

Travel

CLOSE-UP ON WAITSFIELD, VT.

IT'S A NATURAL

RURAL TOWN THRIVES WITH VIBRANT ARTS SCENE AND AN ORGANIC LIFESTYLE

BY KARI J. BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

This picturesque rural town in the heart of the Mad River Valley has a vibrant community, a thriving arts scene, unmatched outdoor activities, and a conscience. Residents spend extra to buy their cheese, veggies, and free-range meat from local farmers, schools serve children organic food, and the Mad Bus whisks people around town for free. In this casually sophisticated valley, people wear their fleece to the choral performances, vendors at town events sell Thai and Ethiopian food, and the local cinema shows Cuban and environmental films and hosts photo exhibits with a political bent. Go see a flick and you may be sitting next to a former Broadway actor, a world-class skier, a glass-blowing artist, or an organic farmer — all locals.

PLAY

Scenic Route 100 bisects town and runs parallel to the north-flowing Mad River, which draws swimmers, anglers, canoists, and kayakers. **Clearwater Sports** (4147 Main St., 802-496-2708, clearwatersports.com; canoe/kayak trips \$75-\$85, tube rental and shuttle \$23) runs five-hour guided canoe and kayak trips on the river and full-moon trips on a local lake, complete with a gourmet dinner. Or, rent kayaking gear or inner tubes, get shuttled to the riverhead, and float downriver for hours. The **Mad River Path Association** (802-496-7284, madriverpath.com) oversees a network of hiking trails in the valley and produces an easy-to-read topographic map that highlights some of the area's best routes and daytrips. Wander along the Mad River, climb Camel's Hump or Lincoln Peak, or hike along the Long Trail. **Inverness Ski Shop** (5274 Main St., 802-496-3343, iskishop.com, \$25 a day) rents mountain bikes for exploring trails in the valley. Or head to **Sugarbush Resort** (1840 Sugarbush Access Road, Warren, 800-537-8427, sugarbush.com; bikes \$25-\$75 a day, lift tickets \$30 a day), which offers lift-served mountain biking through its new Sugarbush Summer Adventure Center. Bring a bike or rent one, ride the lifts up, and explore 15 miles of single-track, cross-country trails, and downhill runs. Looking for something more offbeat? Sugarbush has two new 18-hole Frisbee golf courses. Or, enjoy a bird's-eye view of the valley. **Sugarbush Soaring** (Warren-Sugarbush Airport, 2355 Airport Road, Warren, 802-496-2290, sugarbushsoaring.com; 20- to 30-minute ride \$119-\$156, Thursday-Monday, call first) offers glider rides and lessons.

SPEND

Artisans' Gallery (Bridge Street, 802-496-6256, vtartisansgallery.com) is a co-op that markets contemporary crafts and eclectic works by about 180 Vermont-based artisans. **The Store** (5275 Main St., 802-496-4465 or 800-639-8031, vermont-store.com), located in a restored 1834 Methodist meetinghouse, carries Vermont gifts and gourmet products, imported pottery and linens, cookware, children's books, and antiques. At **Waitsfield Pottery** (4366 Main St., No. 1, 802-496-7155, waitsfieldpottery.com), Ulrike Tessmer, originally of Hamburg, Germany, makes and sells a fun and unusual selection of fine pottery.



The Store (above, located in a former Methodist meetinghouse on Main Street) offers Vermont gourmet products. Hadley Gaylord (below) sorts fresh produce at the Mad River Green Farmers' Market.

