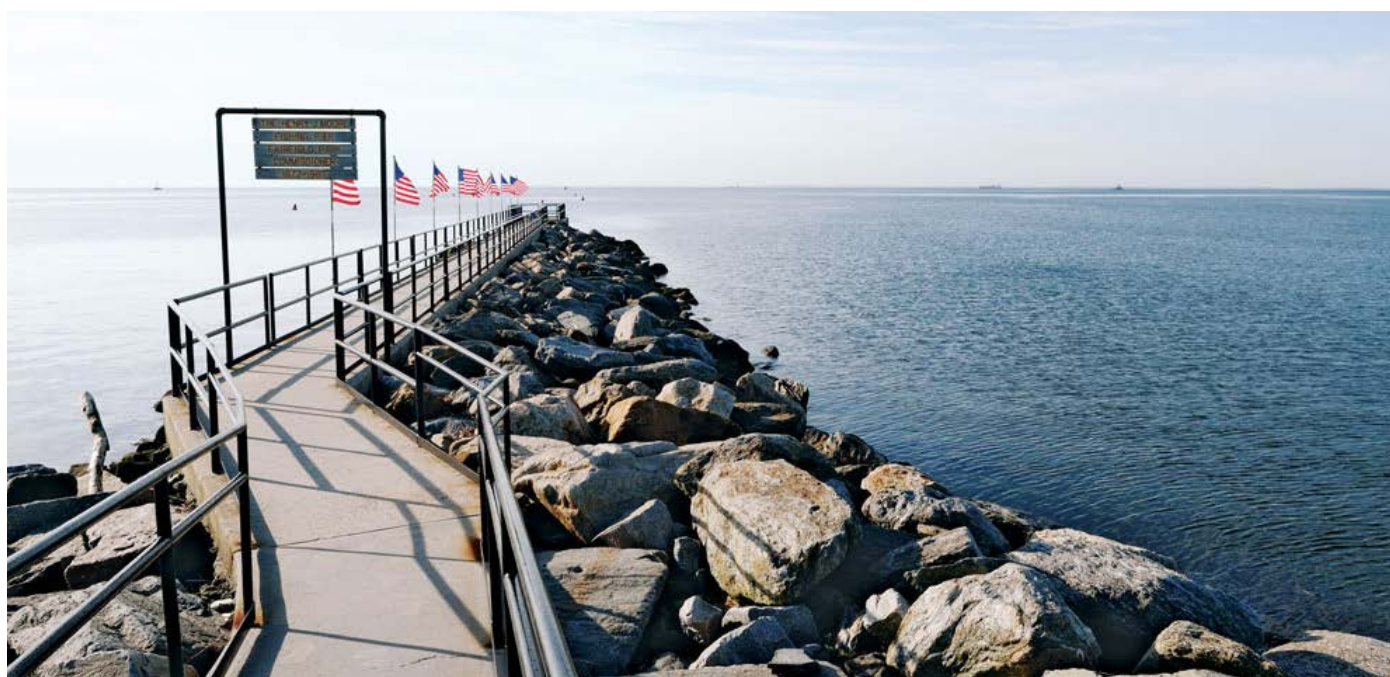
880 South Benson Rd. 203-256-3191; fairfieldct.org/content/2765/2783/3418.aspx

ADULTS-ONLY MUSEUM

CONNECTICUT AIR & SPACE CENTER, Stratford

Connecticut's own mini-Smithsonian runs on devotion. Thanks to volunteers' painstaking efforts, remarkable aircraft and artifacts that tell the tale of Connecticut's preeminent place in aviation history are preserved within this living museum, where you can observe helicopter and airplane restoration work in progress. Its current location inside a federal installation necessitates visitors be age 18 or over.

550 Main St. 203-380-1400; cascstratford.wordpress.com



Best Town Beach | Jennings Beach, Fairfield
Photograph by Shelley McKechnie Cryan

RELAXATION

SALTANA CAVE, Ridgefield

Her asthmatic daughter benefited from time in a man-made salt cave in Poland, so Anna Husted built a sanctuary with tons of Himalayan salt rocks. Within this glowing pink cave, you'll experience utter tranquility while drifting away in a zero-gravity chair. Even if you doubt salt's therapeutic powers, you may be tempted to head immediately back in for another 45-minute session.

