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## VINTAGE RAILROAD RIDES IN NEW ENGLAND

By Kathy Shiels Tully

This fall, why not try riding “car-free” as a passenger in one of New England’s vintage railroad cars, focused on autumn’s patchwork quilt of colors, not traffic? You’ll rumble along networks of historic track, originally laid to transport passengers and goods and now restored for these excursions. From your window, relish the movable vista, some only accessible [KATHY: VISIBLE?] by train: woodlands, cranberry bogs, wooden bridges, steep ravines, gorges, forts, waterfront, sand dunes, lighthouses, wildlife. Listen to the tour guide and, on most trains, dine on options from simple snacks to elegant dinners. Trips last from one to four hours round trip. The memories last a lot longer.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL BENJAMIN

The Notch Train, operated by New Hampshire’s Conway Scenic Railroad, delights day-trippers.







## Cape Cod Central Railroad

Hyannis, Massachusetts

Of note 1955 MC 2007 locomotive

Duration 2 hours

Length 50 miles

The Patti Page song “Old Cape Cod” neglected to mention this railroad, running on lines among the oldest in America. Constructed circa 1850 by the Old Colony Railroad, these tracks first transported passengers, then later local goods, including blocks of ice, sand, and seafood. Departing from either Hyannis or Sandwich, view an idyllic Cape, complete with cranberry bogs, sand dunes, and salt marshes. As you parallel the Cape Cod Canal, listen to the guide describe the waterway’s own chapter in New England history. Meals are served on some excursions.

*Through October 26; \$15-\$79; 888-797-7245; capetrain.com*



Caption Area

## Cafe Lafayette Dinner Train

North Woodstock, New Hampshire

Of note 1952 Pullman Planetarium, 1953 Canadian National Railroad cafe, and 1924 Pullman-Standard Victorian coaches

Duration 2 hours

Length 20 miles

In 1989, owners Lance Burak and Leslie Holloway got this feast-on-wheels rolling, one of about 20 fine-dining trains in North America. Leaving North Woodstock, you travel round trip on former Boston & Maine track, along the Pemigewasset River and through the Jack O’Lantern resort in Woodstock. Admire the scenery while enjoying a five-course meal, served with white gloves, European style. At night, 6,000 watts of halogen floodlights showcase the view. For a panoramic view, reserve a seat in the Granite Eagle’s 24-seat observation dome, the top level of this three-tiered 1952 Pullman Planetarium car. One of five built by the Missouri-Pacific Railroad, it’s the last in operation in the United States.

*Through October 26; \$59-\$89; 603-745-3500; nhdinnertrain.com*





## Downeast Scenic Railroad

Ellsworth, Maine

**Of note** 1948 and 1950 diesel-electric locomotives, 1917 Delaware Lackawanna & Western and 1910 Maine Central coaches, and an open-air car converted from a 1964 log car

**Duration** 90 minutes

**Length** 10 miles

“Newest” among New England’s vintage train rides, the Downeast four years ago revived operation on the historic Calais Branch line, built in 1884 as the Maine Shore Line Railroad (later bought by the Maine Central Railroad Co.). In 2006, five local businessmen seeking to renew the tourist railroad business leased 30 miles of track, closed since 1985, from the state of Maine. Volunteers restored the rails, an engine, passenger cars, and caboose. In 2010, the Downeast began operating on 5 miles of track, along which you may spot fox, bald eagles, bear, osprey, and moose. Last July [KATHY: 2012 OR 2013?], the newly rebuilt wye, a triangle of tracks used to turn a train around, was back in use at the Washington Junction rail yard. Consider volunteering with the Downeast Rail Heritage Preservation Trust through November as a conductor, brakeman, or car attendant. Or help out restoring passenger cars, including a 1904 Delaware & Hudson Combine (half baggage, half passenger car).

*Through October 20; \$8-\$15;*

*866-499-7245; [downeastscenicrail.org](http://downeastscenicrail.org)*

## Essex Steam Train & Riverboat

Essex, Connecticut

**Of note** 1920s Mikado 40 and 1989 Mikado 3025 locomotives, and 1920s coaches

**Duration** 2½ hours (train and riverboat) or 1 hour (train only)

**Length** about 12 miles (train)

Essex is home to the last steam train and riverboat connection in the United States, one of only two worldwide. Ride an old-fashioned train pulled by a powerful engine on the Valley Railroad line and behold the white billows of smoke belching out overhead. At Deep River Landing, jump aboard the *Becky Thatcher*. On this land-and-water journey you’ll see the Connecticut River, Gillette Castle, Goodspeed Opera House, and the Haddam Swing Bridge. Don’t be surprised if you spot cormorants, swans, or blue herons; this section of the river has never been industrialized.

*Through October 27; \$9-\$36;*

*800-377-3987; [essexsteamtrain.com](http://essexsteamtrain.com)*

## Green Mountain Flyer

Bellows Falls, Vermont

**Of Note** Alco RS-1 405 diesel locomotive, and 1930s steel-and-wood and 1940s all-steel cars

**Duration** 2½ hours

**Length** 26 miles

Boarding at the historic Bellows Falls Station, which was built in the 1800s and is now shared with Amtrak, the Green Mountain Flyer runs on tracks owned mostly by the state of Vermont. The Rutland Railroad, the Boston & Maine, and the Central Vermont Railroad once carried New England passengers from state to state and even to Montreal on these tracks. Meander through the woods, over the Williams River seven times, over the Brockway Mills Gorge, and past a few wooden bridges. In addition to tourists, this train still carries freight, including wood, salt, and ethanol.

