

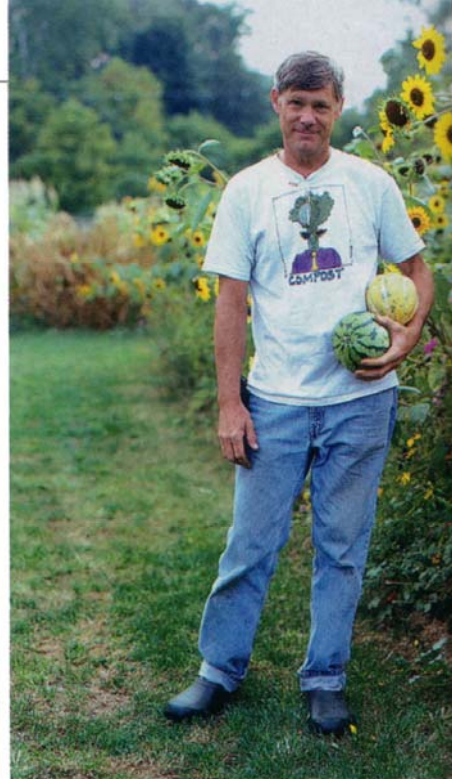
Big City, Small Town

Burlington combines great escapes on Lake Champlain with eclectic dining and lively nightlife. BY JOHN ROSENTHAL

What if you were to design the perfect small city? You might select a place of great natural beauty, nestled among the mountains. You might build it on a hill that rises gently from the shores of a clear blue lake. You might create a pedestrian-friendly downtown to encourage residents to get out of their cars and walk the streets. And you might open a university atop the hill so that your city would be carpeted with green quadrangles and populated by a vibrant community of literate young people.

What you'd end up with would look a lot like Burlington, Vermont. And yet Burlington was not designed by master city planners. On the contrary, Burling-

ton, the birthplace of tie-dye ice cream makers Ben and Jerry and the organic crowd's favorite band Phish, has a deserved reputation as a haven for aging hippies. In 1981, it elected a Socialist mayor, Bernie Sanders, who is now Vermont's lone representative in Congress. At the intersection of Main and Church, Burlington's two busiest streets, a gentle *cuckoo cuckoo* advises blind pedestrians when it's safe to cross. Ask people why they like living in Burlington, and then pull up a chair. "I love being able to hike the Long Trail all day, and have Thai food for dinner the same night," says Carolyn Lese, a regular patron at Five Spice Cafe. Others go on at length about reaping the benefits of city life without having to lock the door



A busker strums outside the Flynn Center for Performing Arts (left). Shepherd Ogden (top) holds melons from the Cook's Garden at the Intervale. Caramel apples (above) stand tall at Lake Champlain Chocolates.

at night. They point proudly to the Intervale, 220 acres of prime real estate within the city limits devoted entirely to organic farming.

FAST FACTS

Burlington is Vermont's largest city, but with a mere 40,000 people, it still feels like a small town. No other state's largest city is so small. In 1999, the A&E network deemed it the best city in America. The downtown streets are laid out in a grid, extending east from Lake



At Perkins Pier marina on Lake Champlain, visitors can rent dinghies and other small craft.

Champlain, and you can walk from one end of downtown to the other in 20 minutes. **Church Street**, which parallels the lake, is downtown's pedestrian-only mall, with a great selection of shops, restaurants, and cafés. In summer, average highs range from 70 to 81°F, and it usually stays warm enough to enjoy dinner alfresco in August. Autumn is dry but cool, with a gaudy display of fiery reds and oranges, which in turn draws "leaf peepers" from half a dozen states and provinces around the region.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Lake Champlain is Burlington's backyard pool and playground, with countless opportunities for recreation. Whether you wet your toes in it, bike around it, boat across it, or stroll along its shores, the lake is Burlington's greatest attraction. Start at **Waterfront Park**, where, in quintessential Burlington style, a sailboat wharf and a skateboard park co-exist. From there, you can walk or bike north along the **Burlington Bike Path/Island Line Rail Trail** for 13 miles, the last four of them on an eight-foot-wide converted railroad bed that extends like a skinny finger across the lake itself. A bicycle ferry (\$1 each way) takes you across the first disconnect in the trail, but you'll have to turn around when you get to **"The Missing Link,"** a 200-foot

gap that prevents the trail from extending to the Champlain islands. For maps and information about where to rent bikes, stop by **Local Motion**, a non-profit advocacy group for the city's pedestrians and cyclists. "Burlington is a biker's dream, and there's so much variety," says resident Chapin Spencer. "From downtown, you can set off on any number of routes, including the

Sample This

Three tours behind the scenics.



Now that it has outgrown the converted Burlington gas station where it all started, **Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream** has its operations in Waterbury, about a half-hour drive southeast of town. The tour includes a movie and costs \$2 (kids under 12 free). The wait can be longer than the tour, so grab a scoop of Chunky Monkey and step outside to see the corporate spokescows and green mountain vistas. Free samples are the biggest attraction at the **Magic Hat Brewery**, just south of Burlington. At least four ales are always on tap. Tours are free, afternoons only Wed-Sat. Finally, there's the **Vermont Teddy Bear Company**, in nearby Shelburne. Big brothers will yawn, but little kids with a soft spot for stuffed animals will enjoy watching a bear being made especially for them. —J.R.

TRAVELWISE BURLINGTON

Planning your trip

The area code for Burlington is 802.

Sightseeing and Culture

Ben & Jerry's, Rte. 100, Waterbury, Vt.; 866-258-6877.

Flynn Center for Performing Arts, 153 Main St.; 863-5966.

Lake Champlain Shoreline Cruises, 862-8300; www.soea.com.