FUEL

Green Mountain Coffee got its start at **Three Mountain Cafe** (107 Mad River Green, 802-496-5470, threemountaincafe.com) in the early '80s. It's a cozy spot with free Wi-Fi, tasty breakfast, and deli sandwiches (\$2.99-\$6), and the best cup of joe in town (\$1-\$1.80). The valley is home to another first: the birth of American flatbread. **American Flatbread** bakery and restaurant (Lareau Farm, 46 Lareau Road, 802-496-8856, americanflatbread.com; Friday-Saturday, 5:30-9:30 p.m., pizza \$8.50-\$18.50), serves delicious wood-fired flatbread pizzas. **Easy Street Cafe and Restaurant** (6163 Main St., Route 100, 802-496-7234, easystreetmarket.com; daily for lunch, sandwiches \$7.15; Tuesday-Sunday for dinner, entrees \$15-\$23). Or, head up the hill to **Timbers Restaurant** at Sugarbush Resort (1840 Sugarbush Access Road, Warren, 802-583-6800; lunch \$9-\$12, dinner entrees \$15-\$26) for one of the best fine-dining experiences in the valley.

REST

Inn at the Round Barn Farm (1661 East Warren Road, 802-496-2276, innattheroundbarn.com; \$165-\$315) has 12 guestrooms in a renovated 19th-century farmhouse. The inn sits on 245 acres, surrounded by meadows, mountains, and ponds, next to a round barn that hosts art exhibits and performances by local theater and music groups. **Millbrook Inn and Restaurant** (533 Mill Brook Road, Route 17, 800-477-2809, millbrookinn.com; summer \$95-\$105 with breakfast, \$145-\$155 with breakfast and dinner) is an 1850s renovated farmhouse. Don't miss the restaurant, which serves homemade pasta, breads, and desserts, and is known for its Indian food. The **1824 House Inn** (2150 Main St., 802-496-7555, 1824house.com; \$99-\$135 Sunday-Thursday, \$153-\$163 Friday-Saturday) has eight country-style rooms and serves a three-course breakfast with fruit, pastries, and a main entree. The inn has a great swimming hole nearby.



DO

The Big Picture Theater & Cafe (48 Carroll Road, 802-496-8994, bigpicturetheater.info, Wednesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.) lives up to its motto: "A local gathering place with a global dimension." In the past year, this popular hangout has held a Cuban film festival, an opera festival, a punk rock show, salsa nights, politically themed exhibits, and performances by local bands. At the **Mad River Green Farmers' Market** (Route 100, on the Mad River Green, mrgfm.com, Saturdays 9 a.m.-1 p.m., May-October), you can buy locally grown fruits and veggies, baked goods, free-range meat products, maple syrup, and crafts, all while listening to live music. The **Vermont Festival of the Arts** takes place each August (Aug. 3-Sept. 3, 802-496-6682, vermontartfest.com) throughout the valley, and includes more than 100 events: local theater, dance, and music performances, art exhibits and demonstrations, cooking classes, a decorated boat regatta, garden tours, and an ice cream social. Don't miss the Mad River Valley Duck Race on Sept. 2, when more than 5,000 yellow rubber duckies race down the river to raise money for local schools, arts, and environmental groups, and charities. The festival culminates in the **Mad River Valley Craft Fair** (Kenyon's Field, madrivercraftfair.com; Sept. 1, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sept. 2, 10-4; adults \$3, children under age 13 free) on Labor Day weekend, when you can pick up handmade pottery, clothing, furniture, fine art, jewelry, and more. The event includes music by the big band Green Mountain Swing, artists' demonstrations, and kids' activities.

PARTY

The **Purple Moon Pub** (6163 Main St., Route 100, 802-496-3422, purplemoonpub.com) has a nice outdoor deck and a small, intimate "martini bar" feel inside, with comfy couches and a hand-crafted mahogany bar. It serves Vermont beers on tap and pub fare until 10 p.m. on weekdays and 2 a.m. on weekends, and often has live entertainment on weekends. Just down the road, **Localfolk Smokehouse** (9 Route 17, on the corner of Routes 17 and 100, 802-496-5623) serves 18 types of draft beer until 1 a.m., Thursdays to Saturdays, and has pool tables and an outdoor deck. It's known for its hickory-smoked barbecue ribs and live entertainment, including funk, folk, R&B, bluegrass, and rock bands. **John Egan's Big World Pub and Grill** (8 Route 17, 802-496-3033, bigworldvermont.com) is another popular locals' hangout that draws families and the outdoorsy set. It closes by 9:30 p.m. (call first) and doesn't have entertainment, but it's the perfect spot to get a beer (with a good burger or rack of lamb prepared on a wood grill) and relax in a casual setting that's decorated with local artwork.