*September 20 through October 29;*

*\$20-\$25; 800-707-3530;*

*[rails-vt.com/green-mountain-flyer](http://rails-vt.com/green-mountain-flyer)*

## Maine Narrow Gauge Railroad Co. & Museum

Portland, Maine

**Of note** 1949 diesel locomotive and 1918 Monson steam locomotive

**Duration** 35-40 minutes

**Length** 3 miles

Narrow-gauge railroads, so named because their tracks are about half as wide as standard tracks, made it possible to reach people and businesses in the rural areas of central Maine. On this railway, built just for the museum, you can ride al fresco if you like (some passenger cars are open) along picturesque Casco Bay, or as a guest engineer with your hands on the throttle in a special hour-long program. Either way, you’ll view Portland’s historic and still active waterfront, with four forts (dating back to the early 1800s) and three lighthouses (Portland Head Light, Portland Breakwater “Bug” Light, and Spring Point Ledge Lighthouse), not to mention colorful ferryboats, sailboats, and cruise ships. Vintage passenger cars and hands-on activities for kids share the museum with the only 2-foot-gauge parlor car ever built in the United States.

*Through October 27; \$6-\$10 (museum included);*

*207-828-0814; [mainenarrowgauge.org](http://mainenarrowgauge.org)*





Caption Area

### The Notch Train, Conway Scenic Railroad

North Conway, New Hampshire

**Of note** 1965 and 1966 GE diesel-electric locomotives, 1955 Budd Vista Dome, and 1940s and 1950s passenger coaches

**Duration** 5 hours (Crawford Station) or 5½ hours (Fabyan Station)

**Length** 52 or 60 miles

The Notch Train, one of three trains operated by the Conway Scenic, runs on tracks laid by the Maine Central Railroad in the 1870s. Once integral to tourism, 57 trains ran daily in 1915, the peak for train travel, to the White Mountains' grand hotels, including the Mount Crawford House and Mount Washington Hotel. Heading to the Crawford and Fabyan stations, steady your cameras for a spectacular view of the entire Mount Washington Valley. Experience a thrilling ride over the Frankenstein trestle, an engineering marvel more than 520 feet long and almost 85 feet off the ravine floor. From September 14 to October 13, the popular steam locomotive No. 7470 pulls the Conway Valley train.

**Through October 20; \$10.50-\$108; 800-232-5251; [conwayscenic.com/notch-train](http://conwayscenic.com/notch-train)**







CONWAY PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL BENJAMIN; WINNIPESAUKEE PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOBO & WINNIPESAUKEE SCENIC RAILROADS

## Old Colony & Newport Railway

Newport, Rhode Island

**Of note** 1884 parlor car, 1904 open platform coach, and 1940s GE diesel-electric locomotive

**Duration** 80 minutes

**Length** 10 miles

Newport's known for its mansions, and you'll feel like Vanderbilt himself as you travel on this museum on wheels. Once a major player in Boston's transportation network, the OC&N RY operates on tracks laid in the late-1860s. Rumble past the Point, a historic Newport neighborhood lined with Early American and Colonial homes, and the decommissioned USS Saratoga in the Newport Naval Station. Capture stunning views of Narragansett Bay. On November 9, take the special North End train and travel an extra 8 miles of track not normally used by OC&N RY.

*Runs year-round, \$6-\$15;  
401-849-0546; ocnrr.com*

## White River Flyer

White River Junction, Vermont

**Of note** same as the Green Mountain Flyer

**Duration** 2½ hours

**Length** 26 miles

Something extra is in store when you board the White River Flyer, operated by the same company as the Green Mountain Flyer. After leaving Union Depot in White River Junction, once an important meeting spot for the Boston & Maine and Connecticut River lines, and now shared with Amtrak, you chug along the Connecticut River, heading north to East Thetford, where you reach the first of two optional stops: You can get off and spend two hours at the Montshire Museum of Science, with lots of indoor and outdoor activities, re-boarding for the return trip; there's also a half-hour lay-over at the Cedar Circle organic farm in East Thetford, where you can pick up some fresh veggies and baked good. Along the scenic river, you might spot members of Dartmouth College's crew team practicing.

*September 26 to October 27; \$20-\$25;  
800-707-3530; rails-vt.com/white-river-flyer*



## Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad

Meredith or Weirs Beach, New Hampshire

**Of note** Two 1924 Erie Lackawanna coaches, two 1950s Budd coaches, and a 1954 Pullman  
**Duration** 1 hour (from Weirs Beach), 2 hours (from Meredith), or 4 hours (Fall Foliage Special)

**Length** 9 miles (Weirs Beach), 18 miles (Meredith), or 40 miles (Fall Foliage Special)

Colorful maples, lakes and streams, deer grazing on a farm. The view outside is scenic, while the view inside shows you how railroad barons rode the rails. The Pullman car, for example, offers a baby grand piano, overstuffed chairs, and stewards who serve with white gloves. The tracks were laid in the late 1800s, along the shore of Lake Winnepesaukee. Choose a trip boarding in Meredith or a shorter one starting in Weirs Beach. Both head down along the lake shore to Lakeport; you'll see islands and grand houses dotting the rolling hillsides. Another option: Jump aboard the Fall Foliage Special, which includes an hour-long stop for a hot buffet at the Common Man restaurant in Plymouth.

*Through October 27; \$10-\$99;  
603-745-2135; hoborr.com* ■

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