

A TANK AWAY

Bethlehem, NH, boasts artistic community



The star billing in Bethlehem, NH, goes to Mount Washington, visible here from downtown.

By Eric Wilbur

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In this particular little town of Bethlehem, nestled in the northern region of New Hampshire's White Mountains, you are not likely to come across three kings or a baby born in a manger. But just as in the biblical town, Bethlehem boasts its own glowing beacon in winter with the dominating presence of Mount Washington reflecting sunlight from its snow-capped peak. The residents here consider their home the "Star of the White Mountains," a sleepy town that takes pride in its artistic community and being a gateway to a number of outdoor recreation activities. In the weeks leading up to the holidays, Bethlehem becomes a kind of staging area for those preparing to embrace the Christmas spirit.

STAY

The warm and welcoming **Bear Mountain Lodge** (3249 Main St., 603-869-2189, www.bearmountainlodge.net, \$175-\$350) is a rustic-looking establishment with luxurious accommodations, sweeping views of the Presidential Range, and an eco-friendly philosophy. In winter, visitors can look forward to private sleigh rides, snowmobile tours, and dog sled mushing. **The Gables Inn** (2007 Main St., 888-488-0503, www.thegablesnh.com, \$95-\$135) is a quaint Victorian bed-and-breakfast with each room showcasing its own unique attributes. All guest rooms feature private baths; some boast views of Mount Washington. **The Wayside Inn** (3738 Main St., 603-869-3364, www.thewaysideinn.com, \$128-\$268) is a classic New England country inn situated along the Ammonoosuc River. This month, the inn offers a special Christmas package (\$381 per couple, \$69 additional person) which includes two nights lodging, two three-course dinners, and you also get to cut your own Christmas tree at one of Bethlehem's two tree farms.

DINING

For breakfast and lunch, including a variety of coffees, baked goods, panini, and wraps, try **Maia Papaya** (2161 Main St., 603-869-9900, www.facebook.com/pages/The-Maia-Papaya//116186471735456, \$3.50-\$6.50). With its walls covered by rustic objects and original paintings on old wood, this downtown favorite, noted for its vegetarian and vegan options, reflects the town's artful, funky vibe. The **Riverview Restaurant** (\$15-\$26) at the Wayside Inn serves dinner Tuesday-Sunday evenings with selections such as grilled duck breast with orange sauce, venison with pears, red cabbage, and chestnuts, and a list of Swiss specialties in a romantic environment. One of the most popular dining options in town is at **Rosa Flamingo's** (2312 Main St., 603-869-3111, www.rosaflamingos.com, \$15-\$21), where diners can tuck into pizza, calzone, sandwiches, and other app-style options in addition to main dishes featuring seafood and pasta, all in a casual, relaxed setting.

DURING THE DAY

Many families with youngsters will be delighted to discover that nearby **Santa's Village** (528 Presidential Highway, 603-586-4445, www.santasvillage.com) is open during the holiday season, with more than a dozen rides running at the amusement park (weather permitting), and of course, Santa himself in residence. Those looking to score the perfect Christmas tree won't be disappointed with the regal **Rocks Estate** (4 Christmas Lane, 603-444-6228, www.therocks.org), a private 1800s summer destination that now hosts one of the area's best Christmas farms, a holiday-themed gift shop, and a number of hiking trails with spectacular views of the White Mountains. Just down the road, **Finnegan's Fine Firs** (371 Cherry Valley Road, 603-444-6275, finnegansfinefirs.biz) also offers families a vast plantation on which to search for that perfect tree. In downtown Bethlehem, those on the hunt for unique holiday goods stand a good chance of bagging a real find. **Local Works Marketplace at WREN** — Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network (2011 Main St, 603-869-9736, www.wrencommunity.org/shop/shopatwren.php) features locally produced foods, jewelry, and other gifts in addition to a showcase of rotating exhibits by area artists (www.wrencommunity.org/gallery/about.php). A few doors down, **Ragamuffins** (2053 Main St., 603-869-3387, www.flyingcarpetdesigns.com) is an eclectic stop for hand-knit rugs, hand-crafted gift cards, and well-priced antiques (we picked up a relatively worn, 1903 copy of the "Land of Oz" as a gift for \$5 on our visit). If you're itching to get outdoors and hit the slopes, both **Bretton Woods** (Route 302, Bretton Woods, 603-278-1000, brettonwoods.com), and **Cannon Mountain** (9 Franconia Notch State Park, 603-823-8800, www.cannonmt.com) are less than 15 miles away. On Dec. 12, the former is also selling lift tickets for only \$12 in order to celebrate the grand opening of its new lift at its Mount Stickney gladed area. [Continued...](#)

Eric Wilbur can be reached at ewilbur@boston.com. ■

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