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'There's a lot of talent in this valley'

By Kari J. Bodnarchuk

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

WAITSFIELD, Vt. — This small community of about 1,700 has one of the state's liveliest visual, cultural, and performing arts scenes and, at least unofficially, its highest concentration of artists.

"Not a lot of people watch television here, and it's a much more vibrant community because of that," says Jennifer Howard, a local resident and chairwoman of The Valley Players, a community theater group. "People tend to get out more and get involved."

Howard and others also attribute this vibrancy to the New Yorkers and other New Englanders who have moved to the area and brought art or art appreciation with them, and to the openness of the existing community.

Waitsfield is home to a professional theater group, a community theater group, a choral group, a facility that hosts summer music and theater camps for children, numerous venues that showcase high-quality theater events and musical performances throughout the year, and many galleries that exhibit the works of dozens of local artists.

The Valley Players performs several high-caliber theater events each year in a historic building on Main Street that was a church when it was built in the 1800s.

"We firmly believe in making the performing arts available to everyone by keeping our prices down and encouraging people to get up on stage," says Howard. "There's a lot of talent in this valley and people who love to get on stage."

The community theater group usually puts on three to five big productions a year, shows such as



CALEB KENNA FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Built in 1962 as a museum, The Bundy Center for the Arts is now a top arts venue for the Waitsfield community.

the recent musical "Side by Side by Sondheim" and the comedy "The Cemetery Club."

This month, the group holds three play readings as part of the Vermont Festival of the Arts. The first, Aug. 9, is a staged reading of the very funny whodunit, "The Real Inspector Hound" by Tom Stoppard.

The readings on Aug. 16 and 23 "are open to anyone who walks through the door," says Howard.

Each summer, the Skinner Barn Theatre Company produces a Broadway cabaret series, a big musical, and several public dances at The Skinner Barn, a restored 1891 post-and-beam dairy barn.

The company's founder, Peter Boynton, moved to Waitsfield in 2000 from New York, where he was a Broadway actor and a soap star on "As the World Turns" (remember Tonio Reyes?). This month, the company performs the musical "The Fantasticks" as part of the arts festival.

The Bundy Center for the Arts, just south of town, was built by ar-

chitect Harlow Carpenter in 1962 as a contemporary rural museum. After several reincarnations, it's a top arts venue for the community.

"We're trying to be an all-around center for the arts by offering visual arts, performing arts, music, theater, and the whole range," says Ruth Ann Pattee, operations director for the center.

The nonprofit Green Mountain Cultural Center, located in the renovated 1910 Joslyn Round Barn, hosts year-round art exhibits, theater productions, and musical events such as the three-week June opera festival. All of the rehearsals and a series of opera-related classes and lectures take place at the center and are open to the public.

"People can watch the making of an opera," says Tim Piper, co-owner of the Inn at the Round Barn, site of the Joslyn Round Barn. "They can see the creative directors putting the staging together, hang out with musical directors from the New York Met, and have lunch with opera singers

If you go . . .

The Skinner Barn

609 Common Road, Waitsfield, Vt.

802-496-4422

theskinnerbarn.com

The Valley Players

Route 100

802-583-1674

valleyplayers.com

The Bundy Center for the Arts and Mad River Chorale

361 Bundy Road

802-496-4781

Green Mountain Cultural Center

Joslyn Round Barn

8 Mad River Green

802-496-7722

theroundbarn.com

who come from all over the world. It's like a fantasy baseball camp."

"The key to all the arts in the valley," Piper says, "is that people have an opportunity to be exposed to new art forms in a personal and intimate way."

It's nothing like watching TV.

Kari J. Bodnarchuk, a freelance writer and photographer, can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.

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