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Visiting New Hampshire

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Introduction

New Hampshire, often referred to as the "Granite State," is a gem in the New England region, offering unparalleled natural beauty and a rich tapestry of history and culture. Unlike generic travel guides that often apply a one-size-fits-all approach, this book focuses specifically on the myriad experiences unique to New Hampshire, equipping potential tourists with a detailed and personalized roadmap for their journey.

With its four distinct seasons, New Hampshire is a state that offers something for everyone year-round. From the vibrant hues of fall foliage that attract leaf peepers from around the world, to the bustling summer days spent on the pristine waters of Lake Winnepesaukee, adventures in New Hampshire promise diversity and excitement. Spring brings blooming wildflowers and fresh maple syrup, while winter transforms the landscape into a snowy paradise perfect for skiing, snowboarding, and other winter sports.

While the natural beauty of New Hampshire is astounding, the state's cultural and historical landmarks add layers of depth to your visit. The quaint towns and historic sites, such as the city of Portsmouth and the charming Monadnock Region, provide a glimpse into the state's rich past. Moreover, the absence of a general sales tax makes shopping in New Hampshire a uniquely appealing experience for many visitors.

New Hampshire's compact size belies the richness of its attractions, offering everything from rugged mountains and serene lakes to a picturesque coastline. Whether you're embarking on a scenic drive along the Kancamagus Highway, exploring the covered bridges of Cheshire County, or partaking in outdoor activities in the Great North Woods, your journey will be filled with awe-inspiring vistas and memorable moments.

Transportation and travel logistics are crucial components of planning a visit. This book provides detailed information on how to navigate the state's diverse regions, ensuring that your travels are as smooth as possible. Whether traversing the state by car to explore its less accessible areas, or utilizing trains and buses for more urban locales, the options are clear and attuned to every traveler's needs.

In summary, this guide is your perfect companion as you prepare to uncover the beautiful complexities of New Hampshire. From practical travel tips to in-depth insights into the state's most famous destinations, "Visiting New Hampshire: A Guide for Tourists" will help you plan a trip that is not only enjoyable but also deeply enriching.

CHAPTER ONE: Getting To and Around New Hampshire

Embarking on a journey to New Hampshire requires a bit of planning, particularly concerning how you'll arrive and, perhaps more importantly, how you'll navigate the diverse landscapes once you're here. The Granite State offers several entry points and modes of transport, each with its own advantages depending on your starting location and your intended New Hampshire itinerary. Understanding the lay of the land, both geographically and in terms of its transportation network, is key to a smooth and enjoyable visit.

For many visitors arriving from further afield, flying is the most direct option. While New Hampshire doesn't host a sprawling international airport, it is served by Manchester-Boston Regional Airport (MHT). Conveniently located just a short drive south of Manchester and about an hour north of Boston, MHT is a well-connected regional airport. It offers flights to and from a variety of major hubs across the eastern United States, allowing travelers to connect from virtually anywhere in the country or internationally via those larger airports. MHT is known for being relatively easy to navigate compared to larger metropolitan airports, which can be a welcome relief for travelers. Upon arrival at MHT, rental cars are readily available, providing the most flexible option for exploring the state, a topic we will delve into shortly. Taxis, ride-sharing services, and even some limited bus connections are also available, though these options are generally best suited for reaching nearby destinations rather than venturing deep into the state.

Another way to reach New Hampshire is by rail, offering a more leisurely pace of travel. Amtrak serves the state via two distinct routes. The Downeaster line, which runs between Boston, Massachusetts, and Brunswick, Maine, makes stops in several New Hampshire Seacoast towns. This is a fantastic option if your destination is along the coast, with stations located in places like Exeter and Durham, near the University of New Hampshire, and further north towards the Maine border. It provides easy access to the historic city of Portsmouth and the charming coastal communities without the need to drive. The other Amtrak service, the Vermonter route, travels through the Connecticut River Valley on New Hampshire's western border, connecting Vermont with destinations south to Washington, D.C. This line has a stop in Claremont, offering access to that part of the state and the beautiful scenery along the river. Train travel can offer scenic views you might miss when driving, allowing you to relax and watch the landscape unfold.

Bus services also connect New Hampshire to surrounding areas, particularly Boston, a

major transportation hub. Concord Coach Lines is a prominent operator, offering comfortable and reliable service from South Station in Boston directly to key New Hampshire cities like Concord, the state capital, and points further north into the Lakes Region and beyond. These bus routes are an excellent option for those who prefer not to drive or fly, providing an affordable and convenient way to reach specific destinations within the state's network. However, similar to train travel, your mobility is limited to the areas served by the bus routes unless you have made arrangements for local transportation upon arrival.

Now, let's talk about getting *around* New Hampshire once you've arrived. This is where the rubber truly meets the road, quite literally, for most visitors. While the options for arriving are varied, exploring the true breadth and depth of New Hampshire's attractions overwhelmingly points towards one primary method: having your own vehicle. The state's charm lies not only in its well-known cities and towns but also in its countless hidden gems - the secluded hiking trails, the quiet lake coves, the picturesque rural villages, and the stunning scenic drives that wind through mountains and along rivers. These places are, by and large, simply not accessible via public transportation. Relying solely on buses or trains within New Hampshire will severely limit your ability to explore freely and spontaneously, requiring rigid planning around schedules and routes that may not align with your desired stops or detours.