590 Danbury Road. 203-969-4327; saltanacave.com

BEST PLACES TO STAY ALONG THE CONNECTICUT GOLD COAST

GOURMAND GETAWAY

HOMESTEAD INN/THOMAS HENKELMANN, Greenwich

This Euro-sophisticated escape earns accolades for both Thomas Henkelmann's exquisite, contemporary French cuisine and Theresa Henkelmann's impeccable eye for bold, inviting interiors. Masterfully married ingredients and exotic design elements achieve the couple's objective of enchanting and transporting guests.

420 Field Point Rd. 203-869-7500; homesteadinn.com

INN ON THE SOUND

THE INN AT LONGSHORE, Westport

Situated between a stunning curve of shoreline and a historic public golf course built as an exclusive private club in 1929, the Inn at Longshore has a dozen rooms. Often occupied by wedding guests on weekends, they're quite a value midweek and off-season.

260 South Compo Rd. 203-226-3316; innatlongshore.com

DOG-FRIENDLY HOTEL

DELAMAR GREENWICH HARBOR, Greenwich

It's happened: Humans have actually expressed jealousy over the pampering that dogs receive at this stylish waterside hotel. From treats at check-in to their own cuddly beds to bottled mineral water at turndown, pups enjoy every creature comfort on designated dog-friendly floors. Walking and grooming services are available, and a portion of the nightly pet fee supports Adopt-a-Dog.

500 Steamboat Rd. 203-661-9800; delamargreenwich.com

BEST PLACES TO EAT ALONG THE CONNECTICUT GOLD COAST

GARDEN LOVER'S RESTAURANT

TERRAIN GARDEN CAFÉ, Westport

Tucked inside Terrain, a shop that's pure Eden for gardeners, is an equally divine indoor/outdoor restaurant, where the conservatory-like setting and seasonally evolving fare soothe and satisfy the senses. Chef Alissa Svorka builds a five-course tasting dinner, which can be ordered as a feast for two with 10 different dishes, using the epitome of locally procurable ingredients, from heirloom carrots to Stonington scallops.

561 Post Rd East. 203-226-2742; shopterrain.com/westport-restaurant

GOLD-COAST MEAL DEAL

VALENCIA LUNCHERIA, Norwalk

Never had arepas? Neither had television host Guy Fieri when he put this tiny, strip-mall Venezuelan beach-food restaurant on the map. Now in larger digs with a "Beach Patio" for outdoor diners, it's a budget-conscious place to load up on Latin American comfort foods. Pair arepas—corn cakes fried and filled with everything from beef to bananas—with fresh-squeezed juices.

164 Main St. 203-846-8009; valencialuncheria.com

SPOTLIGHT: NORTHWEST HILLS

FROM A SCENIC DAY HIKE TO THE BEST CINNAMON SUGAR MUFFINS, HERE'S A LOOK AT OUR PICKS FOR SOME OF THE BEST THINGS TO DO, PLUS WHERE TO EAT, SHOP, AND STAY IN THE CONNECTICUT NORTHWEST HILLS.

BEST THINGS TO DO IN THE CONNECTICUT NORTHWEST HILLS

CAR EXPERIENCE

LIME ROCK PARK, Lakeville

"Road to 60" improvement projects underway since 2014 are nearly complete, as racing legend Skip Barber's historic auto track zooms toward its 60th anniversary in 2017. This summer, there are four major close-to-the-action spectator events, including the Ferrari Challenge, plus near-daily on-track activities for visitors to observe, Fourth of July fireworks, and driving experiences such as Autocross, open to anyone in any car—even your family-mobile. 60 White Hollow Rd. 860-435-5000; limerock.com

SHORT HIKE

HAYSTACK MOUNTAIN STATE PARK, Norfolk

The 360-degree view from the Rapunzel-esque stone tower atop Haystack Mountain is worth the half-hour or so of exertion it takes to scramble to the summit. From the parking area, the short, steep, uphill hike is doable for most abilities. At 1,716 feet above sea level, the landscape seems to gleam and glow. Write a fairytale ending by packing a picnic or plotting a proposal.