Local Motion, 1 Steele St. #103; 652-2453; www.localmotionvt.org.

Magic Hat Brewery, 5 Bartlett Bay Rd., South Burlington; 658-2739.

Shelburne Museum, Rte. 7, Shelburne, 985-3346; www.shelburnemuseum.org.

Vermont Teddy Bear Company, 6655 Shelburne Rd. (Rte. 7), Shelburne; 985-3001.

Restaurants, Cafés, and Bars

Al's French Frys, 1251 Williston Rd.; South Burlington; 862-9203.

Five Spice Cafe, 175 Church St.; 864-4045.

Ice House, 171 Battery St.; 864-1800.

Lake Champlain Chocolates, (Free factory tours) 63 Church St.; 800-465-5909.

Muddy Waters Coffeehouse, 184 Main St.; 658-0466.

NECI Commons, 25 Church St.; 862-6324; www.necidining.com.

Nectars, 188 Main St.; 658-4771.

O, 112 Lake St.; 264-4700.

Penny Cluse Café, 169 Cherry St.; 651-8834.

Red Square, 136 Church St.; 859-8909.

Ri Ra Irish Pub, 123 Church St.; 860-9401.

Smokejacks, 156 Church St.; 658-1119.

Vermont Sandwich Company, 2 North Winooski Ave.; 951-1652; also at 265 Williston Rd., Williston; 878-6963.

Lodging

Lang House, 360 Main St.; 652-2500; www.langhouse.com. \$135-195.

Radisson Burlington, 60 Battery St.; 658-6500; www.radisson.com/burlingtonvt. \$119-309.

Willard Street Inn, 349 South Willard St.; 651-8710; www.willardstreetinn.com. \$125-225.



BEN & JERRY'S (ICE CREAM)

ten-mile **Cycle the City Loop** and the 13-mile **Island Line Rail Trail**.”

You can get the same view without all the pedaling on one of the car or passenger ferries that ply the lake (these ships will save you time too, if you're on your way to or from New York). For a true sightseeing expedition, the 500-passenger **Spirit of Ethan Allen III** offers an unusual variety of cruises—lunch, sunset, “lobstah” on the lake—in addition to the 90-minute narrated tour.

North Beach, on North Avenue, and **Leddy Park**, another mile beyond it, both feature long sandy lakefront beaches (North Beach has lifeguards), as well as inviting picnic areas and tennis courts. North Beach also has a campground.

Unlike most museums, **Shelburne Museum** is no rainy day outing. Often called “New England’s Smithsonian,” the Shelburne houses some 150,000 artifacts in 39 buildings on 45 landscaped acres and formal gardens, but no covered walkways. Some of the buildings—a 1901 round barn, an 1890 railroad station—are exhibits in their own right.

At the **Willard Street Inn** (*below*), daily tea is served in the solarium overlooking the English garden. Located in an old mill, the new **O restaurant** (*opposite page*) features seafood entrées.



Friends get together for all-day breakfast and bottomless cups of coffee at the **Penny Cluse Café** (*above*).

WHERE THE LOCALS EAT

Asian food in Vermont? You heard right. **Five Spice Cafe** may not look like much, but the wait for a table should dissuade you from judging this book by its cover. The menu allows you to mix and match Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai, and there's even dim sum on Sunday mornings. You won't soon forget Evil Jungle Prince with Chicken (and vegetables in a spicy sauce made with coconut milk). **Penny Cluse Café** is the place for brunch, serving all-day breakfast and lunch dishes with a Southwestern accent. “The biscuits and gravy are what causes lines out the door on weekends,” says floor manager Angela Heyes.

For dinner, don't miss **Smokejacks**. The bold American menu rotates with the seasons, and draws on the freshest local fruits and vegetables. The macaroni and cheese with applewood smoked bacon is hard to resist, but if the lemon-chive risotto squares are on the menu, don't pass them up. You can sample gourmet meals prepared by chefs from the **New England Culinary Institute** either at their sit-down restaurant, **NECI Commons**, or at their take-out counter located by the door. For surf and turf with a view, the **Ice House** has the best perch, overlooking the lake.

Two “joints” not to miss: **Al's French**

Frys looks like a retro hamburger stand, but it's the real thing. It has been churning out crispy fries (and thick milk shakes) ever since Al himself opened his first french fry cart back in the 1940s. The **Vermont Sandwich Company** has five locations in and around Burlington, and is the best place to pick up sandwiches and baked chocolate chip cookies for a day of hiking or sitting on the beach. You pass the Williston location on the way to the hiking trails east of town.

NIGHTLIFE

Burlington is a college town, so there's no shortage of action after dark. **Nectars**, where Phish got their start, hosts live rock bands

and satisfies late night munchies with its cafeteria-line steam tables dishing up dining hall-style food. Next door is the **Muddy Waters Coffeehouse**, which oozes the kind of real atmosphere that Starbucks could only wish for. **Red Square**, a raucous college hangout, has live music in the adjoining alleyway whenever the weather is warm enough. A more adult crowd flocks to **Ri Ra Irish Pub**, authentic down to its shepherd's pie.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Radisson Hotel Burlington** has the best location in town, overlooking the lake. Rooms with a more personal touch can be had at Burlington's two leading bed-and-breakfasts: **Lang House** and the **Willard Street Inn**. They both date from the 1880s and are a short walk from the center of town. Lang House hides its televisions inside Victorian-era armoires, but boasts dataports in all of its 11 uniquely decorated rooms. Originally a private residence, the Willard Street Inn features a cherrywood-paneled foyer and comfortable rooms with views of the lake and Adirondacks. The current innkeepers turned it into a 14-room inn in 1996.

Freelance writer JOHN ROSENTHAL lives in Manhattan, and whenever the city gets too hectic he escapes to Burlington.