Driving in New Hampshire, while essential for comprehensive exploration, comes with its own set of characteristics. The terrain is varied, and this is reflected in the roads. You will encounter beautifully maintained interstate highways, but just off these main arteries, roads can quickly become winding and hilly, especially as you venture north towards the mountains or through the rolling landscapes of the Monadnock Region. Many of these roads are not built on a grid system like in some parts of the country but follow the natural contours of the land, which can lead to unexpected curves and elevation changes. Taking your time is not just a recommendation; it's a necessity for safe and enjoyable travel, allowing you to navigate the turns and inclines comfortably and also providing the opportunity to take in the stunning scenery around you.

Staying informed about driving conditions is prudent. New Hampshire, like the rest of New England, can experience unpredictable weather, and road conditions can change rapidly due to construction, accidents, or weather events like rain, snow, or ice. Fortunately, resources are available to help you stay updated. Websites like NewEngland511.org provide real-time traffic and road condition information across the region, including New Hampshire. Alternatively, you can often dial 511 from your cell phone while in the state to access automated reports on current road situations. Checking these resources before embarking on a long drive, or even a shorter one in uncertain weather, can save you time and reduce stress.

However, relying on your cell phone for everything while on the road in New Hampshire is not always advisable. While service is generally good in urban and

suburban areas, and along major highways, it can become unreliable, or even non-existent, in more rural and mountainous parts of the state. If you plan on driving through the White Mountains, the Great North Woods, or other remote areas, be prepared for periods with no signal. This is particularly important if you are using your phone for navigation; consider downloading offline maps of the areas you plan to visit as a backup. It also means that if you encounter an emergency or vehicle trouble in a remote location, you may not be able to call for help immediately. It's wise to let someone know your itinerary if you're heading into areas known for spotty service.

Perhaps the most unique driving hazard in New Hampshire, particularly outside of the most densely populated areas, is the potential for encountering moose. These magnificent, massive creatures are a symbol of the state's wilderness, but they pose a significant danger if you collide with them on the road. Moose are most active during dawn, dusk, and at night, and they tend to frequent areas near water or in wooded habitats. Unlike deer, which might dart across the road quickly, a moose can seem to appear out of nowhere due to their dark color and height (meaning headlights might not reflect off their eyes as readily). If you see one, they are large and slow-moving, and hitting one can cause substantial damage to your vehicle and serious injury (or worse) to the occupants. Be extra vigilant when driving in areas marked as moose crossings, especially at night or twilight. Scan the sides of the road and be prepared to brake suddenly. It's a memorable wildlife sighting if seen safely, but a dangerous one if encountered unexpectedly in your path.

While driving offers the most freedom, there are limited public transportation options available *within* New Hampshire, primarily focused on serving specific cities and regions. Larger cities like Manchester, Nashua, Portsmouth, and Concord have their own local bus systems that help residents and visitors get around within the city limits. Additionally, some regional transportation networks exist, such as the Coast bus service connecting Portsmouth, Durham, and Dover in the Seacoast region, or the Advance Transit system serving the Hanover-Lebanon-West Lebanon area in the Upper Valley near Vermont. The town of Exeter in the Seacoast region also benefits from local bus and taxi services, alongside its Amtrak station. These local and regional services are useful if you are staying within one of these specific areas and plan to explore only that vicinity.

However, it is crucial to understand that these local options are not interconnected statewide systems. You cannot typically hop on a bus in Manchester and expect to easily reach a trailhead in Franconia Notch or a lake house in Meredith using public transport alone. Their utility is largely confined to specific geographic pockets. If your trip involves exploring multiple regions of the state, visiting state parks or natural attractions off the beaten path, or embarking on scenic drives, a car is virtually indispensable.

For those who truly wish to avoid driving themselves, New Hampshire does offer some

alternatives, although they often come at a higher cost or require specific arrangements. Some companies specialize in providing guided tours or carless adventures. These services might offer customized itineraries, meeting you at a transportation terminal upon arrival or picking you up from your accommodation. They provide transportation and often commentary or guiding services, allowing you to experience parts of the state without the stress of navigation or parking. This can be an excellent option for specific day trips or for visitors who prefer a fully planned and chauffeured experience. However, the spontaneity and flexibility afforded by having your own vehicle are significantly curtailed with these services.

Ultimately, the choice of how to get to and around New Hampshire depends heavily on your itinerary and travel style. Flying, training, or bussing into the state are viable options for arrival, connecting you to key entry points. But for the vast majority of visitors seeking to experience the diverse landscapes, charming towns, and abundant outdoor recreational opportunities that define the Granite State, a personal vehicle is not just a convenience, it is the most practical necessity. It unlocks the freedom to explore winding country roads, discover hidden waterfalls, stop at a roadside maple sugar shack, or simply pull over to admire a breathtaking mountain vista whenever the mood strikes. Being aware of New Hampshire's unique driving conditions, from hilly terrain to potential moose encounters and spotty cell service, and planning accordingly, will ensure that your road trip is as safe and enjoyable as the destination itself.

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