Route 272. 860-482-1817; ct.gov/deep/haystackmountain

ARTISTS' COMMUNITY

WHITING MILLS, Winsted

A dozen years after Jean Paul and Eva Blachere began repurposing a 19th-century brick sock factory, its wood floors gleam, sunlight spills through 6-over-6 windows, and a critical mass of artists, craftspeople, and creative entrepreneurs makes this a one-of-a-kind shopping destination. The 52 studios' hours vary; time your visit for "Third Sundays" to view demonstrations and meet most on-site artisans, like gourd carver Jeanne Morningstar Kent.

100 Whiting St. 860-738-2240; whitingmills.com

BEST PLACES TO STAY IN THE CONNECTICUT NORTHWEST HILLS

RESORT

INTERLAKEN INN, Lakeville

Situated between two lakes with access to superb freshwater fishing, paddling, and swimming, Interlaken's been a destination for 125 years, yet is remarkably up to date. In addition to 40 spacious main inn rooms, guests can claim pet-friendly, motel-style accommodations; antique-filled chambers in a turreted Victorian; stylish two-story townhouses; a lakeside cottage; the romantic Penthouse with rooftop hot tub; or the Euro-chic new Basha Cottage.

74 Interlaken Road. 860-435-9878; interlakeninn.com

COUNTRY INN

THE WHITE HART, Salisbury

Even the GM wears jeans. But there's nothing bumpkin about this 16-room 1806 landmark on the green, resuscitated following a four-year closure by a Who's Who group of investors with ties to the region. Among them is British chef Annie Wayte, whose masterly, experimental way with local ingredients makes Friday and Saturday dinners worthy of a trek. She oversees weekday offerings, too, in the tap room, which—to locals' glee—remains unchanged.

15 Undermountain Rd. 860-435-0030; whitehartinn.com

FISHING LODGE

LEGENDS ON THE FARMINGTON, Barkhamsted

The lodge that Sal Tartaglione hand-built, utilizing reclaimed and custom-milled wood, looks as though it leapt from an Orvis catalogue onto the banks of the trout-filled Farmington River. Seven B&B rooms are steps from this stretch's "best dry-fly hole," fishing guides are available, and with a plethora of other outdoor pursuits nearby, guests are lured by the cozy vibe even if they never intend to cast a line.

20 River Rd. 203-650-8767; legendsbnb.com

BEST PLACES TO EAT IN THE CONNECTICUT NORTHWEST HILLS

MUFFINS

BANTAM BREAD, Bantam

Don't be afraid to bite into a "Dirt Bomb." These deceptively simple nutmeg muffins—dipped in clarified butter and rolled in cinnamon sugar—are dangerous only because they're addictive. Gently spiced, melty, crisp, and rich, they're Nutmeggers' favorite excuse for a road trip.

853 Bantam Rd. 860-567-2737; bantambread.com



Best Country Inn | The White Hart, Salisbury
Photograph by John Gruen

LOCAL FAVORITE

THE WOODLAND, Lakeville

Diners never tire of the menu at this country pub that oozes cool. The kitchen's adept at cuisine that spans the map: sushi and wiener schnitzel, veal parmigiana and chicken enchiladas. The wine list's equally worldly, and the tables are a mix of high-tops for twosomes and wood-carved and marble-topped antiques for groups. The bar's a mashup of art gallery and greenhouse, where Humphrey Bogart would look at home.

192 Sharon Rd. 860-435-0578; thewoodlandrestaurant.com

NOSTALGIA RESTAURANT

O'HARA'S LANDING RESTAURANT, Salisbury

What was it like to savor breakfast or lunch lakeside in the '50s? Don't wonder. Wind your way along back roads to this seasonal marina restaurant. The lost art of conversation roars back to life around retro kitchenettes. It's not the vinyl chairs or even the pancakes, eggs, or burgers with seasoned fries, all home-cooked with loving care. It's the view of rippling water and mountain silhouettes. And knowing you can rent a boat and stay all day, if you want to.

254 Twin Lakes Rd. 860-824-7583; oharaslanding.com



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