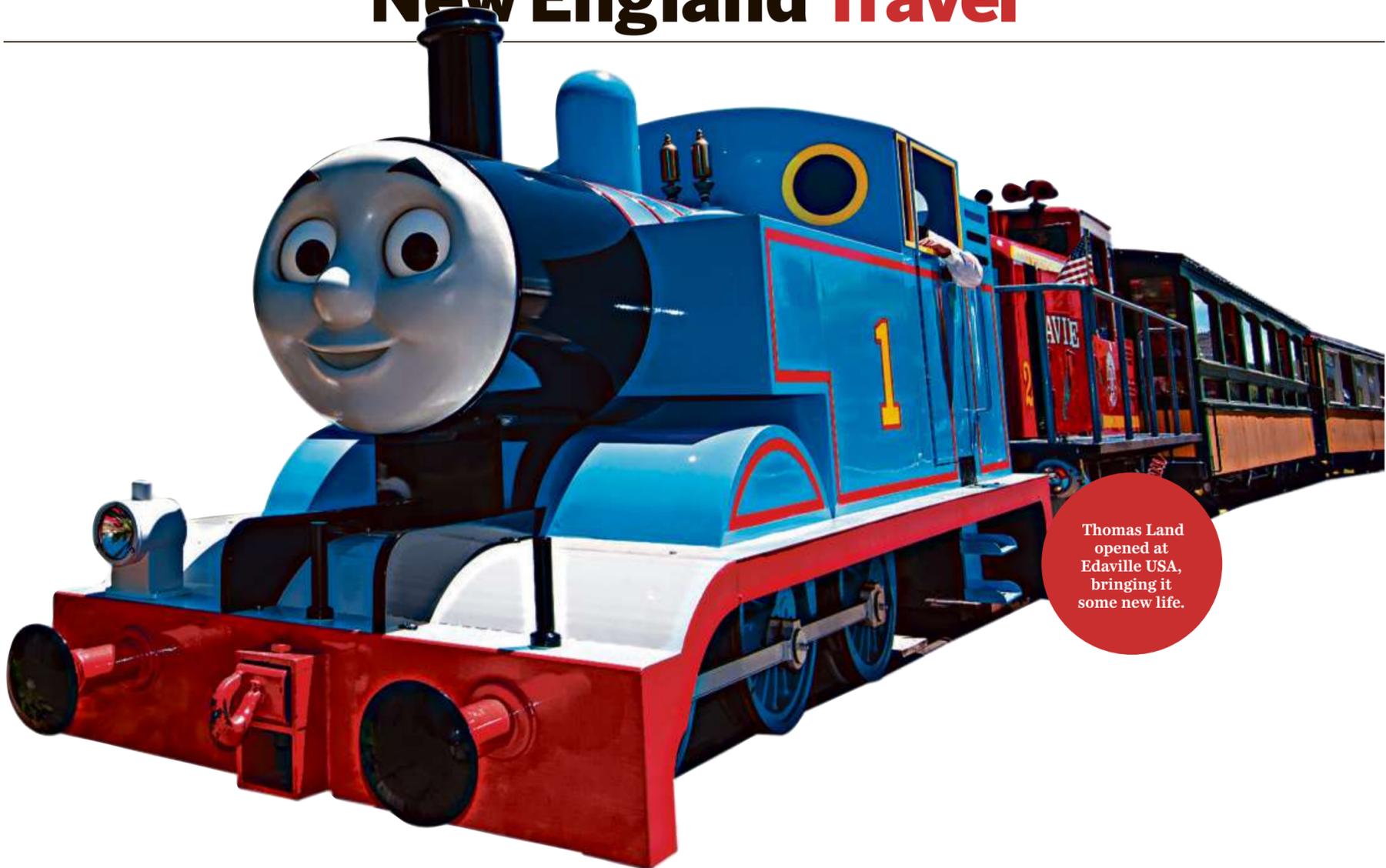


New England Travel



Thomas Land opened at Edaville USA, bringing it some new life.

BACK ON TRACK

BY JACI CONRY | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

These days, Edaville USA shines

As my husband and I got our kids ready to visit Edaville USA last December, I have to admit, I wasn't enthusiastic. The last time we'd ventured to the Carver-based attraction, six years before, had been a disappointment. We'd paid a hefty sum for a train ride that hobbled precariously along the tracks past a poorly maintained holiday light display that hadn't been refreshed in decades.

