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Durham, N.H., is a Great Place for the Young at Heart

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright | Globe Correspondents



Downtown Durham has plenty of shops and restaurants.

Pamela Wright for The Boston Globe

This pretty New Hampshire seacoast-area town is consistently ranked as one of the best places to live and to raise a family in the nation; last year CNN Money also rated Durham No. 2 on its list of top places for 20-somethings to call home. No wonder: the friendly, tight-knit community boasts historic homes and buildings, quiet neighborhoods, and plenty of picturesque places for outdoor adventures. It's also home to the University of New Hampshire, which adds energy, diversity, and creative spirit, along with concerts, lectures, celebrations, and sporting events that you likely won't find in other small towns. Added bonus: the Amtrak Downeaster offers several daily departures to and from downtown Durham and Boston.

STAY

The elegant Three Chimneys Inn (17 Newmarket St., 603-868-7800, www.threechimneysinn.com, standard rooms \$119-\$229), located in an historic 1649 Colonial homestead overlooking the Oyster River, is reason enough to visit Durham. The sprawling property, once part of an original settlement at Oyster River Falls, features 23 rooms in the main house and adjoining 1795 carriage house. All have been lovingly and smartly renovated and feature four poster beds, lush linens, period antiques, restored

woodwork, and private baths. Some rooms have original wide-pine floors, exposed beams, and gas fireplaces. There's also an elegant restaurant housed in two main first-floor rooms, an outdoor terrace that comes alive in warmer months, and a popular tavern (see below.) The Holiday Inn Express (2 Main St., 603-868-1234, www.ihg.com/holidayinnexpress, standard rooms around \$90-\$130) is a solid, wallet-pleasing option, with standard, cookie-cutter rooms but an efficient and friendly staff and a convenient location near town. Free WiFi, parking, and breakfast buffet add value.

DINE

Join the locals for breakfast at family-owned Young's (48 Main St., 603-868-2688, www.youngsrestaurant.com, breakfast, \$3.50-\$9.50, lunch \$5-\$10.50). The longstanding, casual restaurant is touted for its community involvement, green ethos, and locally sourced ingredients, some from the owners' own gardens. The egg benedict is worth the calorie splurge; try the vegetarian with homemade pesto hollandaise sauce. For high-quality Mexican fare, dine at Mixteca (10 Jenkins Ct., 603-868-397-5971, www.mixtecataqueria.com, entrees \$10-\$21), featuring an extensive menu of salsas, freshly prepared guacamoles, and creative enchiladas, rellenos, tacos, and tortas. Our favorites include the spicy carnitas de puerco, with crispy chipotle pork, pickled onions, avocado, and black beans served on a house-made tortilla, and the enchiladas de cangrejo y camarones, with sweet local crab and smoky shrimp in a creamy green chili sauce. We love the cozy, historic atmosphere at Frost Sawyer Tavern at Three Chimneys Inn (entrees \$15-\$35), with low wood ceilings, massive beams, and the original Colonial fireplace. Start with their signature Jefferson fried chicken appetizer, crispy beer-battered and pecan-crusted chicken strips served with a local maple syrup and bourbon dipping sauce. Popular entrees include the potato-crusted haddock and the salmon, gently poached in a coconut curry sauce and topped with a lobster tail. For home-style comfort food, head to Bella's (5 Mill Road Plaza, 603-868-3377, www.bellascasualdining.com, \$6.99-\$14.99), with sandwiches, salads, and burgers, along with dinner entrees like liver and onions, fish and chips, and creamy pasta alfredo. Thai Smile (13 Jenkins Court, 603-868-2772, www.thaismile2nh.com, lunch \$7.95-\$9.95, dinner \$10.95-\$17.95) offers an array of traditional curries, stir fries, and noodle dishes, prepared to varying heat levels. For a quick, healthy sandwich or salad, pop into the UNH Dairy Bar (3 Depot Road, 603-862-1006, www.unh.edu/dairy-bar/index.html, \$3.99-\$6.49), located at the Durham train station, where the focus is on sustainable, organic ingredients. They also serve ice cream.

DURING THE DAY

Visiting artists' lectures, faculty and student concerts, and UNH Celebrity Series performances, featuring world renowned musicians, are held at the Paul Creative Arts Center (30 Academic Way, 603-862-7222, cola.unh.edu/pcac, ticket prices vary). The center also houses the Museum of Art (free) with changing exhibits, and a permanent collection of 1,700 works, including nearly 200 Japanese woodblock prints. Stop in Hayden Sports (44 Main St., 603-868-2096, www.haydensports.com) for UNH emblazoned sportswear, gear, accessories and gifts, SolSistar (9 Madbury Road, 603-397-5229, www.solsistar.com) for trendy designer fashions, and The Candy Bar (44 Main St., 603-397-5154, www.thecandybarnh.com) for gourmet chocolates and candies. There's plenty of outdoor adventure, including hiking, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing at 250-acre College Woods, 334-acre Kingman Farm, and nearly 250-acre Thompson Farm (www.cola.unh.edu/woodlands/properties); all have extensive trail networks through forests and open fields. Sledding is popular at Wagon Hill Farm (www.ci.durham.nh.us/boc_conservation/wagon-hill-farm), as well as hiking, cross-country skiing, and

snowshoeing through woods to the edge of the Oyster River, with views into Little Bay. Don't miss the trails at Adams Point Wildlife Management Area, (www.wildlife.state.nh.us), an 80-acre site at the mouth of Great Bay, where a 1.3-mile trail skirts the rocky Great Bay shoreline with open-water views. If you have time for a longer hike, consider the Cy and Bobbie Sweet Trail (www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newhampshire/placesweprotect/a-sweet-trail-to-a-great-bay.xml). The trail is 4 miles long, one way, stretching from Longmarsh Preserve in Durham to the Great Bay Estuary in Newmarket, traveling through upland forests, freshwater wetlands, and tidal salt marshes.



Pamela Wright for
The Boston Globe

The Town Landing in Durham, which sits along the picturesque Oyster River, which offers access to outdoor activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.

AFTER DARK

Catch a boisterous UNH hockey game at the 7,500-seat Whittemore Center (128 Main St., 862-4000, www.whittcenter.com); family shows, concerts, and other sporting events are also held here throughout the year. Decent food and convivial atmosphere make Libby's Bar and Grill (47 Main St., 603-868-5542, www.libbysbarandgrill.com) a popular hangout. The downstairs dance club, with a DJ and laser light show, is always packed on Thursday and Saturday nights. The Knot (58A Main St., 603-868-2959) is dark, cramped, and a bit grungy, like all good dive pubs should be. It has live music two or three times a week.

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