That afternoon last year, although

I'd heard Edaville had been revived, I was skeptical.

Edaville Railroad was founded by Ellis D. Atwood, who installed a two-foot narrow gauge line that operated two locomotives along his 1,800-acre cranberry plantation in 1947. Atwood's 5½-mile long railroad used the trains to transport sand and supplies to the bogs. His neighbors were intrigued by the operation, which spurred him to begin offering rides to townsfolk for free. When the demand for rides increased, Atwood charged riders a nickel. In time, the line became less of a working railroad and evolved into a

bustling tourist attraction during the holiday season, drawing people who came to see extensive light displays along the bogs. Kiddie rides and vendors were added, too.

For decades, the park prospered, becoming a beloved destination that drew crowds during November and December.

Yet, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, a series of unsuccessful owners caused the park to decline: Trains operated sporadically, the bright paint on the amusement park rides faded while some broke down completely, and the

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EDAVILLE USA

Amid twilight of fall, inns offer a warm welcome

Sate body and soul with a walk, book, and meal

The Grafton Inn in Vermont is one of the nation's oldest continuously operating inns.

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

November. It's the calm before the storm. Summer is long past; the vibrant fall foliage has dulled, and there's a lull before the busy holiday season — and Old Man Winter — arrives.

"New England in November has a wonderfully calming effect," says Beth Steucek, CEO of New England Inns & Resorts Association (www.newenglandinnsandresorts.com). "It's a quiet time for a good book, brisk walks, and a few decadent meals. And innkeepers and hoteliers are especially eager to provide a warm welcome at this time of year."

Before it gets too crazy busy, treat yourself to a quick escape to one of these tranquil country inns. We're thinking serene settings,

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GRAFTON INN

CONNECTICUT

Home design with art in mind

By Janet Mendelsohn
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Theodate Pope Riddle. A memorable name that doesn't come up often, yet there she was, twice. First, in Erik Larson's New York Times nonfiction bestseller, "Dead Wake," in which she survives the sinking of the RMS Lusitania. Then again at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts where a lecturer on the Impressionists repeatedly urged us to visit Hill-Stead in Farmington, Conn., the country estate that Pope designed and built in 1901

for her parents' retirement. Her father, Alfred Atmore Pope, was a wealthy Gilded Age industrialist and passionate art collector. His taste differed radically from that of his peers who tended to acquire traditional paintings and drawings by the Old Masters. Alfred Pope selectively chose bronze sculpture; Asian and European porcelains and European prints and works by American and French Impressionists, artists who were working at the time.

HILL-STEAD, Page M7

The restored Sunken Garden at Hill-Stead in Farmington.



JANET MENDELSON

On board for trip to refurbished Edaville USA

►EDAVILLE

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light displays became paltry.

In 2011, Jon Delli Priscoll, who owned the property with another owner, bought his partner out. While part of the sprawling parcel of land was turned into a housing subdivision, Delli Priscoll opted to devote nearly 60 acres to Edaville USA (the park was renamed in 2000).

Delli Priscoll had a vision to repair the aging park and revive Edaville into a burgeoning modern destination — an ambitious undertaking that has taken years to achieve. On my visit I was astonished to see the transformation of the park. I was struck at once by its cleanliness; the whole place seemed to shine. While before I had felt Edaville was unkempt and withering it has become polished and updated, with a trove of engaging employees eager to help the scores of visitors who walk through the entrance.

In 2015, a partnership with toy conglomerate Mattel that took years to solidify resulted in the creation of Thomas Land, a “Thomas the Tank Engine”-themed section that includes an area depicting the island of Sodor as well as other locations from the hit PBS television show. Young fans of the show shriek with pure joy as they encounter amusement park rides based on the show’s beloved characters: Harold the Helicopter, Toby, and the Troublesome Trucks. The Thomas Land area includes a stage show, new dining locations, and full-scale audio-animatronic trains: kids go wild for the full scale talking Thomas the Tank Engine. Edaville’s Thomas Land is the only one of its kind in the country, and there are only two others worldwide — in Japan and in the United Kingdom.

In Edaville proper, the park’s more than 30



EDAVILLE USA

A 45-minute train ride called Edaville Express: Where’s Santa? takes visitors on a trek to Santa’s Workshop.

vintage rides have been refurbished and repainted and others have been added. There’s a Ferris wheel, Tilt-a-Whirl, and Scrambler. Inside, there are more rides for younger kids, including a clown train and a ball crawl. There’s also an indoor arcade, bumper cars, gift shops, and snack stands. In the summer and fall, the park wel-

comes visitors to catch and release fish in the bog’s freshly stocked pond. Also open during the warmer months is Dino Land, which features a self-guided adventure along the property’s walking trails where 23 life-size animatronic dinosaurs lurk.

The classic train excursion during the annual Festival of Lights (Nov. 18-Jan. 1) remains the park’s biggest draw. During this season’s Festival of Lights, the plantation will be aglow with more than 7 million lights. A \$34 admission ticket

gains visitors access to Edaville proper, Thomas Land, and trains departing every half hour that amble past the scenic holiday lights around the bogs. The festive light displays have been vastly enhanced since the last time I was there; both children and adults find delight in the characters and holiday scenes.

Edaville offer two special holiday train packages, one of which has already sold out. There are still plenty of tickets for the other one, called Edaville Express: Where’s Santa? The 45-minute train ride — which costs \$47 — takes visitors on a trek to Santa’s Workshop. The interactive journey is hosted by Mrs. Claus and elves who provide cookies and hot chocolate while caroling. When the train arrives at the destination, kids are greeted by Santa and given a special wrapped package. Reservations must be made in advance.

Edaville has been working on Dickens Village, designed to evoke the Main Streets of the Dickensian era with red and green painted wood clad buildings housing shops. While there’s still work to be done, this season, one of the buildings will house a candy store, there will be pictures with Santa in another, and others will house vendors selling locally made crafts.

Edaville’s revival is refreshing. The park’s heritage is being preserved while being infused with new life, poised to endure for generations. As we left, I felt encouraged and hopeful, just the sentiments we strive to embrace as the holiday season approaches.

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APPLEGATE INN



SNOWVILLAGE INN

Inns offer quiet time for adults

►INNS

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quiet towns, and classic inns that remind us of simpler times.

THE GRAFTON INN

Close your eyes and imagine a quaint, postcard perfect Vermont country village. Open those eyes in Grafton and you’re there. The sleepy hamlet, on the National Register of Historic Places, includes a white steeple church, a covered bridge crossing the trickling Saxtons River and a cluster of impeccably restored 19th century houses, surrounded by rolling farmlands and mountain peaks. The Grafton Inn, one of the oldest continuously operating inns in the country, sits prominently on the village common, and has been welcoming guests for more than two centuries. Rudyard Kipling was a resident at the inn while he was writing “The Jungle Book”; Ulysses Grant stopped by in 1867, and Daniel Webster, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ralph Waldo Emerson were guests. The rambling inn oozes historic charm, with age-worn pine floors, fireplaces, antiques, and a gracious porch filled with oversize, cane-backed rockers. There are 45 rooms and suites, located in the main building and nearby restored houses. We like the bright, second- and third-floor rooms located in the main tavern building, many with handcrafted, four-poster beds, topped with fluffy duvets. Snag one of the porch rockers and watch the clouds roll over the Green Mountains before enjoying beverages in the Phelps Barn Pub, with exposed beams, wood paneled walls, and a fireplace. Reserve one night for dinner in the Old Tavern Restaurant, located in the main inn, to enjoy dishes like Grafton cheddar cheese and Long Trail Ale soup, roasted sea bass with an orange gremolata, and a zingy house paella, loaded with chicken, sausage, shrimp and mussels. 92 Main St., Grafton, Vt., 802-234-8407, www.graftoninnvermont.com. Rooms starting at \$209.

SNOWVILLAGE INN

It’s tough to top the views from this affectionately-restored inn. Tucked away on the slopes of Foss Mountain in



GRAFTON INN

Clockwise (from top left): Applegate Inn in Lee, a view from Snowvillage Inn in Eaton, N.H., the Grafton Inn’s library, the Hancock Inn in Hancock, N.H.

Eaton, N.H., the inn sits on a knoll, with lofty vistas of Mount Washington and the Presidential Mountain Range. It was once the gracious summer home of Frank Simonds, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and still has a relaxed, country get-away vibe. Put on your fleece and take a walk around the property, stroll the beach at Crystal Lake, or hike nearby trails. If you’re missing the hustle and bustle, or need to get some early holiday shopping done, you can head to North Conway, only a 10-minute or so drive away. Or not. Instead, relish the peace and quiet, while you have it. Rooms, located in the main house and two separate buildings, are spacious and comfy, decorated in simple country décor; all have private baths, some have fireplaces. But the rooms in the main house have the best mountain views. Check in and then head to the pub to slip into one of the leather chairs fronting the fireplace, the perfect spot for a pre-dinner beverage. Many guests are tempted to stay put, ordering casual fare off the pub menu, including vegetable tacos, steak & fries, and burgers. Others head to the more formal dining room, serving entrees like maple cider brined



HANCOCK INN AND FOX TAVERN

duck, Maine coast scallops and rack of lamb. Chef Peter Willis also offers a nightly game selection: beef to boar, antelope to venison. “We guarantee that you will leave insouciant and ready for the holiday rush,” promises innkeepers Kevin Flynn and Jen Kovach. 136 Stewart Rd., Eaton, N.H., 603-447-2818, www.snowvillageinn.com. Two-night stay, breakfast daily, three-course dinner for two, keepsake wine glasses and gift soap (made by the innkeeper) starting at \$459, valid through Dec. 24.

THE HANCOCK INN

Your heart rate drops; your breathing gets deeper; your pace slows. Ahhh . . . you’ve landed in the tiny, pristine

town of Hancock, N.H., where every single building on Main Street is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There’s a country store, a church, and the town square gazebo. The Meeting House is home to one of Paul Revere’s bells, and the Hancock Inn opened its doors in 1789, when George Washington was president. Much of the inn’s original details remain: burnished pumpkin pine floors, wood paneled walls, fireplaces, period antiques, and a hand painted mural by American folk artist Rufus Porter. But despite the historic authenticity, the vibe is relaxed and amenities, like flat screen TVs, free Wi-Fi, and high thread count linens, are up-to-date. Individually decorated rooms come in all sizes

and configurations; all have private baths and some have fireplaces. The Rufus Porter room is a favorite, with an antique four poster bed, electric fireplace and original hand-painted wall murals. The George Washington Room is a cozy cocoon, with a window seat and red, white, and blue décor. Or, splurge on the John Hancock Suite, located in the inn’s original ballroom, with an electric fireplace, whirlpool tub, and four poster king bed. After settling in, head to the inn’s Fox Tavern, known for fresh, farm-to-table cuisine, including dishes like the local cheese and charcuterie platter, New England raised beef ribeye steak, and a daily New Hampshire-caught fish selection. If the mere thought of leaving the inn stresses you out, consider extending the weekend stay. The popular Innkeeper’s Supper on Sunday evenings is all about comfort. 33 Main St., Hancock, N.H., 603-525-3318, www.hancockinn.com. Rooms starting at \$159.

APPLEGATE INN

Tranquil, elegant, immaculate, beautifully decorated, and very welcoming are some of the words guests use to describe this top-rated Berkshires bed and breakfast. Even in the height of the summer and fall tourist seasons, the inn remains apart from the hustle and bustle, surrounded by six acres of manicured lawns, gardens, and orchards. The gracious two-story Georgian Colonial, the former summer estate of a successful New York surgeon, is filled with quality antiques and lush fabrics; a grand piano sits in the corner of the library/living room, where guests can enjoy complimentary cheese and wine during the cocktail hour. Other nice touches include a help-yourself pantry filled with snacks and beverages and a never empty cookie jar. There are eight guestrooms in the main house (the adjacent Carriage house has two additional rooms and a two-bedroom cottage), with private baths and fireplaces or stoves. Room 1 is a standout; located in the former master suite, it has a four poster bed, working wood fireplace and a bathroom with a steam shower. Room 8 has a private balcony, electric fireplace, and a whirlpool bath with overhead skylights for star gazing. 279 West Park St., Lee, 413-243-4451, www.applegateinn.com. Rooms are \$170-\$305; several specials are offered, including a stay-three-nights-and-pay-only-\$50-for-the-third-night package.

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